

Lt. Col. Manjit Singh at US Staff College

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Lieutenant Colonel Manjit Singh, an Indian Army officer of the Punjab Regiment, is one of 26 foreign students selected for advanced education this academic year at the Command and Staff College of the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia.

"I would rate it as an exceptional experience," says Singh, who is taking a graduate-degree-level course and says that this, his first visit to the United States, has taught him a lot about its people and culture, and given him insight into the way America's and other countries' militaries think about war and conflict.

"What I appreciate about Command and Staff College is that it includes international officers like myself," says Singh. "This is important because we are imbibing the same democratic values and professional lessons as the American officers. We are not treated like outsiders but partners in the same mission of providing security and stability in our regions." At the same time, Singh says, "As an Indian and Sikh, I am an individual from a different culture who has come here not only to study, but live with Americans. I have seen how they live and view the world, and this has also affected me." Americans have invited him into their homes and enabled him to see that "the values we hold dear in India, like family, are also embedded in American culture."

Singh was selected for the course through the International Military Education and Training Fund, a program of the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. The Marine Corps University campus, tucked away in a corner of the Quantico Marine Base in northern Virginia, includes four professional schools offering courses in subjects such as war, policy and strategy; national security and joint warfare; regional studies; culture and interagency operations; and operational planning. The Quantico campus is home to 480 resident students, and almost half of them, 196, attend the Command and Staff College, with Singh. In the classroom, case studies of military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other conflicts, are "approached in a very broad-base, holistic manner and not in the myopic, one-sided way the press usually presents them," Singh says.

This is important, he explains: "We see the American officers studying these campaigns, in which non-brute-force elements like civil/military relations and humanitarian operations are given top priorities and we see that the portrayal of U.S. forces, by the press and others, as aggressor or occupiers, is not accurate." Singh says he is grateful for his year at the Marine Corps University because "this chance of being a part of the American educational system is an opportunity which I'll definitely take back to India. It will not only influence me, but others I come into contact with."

Marine Corps University President Donald Gardner agrees with Singh that an effective military needs skills other than force and tactics. "We're not just interested in muscle," says Gardner, a retired Marine major general and combat veteran of the Vietnam War. "We have an old belief in the Corps that education is like camouflage; it should be continually updated and kept fresh to be effective. Teaching for the future is the focus of our day-to-day operations and strategic planning."

Training the minds of future leaders-officers and noncommissioned officers alike is essential to a modern military.

Adding to that reality is the emerging strategy of coalition operations in which military personnel from many nations combine to carry out joint missions.

Gardner tells his students, "We will provide you opportunities to advance your leadership abilities, expand your war-fighting knowledge, [and] enhance your ability to solve problems

while sharing your experiences with fellow students from across the world.”

The Marine Corps University still follows the guiding principles established by Brigadier General J.C. Breckinridge, who was commandant of Marine Corps schools in 1934, Gardner says.

Breckinridge summed up his concept of a military education saying, “It is my constant ambition to see the Marine officers filled with ambition, initiative and originality, and they can get these attributes only by liberality of thought - broad thought - thought that differs from precedent and the compulsory imprint of others.”

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