

By K Richard Douglas

A lot more goes on in a war than just people shooting at each other. There is much more than just battlefield strategy. In the 21st century, when the U.S. goes to war, there are people behind the scenes with a mission that has little to do with guns or other weapons.

One such person is Sterling Jensen, formally of Mesa, now a civilian employee with the Navy working for the Marines in Anbar

Province in Iraq. Jensen is a linguist with the Civil Military Operations (CMO) Section. These are the folks tasked with helping to rebuild the provincial government, providing the knowledge to stimulate the economy and assisting with overall planning. Jensen is an actual civilian employee with the Navy and not a contractor. He is also a part-time graduate student at Johns Hopkins.

In 1999, Jensen was part of a study-abroad program that took him to Jerusalem where he learned to speak Arabic. His goal at the time was to work for the U.S. State Department, so learning Arabic was a good first step. He continued his Arabic studies at Brigham Young University and went to France for a year for his undergraduate field study on French-Arabs. He also participated in two U.S. government-sponsored Arabic language acquisition programs in Damascus, Syria and studied Arabic for a summer in Morocco.



All of those studies and cultural understandings were to play an important role just a few years later. The stage was set for Jensen to become the main cultural advisor and linguist to the Army brigade in Ramadi. From June 2006 to June 2007, when it was the most dangerous place in Iraq, Jensen was involved in tribal, governance and security engagements in Ramadi.

The mission of the linguist is so integral to the success of the war effort that even a civilian like Jensen may find himself in harm's way. Economic and planning considerations go on behind the scenes and these activities are crucial to the stability and growth of a young democracy.

Life can often prove to be an adventure, and the former Mt. View High School and Mesa Community College student can attest to that. After all, here is a person who was once an East Valley student with an eye on getting a job with the State Department, who is now a Foreign Area Officer for the Marines in Anbar.

Jensen looks forward to his return to school for the fall semester at Johns Hopkins' School of International Studies in Washington D.C. He will leave the heat of Iraq and the duties of a civilian linguist to become just another grad student. The only difference; this student was part of the establishment of a new democracy. What a unique entry to have on a resume.



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