

Don't know where Iraq is?

By CARY LEIDER VOGRIN THE GAZETTE

March 28, 2007 - 1:10AM

Thousands of Fort Carson soldiers have come and gone from Iraq in the past few years — many more than once — yet most people around here

don't quite know where in the world they went.

When it comes to finding Afghanistan on a map, they're really lost.

As part of Geography Awareness Week, The Gazette conducted an unscientific sampling of the community, asking more than 300 people to take a six-question geography quiz. Participants were asked to locate three countries that frequently appear in the news: Iraq, Afghanistan and North Korea.

The results? Not so hot for a military community, some might say. But local residents did a little better at finding Iraq and other countries than respondents to a recent national survey. And they did much better when they were asked to pinpoint New York City and Colorado on a world map.

Because Africa is the focus of National Geographic's current "My Wonderful World" campaign, the local survey included a two-parter asking for the name and location of one country on the continent. "Oh wow. What's in Africa?" was one of the many quizzical reactions.

Most people approached by The Gazette readily agreed to pore over an 8½-by-11-inch world map, but many became wide-eyed when reading the questions. Some burst out laughing in embarrassment.

"Oh, God. This is confidential, right?" one said.

"I'll need to freshen up," said one soldier who mislabeled Iraq despite having been there. "I'll come back tomorrow lookin' for y'all."

For others, albeit a minority, the quiz was a breeze.

"I'm not the dumb son-of-a-gun my wife thinks I am," joked a man who aced it. Others who scored six of six and also got the Africa "bonus" question included a couple of other soldiers, an elementary school principal and a 15-year-old from Air Academy High School who whipped through it in less than 30 seconds.

In all, 40 people — 13 percent of the 302 who took the test — scored 100 percent.

Gazette staffers attempted to reach a cross section of the community, seeking everyone from soccer parents to soldiers to park-goers to Palmer High students. The survey was given out at a job fair, at a young professionals gathering and to students at Colorado College, UCCS and Pikes Peak Community College.

The findings:

- Forty-six percent could mark Iraq on a map.

- Forty-nine percent correctly labeled North Korea.

- Twenty-four percent could find Afghanistan.

- Eighty-nine percent could name at least one country in Africa, but just three in four who could do so could also locate that country on the map.

Advertisement

- Nine in 10 people marked the approximate location of New York City, and 95 percent correctly marked Colorado. One participant was so confident he'd do well, he offered to be interviewed even before seeing the questions. Andreu Bell, an 18-year-old student at Pikes Peak Community College, got five of six. His only mistake? Putting North Korea in northeastern Russia. But he made up for it with his Africa answer: Bell was the only person to write in Ghana, and he correctly located it. (Fifty-five percent of people who could name a country in Africa came up with either South Africa or Egypt.)

Some people thought Brazil, Jamaica, Ecuador and Nicaragua were in Africa. One wrote down "Uwanda," a creative Uganda-Rwanda hybrid.

A recent national scientific survey done by National Geographic found participants "demonstrate a limited understanding of the world." National Geographic surveyed 510 people ages 18-24. The results showed that 63 percent of people could not find Iraq on a map, 88 percent could not point out Afghanistan, and three-quarters could not locate Indonesia. Onethird could not locate Louisiana, despite all the news about Hurricane Katrina. Peggy Altoff, who coordinates the development of the social studies curriculum for Colorado Springs School District 11 and also is the president of the National Council for the Social Studies, said geography is much more than memorizing a map. It's also knowing about cultures, population

distribution and the physical characteristics of a region — "in other words, why that place is important," she said. Altoff said teachers should try to connect geography lessons with something in students' lives or something that they're studying. "When I work with elementary teachers in any building, I encourage them to have a world map, a U.S. map and a globe in their room," she said. "Everything that students read — either fiction or nonfiction — is grounded in place." Ben Fisk learned the countries of the world about age 15. Fisk's home schooling included several geography classes. Now 22, he's a business major at UCCS and says knowledge of geography, particularly cultural geography, is crucial to success in the business world. "As we travel in this world of business, we'd better know how to interact with these people, or we're going to fail in business," he said.

Fisk had no problem with the quiz. He earned extra credit by locating not just one, but six countries in Africa. CONTACT THE WRITER: 636-0236 or cary.vogrin@gazette.com

Advertisement

A bright idea in online advertising.

FormatDynamics

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™