

Selection and Training of Infantry Officers

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of training is to make a trainee fit to carry out the task of appointment to be entrusted to him. Like all simple truisms, this is also self evident but in practice, more often than not, this is completely forgotten or neglected. All of us have gone through the experience of undergoing a course of instruction for a job and most probably have never been employed on it thereafter. The other side of this experience being equally probable that many of us were employed on this very job prior to undergoing a course of instruction and afterwards.

The weapons and equipment of the Army are becoming progressively more and more complicated. Though the present generation of officers in the selection grade have had a general education and have been able to cope with this increase in complexity of weapons and equipment, our eyes should now be focussed on the 21st Century and the challenges its technical progress will pose to the General Staff Officers laying down qualitative requirements for Research and Development and other regimental officers carrying out user trials. The validity of this statement is borne out by the kind of user trials being presently carried out by various arms in which their officers do not fully comprehend the technical aspects of the equipment under trial and the report is more or less left in the hands of the technical staff. Keeping in mind this requirement, I will be touching upon the standard of education and the training of an officer (particularly Infantry) from the very beginning i.e. from selection onwards.

TASKS TO BE PERFORMED BY OFFICERS

And infantry officer can be employed on regimental duties, on the staff or on extra regimental employment.

REGIMENTAL DUTIES

As a Subaltern an officer can be employed as an Intelligence Officer,

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Mechanical Transport Officer, and Signal*Platoon Commander in a battalion or as a physical Training Officer and a Weapon Training Officer at the Regimental Centre.

As a Captain an officer can be employed as a platoon commander of one of the support weapons platoons like the Medium Machine guns, 81 mm Mortar and the Recoilless Guns platoon or as a Rifle Company second in Command, Adjutant or as Quartermaster. (If no special List officer is posted.) He can also be employed as an Administration Company Commander.

As a Major an officer can be employed as a Rifle Company Commander or Support Company Commander in a battalion or as a Training Company Commander at Regimental Centre.

As a Lt Col an officer will be employed as a Second-in-Command in a battalion or in appointments at Regimental Centre of training and administrative nature. In certain cases a Lt Col may be appointed to command a battalion and in others officiate in that capacity.

OTHER REGIMENTAL DUTIES

In addition to the jobs mentioned above, which are strictly according to the War/peace Establishment of an infantry battalion, Regimental Centre, the following jobs have also to be performed in a unit, either as a part of the job requirement of an existing appointment, or on being given an additional charge, the manner and method being variable according to the choice of the Commanding Officer, e.g. a Commanding Officer can detail any one officer to supervise physical training and games for the whole battalion or expect all sub-unit commanders to look after their own commands. Such additional jobs are as follows:-

- (a) Accounts Officer. (under the Second-in-Command)
- (b) Physical Training Officer.
- (c) Weapon Training Officer.
- (d) Officers Mess Committee
- (e) Liaison Officer to senior visiting VIPs.
- (f) Legal duties - prosecutor, defending officer or a friend of the accused in courts martial. Recording of courts of inquiry and summaries of evidence, preparation of charge sheets and offence reports and membership of station boards.

DUTIES ON STAFF

Grades 1,2, and 3 Staff officers at various formation Headquarters in G, A and Q Branches.

Grades 1,2 and 3 staff officers at Army Headquarters. (The staff duties and method of working is entirely different at Army Headquarters because it is basically a department of the Government of India and not a formation Headquarters controlling troops.).

EXTRA REGIMENTAL EMPLOYMENT

Instructors Class A,B and C at Category A establishments, Movement Control Organisations, National Cadet Corps, Ground Liaison Officers at formation HQ. Air Photo Interpretation Officers at formation HQ or in other miscellaneous duties like military police, field cashier, resettlement projects and so on.

REQUIREMENT OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Advanced armies of the World have started realising that it is no longer sufficient to have generalist officers in command of troops because the army's equipment is becoming progressively more and more technical. Therefore, they have accepted the fact that it is obligatory for all officers particularly those in higher command and staff appointments to have a high degree of technical comprehension of weapons and equipment. Therefore, it has now become necessary in advanced armies to be an Engineering Graduate before one becomes a General Officer. Whereas it is necessary for a signaller or an engineer or an EME officer to be technically competent in handling and or repair of equipment on charge, it is imperative for an officer in command of troops at any level to have technical comprehension of the weapons and equipment he is handling and to be adept at materials management. To this end, the exposure at the Institute of Armament Technology, before attending the staff course is not sufficient. A combined Technical and Tactical Command and Staff Course would be more appropriate and should be introduced as soon as possible. Similarly training in materials and other management techniques should be imparted at the beginning of the service to young officers. The extra emphasis on knowledge of Science and Technical comprehension, that I am suggesting, *does not* mean that knowledge of humanities is not essential. What I do wish to state is that BOTH are required. It is also suggested that we should restructure the educational standards of the officer cadre as follows:-

- (a) Only Science stream candidates should be selected for training as officers at the NDA.

(b) At the NDA, the course should be expanded, if necessary so that a full degree course in engineering in the following concurrent or alternative streams can be organised:-

(i) Armament technology.

(ii) Electronics technology.

(iii) Mechanical technology.

(iv) An exposure to Chemical and Biological engineering as related to weapons.

(c) Candidates for direct entry training at the IMA should already be engineering graduates in one of the disciplines mentioned above.

(d) The ACC entry, by virtue of its source of material, is not likely to provide science stream cadet in any respectable numbers. Therefore, all arts stream cadets from the ACC should be commissioned into the non technical services. As they are usually late entrants, it will also help their career prospects. Cadets in the science stream from the ACC should have the option to join non technical services.

The officers commissioned in technical arms and services should later on specialise in their own fields-Field Engineering, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering or Electronics to get a post-graduate degree from their respective colleges.

It is necessary that on passing out from the IMA a subaltern is fully qualified and competent to hold the appointments indicated earlier. But at present, as these officers are not fully competent to carry out the above mentioned jobs on grant of commission, they have to be given post commission training courses for these jobs. It is, therefore, obvious that the fault lies in the concept of training of officers at the Academy. The GCs at IMA at present are exposed to the following activities

(a) *Academics*. Since the intake is all graduates, the aim of academic studies here is obscure.

(b) *Military subjects* Elementary knowledge of organisation and administration and military history, map reading, platoon tactics, elementary signal training and some training in driving of B vehicles. An exposure to platoon weapons and to physical training. A very high standard of ceremonial drill is also achieved but at a tremendous cost of time. It

will be seen that the whole gamut of military activities, with varying emphasis on each aspect, is covered over a period of 1^{1/2} years in which two camps are also held for outdoor practical training.

Despite the above experience, the end product on joining the battalion, is found to be such as to require another 6 months of further training at a YO's course in platoon weapons which he should have been taught at the IMA. Then he is trained as a platoon commander where in fact officers are not authorised as platoon commanders in a Battalion. Finally, he is trained as commando when again there is no such organisation in an infantry battalion. This raises the question regarding the necessity of this post-commission training. Similarly, the knowledge of intelligence duties, mechanical transport and Signals of a freshly commissioned officer is also of such a rudimentary standard as to require further special courses. However, he is found to be quite good at saluting, general drill and at ceremonial drill (eighteenth century vintage) but he is not good enough in modern tactical battle drill and procedures or in physical training (otherwise why are PT course and the YO course, as at present constituted, necessary?). The question is WHY is this so?. The pre-commission training of officers for four years at the NDA and 1^{1/2} years at the IMA in an elite public school atmosphere, is an expensive affair. The least one would expect from these institutions is that they turn out officers who are *fit* to carry out their duties laid down for them in the war establishments as young subalterns without requiring further training.

SUGGESTED SCHEDULE - PRE COMMISSION TRAINING

In order to ensure that an officer on completion of his course at the IMA is fully trained to carry out the duties expected of him when he joins an infantry battalion as a Subalterns, it is essential that the training at the IMA is restructured on the following lines.

For officers posted to the Infantry, the aim of training, should be to produce an officer who is fit to carry out the duties of an Intelligence Officer, Mechanical Transport Officer and Signal Platoon Commander. He should also be fully conversant with and proficient in section leading and platoon tactics; imparting instructions in all rifle company weapons and in organising and conducting physical training and games. After joining the unit he should require further training only to be able to perform the duties of Captains and above. Similarly, the young officers of other arms and services should also be fit to perform the duties of subalterns before being granted a commission.

In view of the above, I suggest that the general distribution of time and effort at the IMA should be as follows:

a) *Academic*. Since GCs are already graduates, all academic *teaching* should stop altogether. If they have so far not been *Educated* this is not the time to do so. On the other hand, the selection system should be tightened up to select “Educated” candidates. The exposure to humanities etc is best given in colleges and not here. Here we should concentrate on history of the art of warfare as the basic reading, with a view to inculcating a habit of reading; a love for the art of war and its history; and for improving the GC’s expression both verbal and written.

(b) *Military Subjects* (Six semesters of three month each).

(i) *First Semester*. Basic recruit training i.e. in drill, PT, map reading and in addition Military History. Pass promotion cadre to NK

(ii) *2nd Semester*. To pass a standard similar to map reading standard I and promotion cadre upto Havildar. Training as a MT Driver, signal operator in radio and line equipment authorised to an infantry battalion and to pass the classification test.

(iii) *Third Semester*. To Pass promotion cadre for promotion of JCO. Be able to instruct a class in signals (radio and line); MT driving and maintenance; map reading and field sketching.

(iv) *Fourth Semester*. Learn the organisations of all arms and services upto sub-unit level; be efficient in handling a rifle platoon in barracks and on manoeuvres (administration and tactical handling).

(v) Commissioning Board to be held on completion of the fourth semester.

(iv) *Fifth Semester*. Be proficient in regimental accounts, framing of charges and charge sheets, duties of an officer recording S of E and C of I, conduct of courts martial and duties of prosecutor and defending officer (including practical training). Be proficient in supervision of the interior economy of a sub unit, care and maintenance of weapons and equipment and other stores. Be proficient in the theoretical knowledge of regimental duties.

(viii) *Sixth Semester*. Officers of all arms, specialised training in driving of a tank, handling and firing of a field gun and 81 mm Mortars,

MMG, and RCLs (106 mm and 57 mm). Officers commissioned in the services should be exposed to their duties during this period.

c) *Passing Out*. The present emphasis on a passing out parade in Eighteenth Century battle formations and on unnecessary spit and polish, for which GCs practise for 2 to 3 months for about 2 hours a day should be marked by a demonstration of the tactical/technical skill of the future officers in the form of a field firing exercise or realistic battle inoculation. The ceremonial aspect of commissioning can be looked after by holding the prize distribution ceremony separately in the Chetwode Hall during the Commissioning ceremony or even at a Ceremonial Guest Night function in the Mess.

SUGGESTED SCHEME - POST COMMISSION TRAINING

If the pattern of pre-commission training is modified as suggested, a young officer, on being commissioned, can now be expected to command, administer and train an infantry platoon in peace and in war because he has been given adequate training in doing so and is mentally ready to handle a rifle company as its second in command. The change in the pre-commission training will enable a young officer to effectively discharge the duties assigned to him by the Government according to the War Establishment and for which he has been fully trained at the IMA. He should do so for about six months during which he will be using the experience gained at the IMA and will be learning the characteristics of the men with whom he will be serving for the next 16 to 18 years.

A practice is in vogue to put a young officer through promotion cadre(s) alongwith other ranks and later on placing the young officer in command of an infantry platoon in barracks and in exercise to let him get the feel of commanding troops. The *thought* behind this practice is eminently sound, but it should be done without displacing the permanent incumbent JCO from this job. This can be easily done by giving the subaltern the command of a platoon in a leave vacancy so that the permanent incumbent does not continue to oversee the work of a raw hand.

Some of the courses of instruction also need to be made task oriented. For instance the war establishment of a battalion says that a Signal Platoon Commander is a Captain/subaltern. However, such stroke appointments carry the lower rank. According to existing orders, an officer, who is to be trained for this appointment, can only be sent on this course with a minimum of a year and half service and maximum of 6 years service. If an officer is to discharge his duties as Signal Platoon Commander, he can do so till about

3 to 4 years of service only. Therefore, it is fruitless sending an officer on this course if he has more than 3 years service. At present officers who do the Signal Course, come back much too senior to hold the appointment of Signal Platoon Commander and are then employed in some other appointment. Such is the case with most courses. This results in infructuous expenditure of time, effort and money spent on running Army courses to train officers for jobs which they do not do. This needs to be eliminated.

I feel that the requirement of courses and their capacity vis-a-vis the number of officers available in an unit and the service requirement of trained personnel can be resolved if we draw up a capability profile that we expect our officers to possess in various brackets of service. Depending upon the jobs to be performed by them in a particular service span, the capability profile expected of them should be worked out. We should then send the officers on only those courses which train them to perform these jobs.

CONCLUSION

As the weapons and equipment are becoming more and more technically complex, we should select only the science stream as officer material for the Infantry and other arms and technical services. We should train the NDA entry upto a BE standard in Armament, Electronics and Mechanical technologies with an exposure to Chemical and Biological technology related to weapons and equipment.

The direct entry to IMA should be BEs in above disciplines. The ACC entry should provide the officers for non technical services, with an option available to those from the Science Stream among them to obtain a BE and join the Arms or technical services.

A young officer on commissioning should be fully capable of carrying out the duties expected of him on the War establishment. The passing out parade at the IMA should no longer be based on 18th century battle drills but should be replaced by a Demonstrations of tactical skill/battle inoculation by the passing out Cadets, the infrastructure being provided by the other Cadets.

It is high time that we ensured that not only are our officers fully trained to do a job before being entrusted with it but that there is no infructuous training imparted in optional subjects whereby trained officers keep waiting in vain for jobs for which they have been trained. The type of courses required and their syllabus should be planned according to needs. This will help to reduce expenditure on unnecessary courses and at the same time increase the availability of officers to units.