

DINFOS International students visit Pentagon
By Navy Seaman Nicolas N. Lopez

FORT MEADE, Md. – Students in the Public Affairs Course for International Students (PACIS) at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) visited leading public affairs officials and members of the Pentagon Press Corps (PPC) at the Pentagon on Nov. 5.

“The purpose of the trip was to provide examples of how the students can take what they learned at DINFOS and apply those concepts in their own countries,” said Stefo Lehmann, the course coordinator for PACIS. Lehman said the Pentagon visit was so beneficial DINFOS Commandant Col. Jeremy Martin plans to make it a part of the permanent curriculum.

“The PACIS course teaches how America does things, how the U.N. does things and how NATO does things. The trip shows how well America does public affairs,” Lehmann said.

The 11 PACIS students, who came from Brazil, the Czech Republic, Jordan, Lebanon, the Republic of Macedonia, the Philippines, South Sudan, Taiwan and the Ukraine, met the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs George E. Little. The students also met prominent members of the PPC to include Barbara Starr of CNN; David Martin of CBS News and Jim Miklaszewski of NBC News.

The PACIS students also visited military officers on the Office of the Secretary of Defense Newsdesk as well as on the Chief of Naval Information (CHINFO) Newsdesk. These are fellow military officers the PACIS students could conceivably call upon for assistance on they return to their respective countries.

The students also met with Deputy CHINFO Capt. Greg Hicks who explained how “open” media relations develop between public affairs officers and journalists. He stated, “Relationships like this take time to develop”. Little expounded upon this idea of trust not developing over night during a media prep session that he allowed the students to observe. “Relationships built on trust tend to result in information being accurately reported,” he said.

The students then observed as Little fielded questions from prominent members of the PPC during a live gaggle. This is something no other PACIS class has ever done before.

Col. Philip Aguer Panyang, a military spokesman for South Sudan and PACIS student said he felt extremely fortunate to be a part of the Pentagon visit since he will be fashioning his own public affairs shop upon returning to his country. Panyang intends to model his public affairs office after those at the Pentagon as he works to improve the image of the South Sudanese military.

“I once only had his common sense to rely upon when it came to public affairs because I had no training,” said Panyang.

“I was very happy to meet all the people who work at the Pentagon because they showed us a lot of useful things that I hope to use in South Sudan to make our military the pride of our people,” Panyang said.