As howling wind and rain battered windows of an Einsiedlerhof studio, a sense of peace blanketed a group of people inside a darkened upstairs room.

Despite the furor outside, they focused on breathing and yoga positions, part of “Mindfulness Meditation,” a class led by Maj. Victor Won, an Army officer who in his free time teaches fellow Soldiers and family members at U.S. Army Garrison Kaiserslautern some techniques to reduce stress and improve resiliency.

Mindfulness-based training is a way of learning to live in the present by using techniques such as yoga, meditation and breathing, said Won, who serves with the 19th Battlefield Coordination Detachment at Ramstein.
“What I am trying to teach people to do is to take a purposeful pause throughout the day just to come back and be more present,” Won said. “Simply, it is about bringing our attention to the present, bringing our awareness, becoming more conscious of our life without judgment.”

The class is open to everyone in the KMC and features a mixture of yoga and meditation. Won, a lifelong meditation practitioner, started the free class in September. By accepting what your life is like now as opposed to what you think it should or could be, you will find more calm and peace in your mind, he said.

“That will give you the power to work with stress,” Won said. “You will have the choice to act rather than react.”

As more Soldiers return from multiple deployments, military leaders are looking toward nontraditional ways to treat things such as post traumatic stress disorder. And they are findings that such techniques can help reduce stress in Soldiers, Airmen and Marines.

During an Iraq deployment, Won thought such techniques would be good for Soldiers in a combat zone.

“Many Soldiers can’t relax downrange,” he said. “They can’t sleep. There’s lots of stress.”

Although Soldiers were initially hesitant, several began taking Won’s class. Two Soldiers even stopped taking medication after learning the techniques.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that a group of Marines preparing to deploy had better moods and working memory after practicing mindfulness training.

Following that study, the Army began a study on mindfulness-based fitness training for Soldiers. The Schofield Barracks Training and Research on Neurobehavioral Growth, or STRONG, tests the effectiveness of certain components of mind fitness training.

For Maj. Jeff Labrune of the Ramstein-based 603rd Air and Space Operations Center, the class offers an opportunity to learn and spend an afternoon with his wife, Andi.

“We have seven children,” Labrune said. “It’s not quiet in our house, ever. I think everyone is multitasking these days. This is bringing awareness back to what they are doing. I think it’s good for anyone in practice.”

Andi Labrune agrees, saying she often focuses on too many things in her life instead of living in the moment.

“I am doing so much, yet I miss out on a lot of the day to day stuff,” she said. “I like that awareness factor. I need to learn to stop what I am doing and focus on the here and now.”

The techniques could be a benefit to many in the community, she said.

“As a mom or wife, whether you are focusing on your job or dealing with deployments, we have to know how to de-stress ourselves,” she said. “I think this is a good way to do that. You can do this anywhere, anytime.”

For more information about the Sunday afternoon sessions, write to MindfulWarrior108@gmail.com or call 0631-5600-0993.