



Inside SWCS

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Civil Affairs breaks into general officer ranks

SWCS Deputy Commander promoted to brigadier general, becomes Army's first active-duty general to come from Civil Affairs branch



SWCS Deputy Commanding General Ferdinand Irizarry is promoted to the rank of brigadier general in a ceremony July 15 in Fayetteville, N.C. by his wife and Lt. Gen. John F. Mulholland, U.S. Army Special Operations Command Commanding General. Irizarry, a former commander of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade at Fort Bragg, is now the Army's first active-duty general officer to come from the Army's civil affairs community. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika, SWCS Public Affairs Office)

By Dave Chace

SWCS Public Affairs Office

Last week, Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Irizarry became the Army's first general officer to come from its active-duty civil affairs community.

Irizarry, the deputy commanding general for the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in a ceremony in downtown Fayetteville.

Civil affairs – the art and science of advocating for foreign civilians' needs and roles in U.S. military objectives – is a growing discipline for the Army; his promotion is a way for the Army to recognize the need for an active-duty representative in its general officer ranks, Irizarry said.

"A very important piece of my promotion is a story about civil affairs NCOs and junior officers who have done extraordinary things to validate a promotion like this," Irizarry said. "Senior leaders have seen that they're really making a difference for the military."

"It isn't about me. I think this really is an acknowledgement of how important the discipline of Civil Affairs is," he said. "One person could never earn this on their own."

With a core population of Army Reserve civil affairs Soldiers supporting conventional operations across the globe, the Army expanded its active-duty capability by creating the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade in 2006 to support special-operations missions with additional regional and cultural expertise.

When it did so, Irizarry was tapped to become the brigade's first commander. Out of a World War II-era building near Fort Bragg's Pike Field, the 95th built companies to support Operation Iraqi Freedom as a surge of U.S. forces was underway.

This year, the Army is adding another active-duty civil affairs brigade to its force: the 85th, which will be based out of Fort Hood, Texas and support conventional Army missions and units. From his position at the Special Warfare Center and School, Irizarry will have a hand in training and managing the new brigade's Soldiers.

"There's a very high expectation in the world that when America employs its forces, it does so in a very humane way," Irizarry said. "The complete set for a military campaign is the ability to destroy threats to a civil society, and create the capacity for civil society to defend itself from those threats."

For this reason, civil affairs expansion has been inevitable, he said.

"If the Army wasn't building more civil affairs units, it would still be redefining some of the tasks performed by other traditional units," he said. "Somebody would have to do this."

Effective civil affairs units can not only minimize civilians' interference in military operations, but also

identify and facilitate the factors within a culture and population that could accelerate military success, like improving access to education or health care, he said. The trick is to help a foreign population face these threats on their own terms, rather than just present a solution just because it may work for Americans. This is where a civil affairs Soldier's cultural understanding is crucial, Irizarry said.

He's seen astounding results from simple solutions that rely on a population's own technology, resources and skills.

"People make fun of water all the time, saying that civil affairs units just build wells everywhere, but I have to admit that when I saw

[in Morocco] a well put in to a village that hadn't had one, it changed the dynamics of an entire community," Irizarry said. Less time traveling for clean water meant more time to build their economy, better hygiene and more open communication with nearby villagers looking for water. "You could see that there were nothing but good second- and third-order effects."

Having seen civil affairs Soldiers in action in Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan throughout his career, and as the senior operations officer for the

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Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Irizarry
SWCS Deputy Commanding General

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Deputy commander for SWCS promoted to brigadier general

U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Irizarry points out that a career in the civil affairs branch prepares Soldiers to become senior leaders because they must often inspire collaboration between various groups outside the military's formal rank structure, like local populations or aid organizations.

The civil affairs discipline is a good opportunity for Soldiers to develop into senior leaders because they can get experience working with virtually all aspects of the U.S. military and government.



Irizarry

"I think the most important thing is to try to get as much experience working with active duty, Army Reserve, special operations, civilian agencies, and conventional and joint units as possible," Irizarry said.

"In my opinion, you have to be able to strike a balance between conventional and special operations units."

With 14 years of experience in infantry units before joining civil affairs, Irizarry emphasizes a Soldier-first mentality; he expects all civil affairs Soldiers to be technically and tactically proficient on the battlefield.

"We go to extremely dangerous and resource-constrained places," he said. "The bottom line is that the places we go in this world are places that need a Soldier first, with other skills second."

Irizarry is also quick to acknowledge the Army Reserve, which houses approximately 94 percent of the Army's civil affairs force, and several general officers of its own.

"There are a lot of general officers in the Army Reserve's civil affairs community who are doing great work for the discipline every day," Irizarry said. His promotion is more a recognition of the increasing role that the Army's active-duty civil affairs units will play in future conflicts.

"For me, part of my charter is to be the advocate for all these NCOs and junior officers who are in the trenches." There's something meaningful for them, and the Army, to have a representative sitting among active-duty general officers, he said.

Of course, general officers are also branch-immortal, and Irizarry is now much more than a civil affairs officer. As the deputy commander at SWCS, he helps educate and train Soldiers joining and advancing through the Civil Affairs, Special Forces and Military Information Support Operations career fields. He ties his role at SWCS to overarching Army issues such as conflict mitigation and the cost of warfare.

Furthermore, Irizarry said the lessons and concepts employed on civil affairs teams will continue to spread through the rest of the military.

"There are no sterile battlefields; everywhere we go, there are going to be civilians living and working in and around the places we operate," Irizarry said. "Every Soldier may bump into a civilian, or a village, at some point, so at some level, everybody has to be familiar with civil affairs."

For Irizarry, his promotion is just further proof that the art and science of civil affairs has earned its place in the Army's active-duty ranks, and is here to stay.



President Barack Obama awards the Medal of Honor to Sgt. 1st Class Leroy A. Petry at the White House in Washington, D.C. on July 12. Petry, the second active-duty service member since Vietnam to live to accept the nation's highest military honor, was a member of Co. D, 2nd Bn., 75th Ranger Regiment when he participated in a daylight raid on an insurgent compound to pursue a top al-Qaida commander sequestered inside. The mission left Petry and two of his comrades within feet of a live enemy grenade, when Petry, already shot through both legs, took action with no regard for his life to save his comrades from certain death. The 75th Ranger Regiment is a part of SWCS' higher headquarters, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Student writing column:

Student writing columns are written by students attending SWCS training and education; students and cadre at any SWCS course are welcome to submit pieces developed over the course of their studies. This week's entry is written by students attending the Initial Acquisition Language Program in the SWCS Directorate of Regional Studies and Education: Spc. Justus, Spc. Lucas, Spc. Viola, Capt. Duffy and Capt. Justi.

As typical American citizens and Soldiers, we have a great love for our country. Moreover, we, like all Soldiers, are very passionate about our service of defending our homeland from all enemies both foreign and domestic. Once lumped into the "Axis of Evil," Iran is one country that we used to consider an unquestionable enemy. However, due to our recent study of the history, language and culture of Persia, our outlook on the countries and more importantly, the common people of the Middle East has drastically changed.

Before we began language training, our primary knowledge of Persia was from stories such as the great story of the brave Greek warriors who held back the overwhelming force of Persian immortals at Thermopylae. Additionally, Army history lessons repeatedly commemorate the incredible feats of Alexander the Great and his conquest of ancient Persia. However, our Western education rarely ever mentioned the Persian side of the story.

Our favorite lesson concerns the values of the ancient Persian society. We learned that from day one of warrior training, Persian soldiers would learn that the greatest sin was to be dishonest. Theft, cheating, pillaging and murder all stemmed from lies. The entire Persian society lived by a values-based system, just like the current American Army. Persia conquered many lands very quickly, and extended their values and rights to the people they conquered. Persia did not accept slavery, it provided freedom of religion and taxed all citizens equally.

Even today, the importance of history and culture gleams in the former countries of Persia. For thousands of years, Persia was a super-power and warrior society. A Persian warrior was unmatched in hand-to-hand combat. The emphasis on this individual skill remains in Iran. Today, Iran always places highly in wrestling and weight-lifting Olympic events.

Each day in language training, our instructor dedicated time to present various lessons from the Persian history, like the story mentioned above. Our class discovered examples of leadership, governorship and tactics that remain hidden to typical Americans. Language training is essential, but the understanding of the history and culture is equally important. We are beginning to learn "why" people think the way they do instead of just "how" they think.

In understanding foreign cultures, we can more efficiently separate the true enemies from the general population. As we shift from offensive operations to stability operations in the Middle East, it is vital that all Soldiers who encounter foreign peoples have the cultural skills necessary to communicate effectively. For this reason, units across the Army should consider implementing cultural training, language immersion, and culturally focused trips.

After learning the "other half" of history and culture from a Persian perspective, we are certain that we are better-rounded Soldiers ready to face challenges around the world.

SWCS Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
17	Retirement ceremony for Col. Paul S. Burton 10 a.m. JFK Auditorium	19	20	21	22	Robin Sage begins
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	1	2	3	4	5	6