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MEMORANDUM THRU

Commanding Officer, 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division

FOR HQMC, Strategy and Plans Division (PLU), Plans, Policies, and Operations, Washington, D.C. 20380-1775

Subj: SPANISH LANGUAGE IMMERSION TO BARCELONA, SPAIN TRIP REPORT

1. **Purpose.** To report on official travel to Barcelona, Valencia, and Madrid, Spain from 6 – 24 April 2013, by Captain Todd Forsman, USMC, Latin America FAO.
2. **Summary.** The primary objective of this trip was to increase my Spanish language proficiency in preparation for annual Defense Language Proficiency Testing (DLPT). The secondary objective of trip was to increase my overall understanding of Spanish and Latin American political and economic relationships through immersion in the local environment. All objectives were designed in support of my continuing education and skill sustainment program as a Latin American Foreign Area Officer. DLPT testing in both the lower and upper level ranges is scheduled and will be completed no later than two weeks after the submission of this report.
3. **Discussion.** Professional language training during this evolution was provided in a private setting through a local language school named Camino Barcelona. (More information can be found at the following website: <http://caminobarcelona.com/>). The training consisted of four to five hours of instruction daily provided in a one on one setting, both in the classroom and in the local environment. My skill level was evaluated via a written placement test and an oral exam. I was placed in Level C1, Superior according to the school's system. Daily instruction included an intensive review of upper level grammar and sentence structure. The lessons were developed as instructors identified weaknesses in my written, spoken, and oral comprehension. I found the instruction to be extremely beneficial and very challenging, second only to in residence training at DLI. Of note, I was provided with four separate instructors on a rotational basis. Much like DLI, each instructor was from a different sub region of Spain or a different Spanish speaking country. This allowed for excellent practice in various accents and colloquial vocabularies. Overall, I was impressed with the level of instruction provided, and I am anxious to gauge the results through DLPT testing soonest.

In addition to formal language instruction, I was able to travel through Southern and Central Spain in an immersion environment with the intent of learning more about Spain and better understanding the relationship between the Spanish and Latin American political and economic systems.

On the economic theme, I was particularly interested in investigating the role of Latin Americans in the Spanish economy. Previous trip reports commented on an influx of Latin American immigrants legally to Spain vice illegally to the US. In my observations, this phenomenon still exists, but the number of Latin American immigrants to Spain in the last few years seems to be diminishing due to the global economic crisis and its specific affects throughout the European Union and Spain. The current unemployment rate in Spain is around 30% and the Euro remains relatively strong against the dollar. Combined, these facts make it difficult for the average working person to survive in Spain. The simple fact is that there are less and less opportunities available in the country. This fact is likely to deter legal immigration to the country from Latin America in the near term despite the cultural, language, and legal notes that had previously incentivized the process over illegal immigration to the US.

On the political theme, I was interested to learn about the Spanish system in general and to compare it to the systems I observed during ICT throughout Latin America. I was only able to scratch the surface of understanding how things work here in Spain during this trip, but I found it very intriguing. In particular, the role the royal family still plays in politics was particularly interesting to me. This topic served as the foundation for numerous discussions with my professors and with various locals I encountered during my travels. To summarize, the royal family does not have a direct role in politics; however, it became very clear that the royal family still had influence in day to day operations in the country. In addition, the “extracurricular” activities of the family provided the foundation for nearly all of the street gossip I was privy to during my travels. Aside from this, I noted that the general structure and operation of local and national level political systems very much mirrored those that I observed throughout Latin America. The institutions were democratic in nature and well discussed, if not completely understood, by the average person. (As an interesting side note, I was able to observe a peaceful demonstration regarding the Health Care system during my travels to Madrid. I found the demonstration to be similarly organized and executed to those in Latin America as well.)

In conclusion, this trip afforded me an excellent opportunity to continue to improve on my Spanish language skills. The formal training coupled with the immersion environment challenged me on a day-to-day basis. I believe it was an excellent preparation for my upcoming DLPT testing that will lead to tangible results. In addition to the language training, I was able to gain further knowledge and understanding of the political and economic relationships between Spain and Latin America through first hand experience. In my observations, the intricacies of the Spanish political and economic systems in general still manifest themselves throughout Latin America despite decades of independence from the Spanish Empire. This observation could be considered obvious and expected on one hand, but I found it very interesting that the Spanish colonial influence remained so prevalent when compared to the British influence in our current system despite similar time factors associated with the independence of the US and the various countries of Latin America from their colonial fore fathers.

4. After actions notes and recommendations.

a. **Topic:** Location of Training.

Discussion: Spain is an ideal location for language immersion training for a Latin America FAO with extensive regional experience in Latin America for two reasons. First, immersion in Spain allows Latin American FAOs to better

understand the political and economic structures used throughout Latin America that originated in Spain through first hand experience. Next, studying the language in Spain provides an excellent foundation, both grammatically and structurally, from which a Latin American FAO can continue to build his or her Spanish skills. The language can be studied in its purest form which makes it easier to understand some of the changes that are particular to the various Latin American countries.

Recommendation: Spain should not be overlooked as an ICT trip or an immersion trip during the formation and subsequent utilization of Latin American FAOs. The experience was invaluable in terms of the knowledge and understanding it provided.

b. Topic: Language Training Provider

Discussion: Camino Barcelona is one of the most professional language schools that I have had the pleasure of attending. I found the instruction to be at a higher and more focused level than in my past experiences. My professors were all educated to at least the Masters level and had at least 3-4 years of experience. The program they created for me was very personalized and addressed my specific weaknesses rapidly and efficiently. I was able to use what I had learned daily to navigate the local environment and to continue to immerse myself both in the language and the culture.

Recommendation: Provide information about Camino Barcelona and similar companies to the FAO community via the next community update in order to provide a starting point in looking for language sustainment training options.

5. For questions or comments concerning this report, I can be best reached via email at todd_forsman@yahoo.com.

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