



Three Weeks in Xi'an

By the **Department of Foreign Languages**



Top photo: Cadets Clark Yuan '12 and Sean Christman '12 teach first-grade children English at a rural elementary school in Lantian. **Above:** Cadet Spencer Donaldson '12 helps a boy to read the *Wellness Magic* book.

“You are my first American friend.” These simple words reflect the impact eight West Point cadets had on their Chinese counterparts during a cultural immersion experience in the summer of 2011. For three weeks, the cadets participated in a Department of Foreign Languages-sponsored program in the People’s Republic of China. The trip was sponsored by the Friendship Fund, an initiative of Major General (Retired) Burn Loeffke ’57, fostering mutual understanding and friendship between young Chinese and American leaders.

Daily, the cadets studied the Chinese language at the prestigious Jiaotong University in Xi’an, a city of over four million. Classroom studies were supplemented by historical and cultural excursions throughout the region. Xi’an is the starting point of the fabled Silk Road, an ancient trade route that spanned Central Asia, but most Americans are more familiar with Xi’an’s famous Terracotta Warriors, unearthed by the thousands since their discovery in 1974.

In addition to their language studies, cadets taught and mentored young children at local elementary schools to strengthen the bonds of friendship through the teaching of preventive medicine. “My vision,” said Loeffke, “is to teach each child to teach. When the child teaches, the family learns. When the family learns, the school and the community benefit.” To this end, cadets spent hours at the local schools teaching the importance of exercise, proper diet, and other aspects of health using materials provided by the Friendship Fund.

The full richness of the summer program was amplified by the leadership of Dr. Qun Ao, Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages. Her knowledge of the local area provided cadets with a first-rate academic experience while simultaneously achieving the Friendship Fund’s vision. “I want the Chinese people—especially those within the schools—to know the true character of West Point cadets and what our future American leaders will be like. The Chinese people visualize Americans based on what the media says, so they don’t always have an accurate impression.”

Former Chinese Language Desk Chief Lieutenant Colonel Brady Crosier added: “The Loeffke Friendship Fund has had the greatest impact on our cadets. When they return from this Chinese immersion opportunity, they are humbled by the experience of performing as junior ambassadors of the United States, the Army, and West Point. Their interaction with the Chinese people and students introduces fresh perspectives and provides the opportunity to become lifelong friends with future Chinese leaders.” The current desk chief, Major Matt Radik ’01, will oversee the selection and preparation of the cadets sent to China in the summer of 2012.

“You are my first American friend,” or some variation, is often heard by cadets who experience cultural immersion opportunities while at West Point. Immersion opportunities enhance classroom experience by means of firsthand interaction with people, languages, and cultures throughout the world. These Academy Scholars Program experiences offer experiential learning opportunities that enhance cadets’ education and leadership development, while also allowing cadets to apply the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to “real-world” situations, all the while increasing their cultural exposure and broadening their perspectives.

The Academy Scholars Program and the Friendship Fund help cadets build international relationships and hone valuable linguistic and cultural skills that will pay dividends over a lifetime of service. ★



Above: Students from a second-grade class at Lantian rural school learn to take their pulse. **Right:** A young student at an elementary school in Xi’an practices her newly acquired skills after cadets taught the students how to take their pulse. **Far right:** Engaging in active, cross-cultural interaction with the cadets, third-grade students at Xi’an elementary school practice the “Rocket.”

