

Educating Officers on the Prevention of Mass Atrocities



The Lewis & Clark Center, home of U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

by Charles E. Heller

In 2009, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) received word of a congressional grant proposed by Representative Steve Israel and co-sponsored by Senator Chuck Schumer. Its purpose was to provide the college at Fort Leavenworth with \$1,600,000 to fund a five-year semiannual seminar on genocide and mass atrocities under the auspices of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) based in New York City. After a 1994 visit to the death camp at Auschwitz, AIPR President Fred Schwartz dedicated himself to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. His institute has conducted numerous Raphael Lemkin (originator of the word “genocide” and advocate who helped to persuade the UN to adopt the Genocide Convention) seminars attended by mid-career government officials from fifty nations. According to Jordan Tannenbaum, lead development officer at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, within the academic, museum, philanthropic, and humanitarian aid circles, AIPR is considered the “gold standard” for providing seminars on genocide and mass atrocities. Jennifer Ciardelli, who is responsible for military programs at the museum, called the AIPR seminar the “flagship of all genocide programs.”

As a result of the congressional funding, the CGSC Department of Command and Leadership and the AIPR staff developed a seminar that would be conducted by qualified experts and scholars of genocide and mass atrocity prevention and related topics. As a historian, I was familiar with holocaust studies and previous genocides in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, and I had previous administrative experience developing academic programs at the University of Massachusetts and Washburn University. Thus I came to be the CGSC liaison with the AIPR and developed then taught an elective titled, “Genocide and Mass Atrocities: The Military Role in Prevention, Identification, and Intervention.” Part of the elective was a nine day trip to Auschwitz to attend the AIPR military-

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oriented seminar. Tibi Galis, AIPR Executive Director, assisted with the development of this elective program. Galis, an extremely capable executive and human rights advocate, is well-grounded in contemporary work on preventing genocide and mass atrocities. With support from the Polish Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum staff, AIPR conducted seminars for mid-career government officials at Auschwitz. Some of the participants were still dealing with the aftermath of genocide and mass atrocities in their nations. The joint program drew accolades from both the State and Defense Departments. We discussed the military student audience and created a draft seminar curriculum for mid-career military officers.

We scheduled two seminars for fiscal year 2010 and included an on-site visit to Auschwitz. The first seminar, conducted for faculty from several Army academic institutions, provided feedback on the curriculum and suggestions for future seminars. Attendees were a mixture of academicians and non-academicians with an interest in the subject. Among the attendees were Dr. David Fry, director of the U.S. Military Academy Genocide and Mass Atrocity program at West Point and Colonel (retired) Dwight Raymond, a doctrine and concept analyst for the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. Raymond, in conjunction with the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy-Harvard Kennedy School and a number of dedicated and professional CGSC faculty, authored the *Mass Atrocity Response Operations: A Military Planning Handbook* and its supplement the *Mass Atrocity Prevention and Response Options Policy Planning Handbook*.

At the conclusion of the nine-day seminar in Poland, the AIPR evaluator questioned the participants and used the results to refine content. The goal was to make a connection between the tour and presentation at Auschwitz and the instruction at CGSC.

In the fall of 2010, the elective syllabus

included the AIPR-conducted seminar at Auschwitz. Because of the large number of contact hours, the seminar accounted for two course credits. Another multi-cultural and regional studies course credit was granted based on the content, the experience in visiting Poland, and the international speakers. Three books were added to the AIPR faculty's copious reading list. The primary text was Samantha Power's, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*. The other two books were Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* and Sybille Steinbacher's, *Auschwitz: A History* (translated from the German). Students kept a daily journal of their thoughts, emotions, military applications, and lessons for the twenty-first century. Enrollment in this new elective was by instructor permission only. Each applicant had to submit a one page essay stating his/her purpose in enrolling in the elective and interview with the primary instructor prior to being selected.

The students attended the first AIPR seminar in September 2010. For them this was an amazing experience and great success based upon their comments and the reflections recorded in their journals, some of which were extremely moving and personal. The participants left the United States on a Saturday and arrived in Poland the following day. Upon arrival a bus met the participants at the small Krakow airport for a one hour trip to Oswiecim (Auschwitz is the German name).

The day after arrival, a Monday, the Seminar began in earnest and the learning pace was not abated until returning to Krakow five days later. It was intense and all were mentally and physically drained at the week's end. The first two days of classes were held at Auschwitz I, the original concentration "work" camp. The first class dealt with the term "genocide" and its meaning to different people. Subsequent classes discussed how the Nazis dehumanized



The main entrance to the extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Courtesy Photo

and isolated the Jews and other victims and the racial theories people use when their intent is to dehumanize others. The class covered in detail the advent of Hitler and the slow legal process of isolating the Jewish population. Dr. Jim Waller, Cohen Endowed Chair of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College and author of *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, discussed the people who commit the killings. Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum staff and Jagiellonian University (Krakow) professors taught a number of introductory courses relating to the question of whether or not the Allies should have bombed Auschwitz. Students toured Auschwitz I and the death camp at Auschwitz II, commonly known as Birkenau. On the third day, classes shifted to a local college building that had once served as SS Headquarters. The move was both physical and mental, and instruction shifted to contemporary issues of genocide and mass atrocities.

Genocidal mechanics became the focus of this class as students discussed Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire's—commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda in 1993-1994—now famous fax to his superiors at the UN requesting reinforcements. Students

discussed what they might have said to receive reinforcements.

Economists, such as Dr. Jurgen Brauer, author of *Castles, Battles, and Bombs: How Economics Explains Military History*, taught the economics of genocide, and CGSC students were fascinated by this topic as it related to contemporary economics. Colonel (retired) Dwight Raymond taught a course on mass atrocity response operations. Lieutenant Colonel Natalie Kolb, Judge Advocate and U.S. Army Military Advisor to the U.S. State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues, taught a class on international law in relation to genocide and mass atrocities.

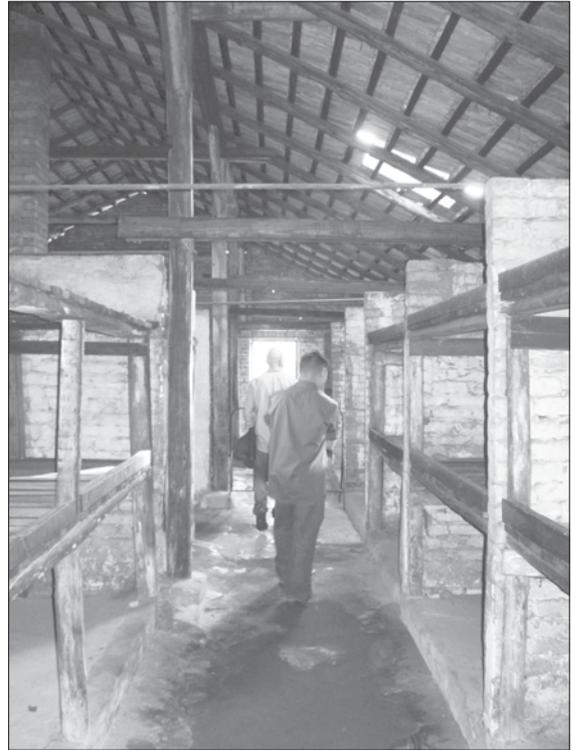
In addition, students analyzed and discussed the UN's Resolution on the Responsibility to Protect. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Senior Media Advisor John Langlois, whose duty station is Kenya, discussed past election violence in that nation. Erin Weir, senior advisor for Refugee International, discussed the role of nongovernmental organizations in incidents of genocide and mass atrocities and convinced many students that cooperating with such organizations could actually benefit

military commanders during such situations. In addition students heard from the Afterconflict Group based in Switzerland on rebuilding post-genocidal and mass atrocity societies, transitional government responsibilities, and security sector reform.

Based on comments and reflections recorded in their journals, some of which were extremely moving and personal, the first CGSC attendees viewed the AIPR seminar as an amazing experience and great success. The seminar curriculum is extensive and material is constantly added and updated. New faculty and speakers continue to enhance the seminar. Lieutenant General Jonathan Riley, United Kingdom, participated in the past two seminars at Auschwitz. He shared with students his firsthand experience in genocide and mass atrocity intervention as the commanding general of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers at Goražde, Bosnia and Herzegovina and as the commander of the UK Joint Task Force Sierre Leone. This past September, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues Stephen J. Rapp joined Lieutenant General Riley for an informal discussion with students on genocide prevention in Africa.

All this effort and the vast amount of material presented by academic experts and professionals with significant field experience left a deep impression on the students. One student worked with the U.S. Army Human Resource Command to approve a personal skill identifier for graduates of the seminar when conducted under the auspices of AIPR. With this identifier graduates can serve as genocide and mass atrocity planners and advisors to military commanders conducting operations to prevent or stop genocide or in situations where the possibility of such incidents exists.

In October 2011, the program was extended to include six foreign military officers attending CGSC. During their orientation visit to Washington, DC, the Holocaust Memorial Museum and AIPR conducted a half-day



Students tour the extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. *Courtesy Photo*

seminar for these students that touched on many of the areas the U.S. students discussed at Auschwitz. It is hoped this opportunity will continue to be made available to foreign military students, as they participate in peacekeeping and assistance mission more frequently than their U.S. counterparts.

Between June 2010 and October 2011, thirty-five faculty and sixty-six CGSC students have attended the AIPR seminar at Auschwitz and received the designated personal skill identifier. The response has been overwhelmingly positive as evidenced by their end of course comments:

This has been the best instruction I have had in the Army in 27 years.

The ability for us to see, walk, touch, smell, and hear Auschwitz and Birkenau makes this subject even more compelling and real than just reading about it in a classroom in

Kansas. I sincerely hope that this program will continue to receive funding so more officers will have the honor and privilege of participating in the most challenging, both intellectually and emotionally, course that I've had at CGSC.

This experience has made me think about what mankind is capable of and how to solve the problems of genocide and everything in between.

After 13 years in the Army, three combat tours to Iraq, and eight months here at CGSC, I can say without hesitation that participating in the Genocide Seminar and visiting Poland was the most significant highlight of my career. This seminar provided the unique opportunity of visiting the historic sites of Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Krakow and reflecting on the horrors of the Holocaust. In addition, networking with representatives from the State Department, humanitarian organizations, USAID, lawyers, scholars, academics, and retired military officers were invaluable. This experience successfully forces one to take an introspective look at oneself and ask the hard leadership questions that weigh between ethical and moral responsibilities. Recent world events illustrates that the reality of genocide still threatens the international community. Due to this fact, educating future senior Army leaders on genocide and in particular the necessary techniques for prevention or intervention requires immediate attention.

An unparalleled experience. I cannot begin to thank CGSC and all those who made this come alive, and really speak to each one of us as leaders, as officers, as persons of value. I have grieved like never before. I have been challenged like never before. These are truly lessons learned that must be seen and shared. As an interconnected world, we can no longer afford to stand by as genocide and mass atrocity touches others it now touches all of us. We have run out of excuses, and the price we pay as it continues grows more every day. I am so proud and honored to have been a part of this intense exchange of awareness and hope. Never before have I been afforded an opportunity to experience something of so much value as to shape my future career. I am humbled that I am part of a military that recognizes the importance of this subject and the value of every life.

The depth of the mental and emotional impact, the deep sense of the role they play as officers, and the knowledge they gained is evidenced by their journals. The seminar has clearly achieved the objectives its sponsors envisioned and produced officers capable of serving in situations where genocide and mass atrocity incidents are occurring or in situations where they may occur in the future. The challenge facing the college now is to obtain the necessary funding to sustain the seminar. In the face of increasing budget pressures, CGSC leadership must make the case that educating military officers on the drivers and mechanics of genocide along with the measures for preventing or stopping such activities is in the interest of the Army and, ultimately, the nation. Currently, CGSC has insufficient funding to continue the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, but continues to identify and educate students interested in this subject by offering a scholars seminar at its campus at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Mass atrocities continue to occur. Understanding how to recognize the conditions and precursors to an outbreak of mass atrocities and knowing what actions to take to prevent or stop them from happening is fundamental to American ideals and values. **IAJ**