Case Study:

Alelo's Learning Products Save Lives In Iraq and Afghanistan

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Now that many US military members have returned from their tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are free to talk about the impact that Alelo's learning products have had during their overseas deployments. This case study illustrates that impact.

Dan Wilson used to be a US Army officer, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 2013. Back in 2005, when Alelo was just getting started, he was preparing for an assignment in Iraq as a MiTT (Military Training Team) commander in 2006-2007. The mission of MiTT teams was to advise and train Iraqi security and police forces. Late in 2005, he came across a new training product called Tactical Iraqi. Tactical Iraqi was Alelo's first immersive game for quickly learning Iraqi Arabic language and culture, developed under sponsorship from DARPA. Dan started using it and was so impressed that he and his team took Tactical Iraqi DVDs with them to Iraq so that they could continue to practice training scenarios. During his tour of duty Dan acted as an advisor to two Iraqi Army battalions, and three police departments and city administrations. He used his knowledge of language and culture every day, in every encounter with the Iraqis. His ability to speak some Arabic and demonstrate his knowledge of cultural norms had a huge effect in building trust.

After his deployment in Iraq, he reflected on his experiences and how he could ensure that his next deployment would be a success. Then in January 2010, he received the assignment to command a battalion in Kunar Province, Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012. He had a year to train and prepare his battalion, and as part of that he wanted to be sure that his Soldiers developed the ability to maneuver culturally. He emphasized language and culture as one of the five pillars of his training program, alongside marksmanship and other basic soldiering skills.

Colonel Wilson developed a pyramid training model, in which all Soldiers had a foundation of communication skills and smaller numbers of Soldiers trained to more advanced levels. Alelo's Tactical Pashto and Tactical Dari were key parts of that training program. Some Soldiers, through a combination of Tactical Language and immersive training, became fluent in both languages and were able to work by side with their Afghan counterparts and cover for them when necessary.

When Dan's battalion completed their final mission rehearsal exercise in the Mojave Desert prior to deployment, they engaged in mock encounters with Afghan role players. The role players said that they had never seen a unit that could speak the language or understand the culture as well as Dan's Soldiers did.

According to Dan, what makes Tactical Language products so powerful is that they let you practice in realistic simulations of encounters overseas, so that when you experience it for real, you feel like you have already done it before. He believes that game-based learning improves recognition skills, so when you encounter a situation, you can recognize it quickly and respond appropriately. This offers a tactical advantage.

By developing relationships of mutual trust and understanding with the local population, violence in that area of Kunar Province dropped dramatically, and real progress toward peace and stability was made in an area the previous unit deemed unwinnable. Attacks went from multiple events a day to one or two a month, which is remarkable considering that the area bordered on the tribal areas of Pakistan. Dan and his Soldiers developed relationships with Afghans in the region that persist to this day.

Alelo has since developed language and cultural products for over 90 countries and is mandatory training for U.S. personnel deploying overseas to 86 countries.

When asked whether people outside of the military could benefit from Alelo's approach, Dan's reply was, "absolutely!" Understanding is universal. Whether the skill to be learned is handling diversity in the workplace or responding appropriately to suspicious emails, people can learn better through simulation of realistic situations. Retention would be even better if learners can run through a couple of scenarios a month so that they can maintain their skills.

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