

Are We Neglecting the Training of Our Young Officers?*

Major Divik Kandpal**

Introduction

Young leaders are commissioned into the Army after a basic grounding into the credo of military leadership. In fact, at the Officers' Training Academy (OTA) / Indian Military Academy (IMA), they are merely introduced to the mystique of military leadership. That remains the core around which leadership traits are developed during the full span of their careers. The real education, development and grooming of a Young Officer (YO) starts only when he joins a unit and gets an opportunity to interact with real soldiers i.e. officers and personnel below officer rank (PBOR). The quality of development and grooming depends a lot on the operating philosophy of different arms and services. Even more important are the working environment and leadership role modelling prevailing in each unit. It is here that the key process of mentoring begins, to give a definite shape to his personal and professional development. The whole effort is directed in turning a vibrant lieutenant into a model Army officer with good leadership qualities.

The next stage of imbibing professionalism is undertaken at designated training schools, colleges and the regimental centres where a YO undergoes special professional courses in his formative years. The learning and values imparted at these courses lay the foundation of his career which enable him to take his rightful place in the profession of arms – essentially by displaying his physical prowess, professional acumen and leadership traits.

Thereafter, the dynamics of converting a enthusiastic YO into a battle worthy Army officer is interwoven in the grooming process embedded in the units and in the training institutions. This model, which our Armed Forces have followed since Independence, has never let us down till date. It has succeeded in creating a

*This is an edited version of the essay which won the First Prize in Group B.

**Major Divik Kandpal was commissioned into Corps of the Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on 11 Dec 1999 and did his initial attachment with 14 Battalion, the Maratha Light Infantry. He is presently posted in 636 EME Battalion.

string of dedicated YOs whose sacrifices are unparalleled in the world. A closer look at all our post-Independence military campaigns reveals that, with the possible exception of 1971 to some extent, all campaigns were conducted at unit and sub-unit levels; which itself speaks much about the courage and leadership qualities of our junior leaders.

Unfortunately, as we come close to the end of the first ten years of the service of the first batch of YO's commissioned in the 21st Century, the environment can easily discern that slowly somehow the above training continuum is getting disrupted. The results of this trend may not be visible in a flash. Nevertheless, the slowly declining sheen of the officer corps can be attributed to '*erosion of values amid their quest for easy success*'. The reasons for this downward trend are manifold. Changing socio-economic dynamics and shortage of officers are the main culprits in the all encompassing malaise that is plaguing our Armed Forces. This coupled with rapidly changing security scenario at the national and international level has put a complex challenge on the military training system. However, we cannot afford to send out our YO's underprepared to face their adversaries on the battlefield inadequately trained with obsolete weaponry in their hands.

The aim of this essay is to examine the issues which are a key to our future as a professional Army, which depends largely on it's inspirational junior leadership. *Is the present day training system of YOs dynamic enough to cater for the burgeoning challenges the Indian Army faces today? Does it cater for their personal aspirations and professional growth in the globalised world today?*

Present Model

Taking infantry as the basic model, the grooming and education of a YO passing out from the academy, starts at the respective Regimental Centres. It comprises of a capsule of two to three weeks on Regimental History, Heritage and Leadership lore. This is followed by living with troops for some duration on joining the units, which is done primarily to familiarise him with the hardships and challenges of soldiers' lives. This helps him to understand his spiritual and emotional quotient, and developing '*camaraderie*' especially with the young soldiers. This is in parallel with the designation of a junior officer as 'Senior Subaltern', who acts as

an institution to mentor him. The YO is made to undergo all the promotional cadres and is also taught the finer details of office work and documentation at company and battalion levels.

After a few months in his parent unit, he goes for his first structured career course – the YOs course. It is followed by Commandos' and Weapons' courses. During the service bracket of five to eight years, he is detailed for Junior Command (JC) course. Interspersed between these courses are Part B and D Promotion examinations and a string of miscellaneous courses like Regimental Signal Officers (RSO), Mechanical Transport Officers (MTO), Quarter Master (QM), Military Law, Mountain / Jungle Warfare, Computer and Information Technology (IT) courses, to name a few. These are generally vacancy based. Unfortunately, due to a variety of internal and environmental factors the above mentioned continuum of educating and grooming YOs stands disrupted and has led to a '*start-stop*' necessity based approach.

Changing Milieu and Its Impact on the Training System

The '*shortage of officers*' is the single biggest reason for the above problem. The inadequacy of officers at the unit level leads to lack of mentoring at all levels. Add to it, the ever '*increasing commitments*' which take away from them the traditional growing up period. They are pushed into operations straightway after commissioning. This at times leads to picking up wrong practices and values, which at later stages, become difficult to rectify. The changing socio-economic dynamics have also touched both leaders and the led. The YOs of today have different dreams and aspirations. Last but not the least, is the increased awareness and interaction with the civil environment which leads to inevitable comparisons in pay and allowances, status and career advancement. All these influences make mentoring more difficult and complicated. The ever increasing unit commitments, both in peace and field, combined with shortage of officers leaves little or no time for the Commanding Officers (CO's) to give them adequate time for normal cadres and courses, leave aside thinking of grooming them. Although most of the units are keen to mentor their YO's, this aspect of their upbringing is now being conducted more and more in a perfunctory manner.

The present day training curricula, right from the OTA / IMA upto JC course is sufficiently covering the '*tactical*' aspects of

conventional environment. However, the challenges that the Country faces in the form of Asymmetric Warfare (AW) requires review of the basics of our training, especially at the YO's level. Add to it, the quantum leap in technology that our Army is making to prepare itself for Network Centric Warfare (NCW) and the demands of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Thus, the environment expects our YOs to be *'technocrat wizards'*, with requisite adaptability to imbibe and implement rapidly changing technological concepts that are getting introduced endlessly, and also *'intellectual understanding'* to comprehend the subtleties of humanities oriented subjects like Perception Management, Human Rights, Media Management, International Relations and Diplomacy. On top of all this is the challenge of 'leading' and 'managing' an increasingly awakened and educated PBOR, who most often would not question your decisions and actions but would also not submit meekly 'always' without expressing reasonable doubts or seeking premature exit from Military service.

The Road Ahead

"Our aim is to extract the potential officer at the start of his career and begin His grooming for leadership as soon as possible. Responsibility breeds Responsibility; The best thing for training Leadership is Leadership."

Field Marshall William Slim

Our training has focussed on two dimensions of education – the 'military field' which can be termed as specialised grooming and the broad based 'education' covering distinct and varied subjects ranging from liberal arts, languages to engineering disciplines. The road ahead lies in effectively adapting and modifying our training syllabi and methodology, and introducing these new parameters at all levels to keep abreast with rapidly changing battlefield requirements and challenges to National Security.

Proposed Model

Paradigm Shift at the National Defence Academy. The change has to be brought in at graduation level at the NDA, where basic streams have to be redefined from humanities and science to defence management and engineering. The model for Bachelor in Defence Management can be taken from Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) Master in Defence Studies and Bachelor in

Business Administration from the civil education system. The focus should be more on human resource development, man management, leadership, psychology, materials & inventory management, foreign languages and international relations. Similarly, the engineering stream initial training and electronics training can be conducted in the civil institutions to start with. This can be modelled on already established Communication Theory Workshops (CTWs) and the recently introduced similar concept at the Naval Academy. The teething troubles can be taken care of by co-located College of Military Engineering as well as active support of MCEME and MCTE. The intake into CTWs should also be increased. These steps would not only give the cadets professional competence but also personal satisfaction.

Raising the Bar at IMA / OTA and YOs Training. At IMA / OTA the training curricula should be revised upwards, to aim at turning out potential sub unit commanders. With majority of cadets earning their spurs after commissioning in active counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, the emphasis on the same cannot be neglected. It should be part of curriculum right from the first term onwards and not merely as a capsule course in the end. Interactive sessions with gallantry award winners as well representatives from active field formations should be organised. Subjects like media management, perception management, human rights etc should be introduced. Emphasis should be more on case studies from the field army.

The logical implication of the above would be raising the bar at the '*corps specific*' YOs' courses to JC level. The training void after commissioning upto the YOs course needs to be filled in respective units under the guidance of respective COs. The period between commissioning and YOs courses also needs to be increased to one year plus. Institutionalised E-courses can be started in this period which along with unit level grooming and mentoring would help in the desired transformation. During the YOs training, apart from customary focus on tactics, development of an officer as a 'leader' is the core issue – that aspect needs to be addressed. The varied subjects introduced at IMA / PTA, such as media management, perception management, human rights etc should be taken to a higher level. The mode of delivery of these subjects should also change from lecture based programme to those that encourage original and creative thinking, e.g. discussions

and seminars based on case studies would arouse more active interaction, culminating in innovative ideas. This would lead to the field army having competent sub unit commanders at a relatively earlier service bracket and age. This would also conform to present day realities in which sub-unit commanders appointments are handled by greenhorns. This will equip these officers to take on responsibility effectively, without waiting for the JC course to empower them with the requisite knowledge base.

Professional Courses. The next mandatory course for the YOs is the JC course, in a service bracket of 5-8 years. This intermediate period is filled with a string of non-mandatory miscellaneous courses like RSOs, MTO, QM, Military Law courses. The content of these courses needs to be skillfully modified to keep the officers abreast with the latest technologies and man management concepts. Aim should be to utilise their '*management*' and '*engineering*' know how acquired during graduation; and suitably updating them through these courses. The importance of these courses needs to be redefined. The problem arises in case of upgrading tactical knowledge, because the gap between the two courses is large. This can be taken care of by introducing a sequential E-learning process. There can be an integrated correspondence cum E-learning course with a contact phase to augment the same. However to fully utilise these courses, there is a need to tie up these courses/studies to career progression and incentives in terms of making career choices.

The Junior Command Course. The content of JC course can be increased to do away with ad hoc Command Pre-Staff courses. Since, every officer does not attend this course, the JC course could also prepare them for 'staff' appointments teneted by middle level officers. The course content needs to be upgraded to also train for UN Peace Keeping Operations. Exposure on international affairs, national security policy etc should be covered in the form of lectures and seminars. The duration of course should be increased and officers should be encouraged to opt for specialisation in different subjects like Operation and Administration Logistics, Intelligence, Information Warfare, Electronic Warfare etc. In fact, the JC course can be modelled on the lines of Post Graduate Diploma in Business / Man Management for executives which needs five years of work experience. The course can be of a limited duration followed by a mini project / thesis report in

respective units which should lead to award of a PG Diploma. This will not only enhance an individual officer's professional qualification, it would also boost his confidence and lead to higher motivation and self esteem levels. Thereafter, constructive projects and research work may be assigned to him on existing field army level problems to find and suggest workable solutions.

Promotion Examinations. The subjects in promotion examinations should also look for a broader perspective. If the above suggested model is implemented then the logical step would be to raise the level of Part B examination to sub-unit level. In essence, it should be seen as a validation of his '*on the job*' learning as well as that on the courses. Technology is touching each and every sphere of personal and professional lives, therefore, introduction of science and military technology as a subject both in Part B and D examinations should be considered. With the help of technical arms and services a formal syllabus may be worked out. It should facilitate gradual progression at all the levels catering for basic technological requirements including the functional needs of latest systems that are being inducted in our Army as well as updating us on latest trends and developments. This will help in preparation of a strong foundation for the DSSC aspirants as well. There is also a strong case for introduction of a subject which would guide our Young Officers on the subtleties of leadership, man-management etc. Though biographies of great military leaders are there for officers to learn from, there is much more military literature, highlighting certain facets of leadership, man-management and variety of other topics which can be of a great learning value. It is recommended that a non-thematic subject based on one or two such books can be introduced. The emphasis should not be on cramming for examination, but on application, analysis and transferring that knowledge into lessons learnt to facilitate their implementation. The level of other subjects also has to be suitably revised to enable the officers to smoothly graduate to JC level and beyond and the knowledge gained should help him in his preparations for the DSSC entrance examination.

Training for International Assignments. The above model would raise the stature of our YOs to a reasonably high level. Thereafter, they can confidently interact and operate at every level for carrying out tasks either in the civil domain or on international assignments. There would be no need for any specialised course for the same.

When officers go out on foreign assignments with their units, they would get enough warning cum preparatory period. If an individual officer is selected for a specific appointment, then the course run by Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) at USI would be good enough.

Mentoring in Units. Shaping 'greenhorns' into good leaders, through mentoring is as old as the concept of leadership itself. We have Lord Krishna mentoring Arjuna in the Mahabharata. The requirement of grooming in the Military exists for a variety of reasons; chief amongst them being the fact that there is a wide gulf between the responsibilities of a gentleman cadet (GC) and a YO. The gulf is not so much due to the rank, but it is in the mindset. As a GC, the interaction is between fellow GCs and instructors through a set training schedule while a YO gets involved in administration and the decision making process. This wide expanse needs to be bridged by grooming a newly commissioned YO through regimentation under the watchful eyes and ears of responsible mentors. The traditional model used to consider these YOs, full of enthusiasm and bubbling energy, as a huge piece of wax which could be moulded, shaped and structured to suit the organisational requirements and to turn them into effective leaders. However, because the shortage of officers and the graph of commitments continues to rise, these realities need serious consideration. These are the two primary causes which have led to the deterioration of the mentoring model. The Commanding Officers do not have enough officers and time to look into this aspect and this vital aspect of a YO's development process has got much neglected. The onus for this vital aspect of a YOs meaningful development has now shifted onto the formation commanders. The training cadres for development of YO's model should be implemented at formation level by 'pooling in' the best available instructors. Preparatory cadres for YOs and JC courses and Part B and D examinations should be organised. Guest lectures on a variety of topics need to be conducted at formation level. The officers who have finished their YOs course need to be exposed to the war games, sand model discussions etc. Professional competitions amongst YOs should also be conducted to develop competitive spirit. Wherever business schools, universities and industries are available in close vicinity, meaningful participation of YOs in their workshops and creative programmes should be facilitated. Under field conditions, where such formation level

integrated training may not be possible, Corps Battle Schools should take the lead and a similar model may be introduced in the form of pre-induction training for YOs. *However, the traditional mentoring and grooming model still needs to be the basis for all such actions and all possible efforts should be made to revive it.*

Conclusion

Young Officers are the backbone of any unit. Grooming them and turning them into assets is a vital command function for commanders of at all levels. The proposition outlined above is primarily 'infantry' centric which can be suitably modified for other arms, technical arms and services. The technical arms and services need to groom their officers into technology managers role. It needs to be emphasised that this may not be the final solution for this problem, but the contours of grooming and training of YOs needs to be looked at holistically and addressed with utmost urgency at the highest possible level. Last but not the least, the mystique of leadership is full of endless possibilities and we must not forget that despite all these changes, it is important to remember that not every good officer or leader will be a good academic or vice versa. There would always be a need to shape these training modules in such a way that they provide the right mix for everybody to hone their professional skills on ground under the able guidance of battle hardened military leaders before they go back to the units.

"The Greenhorn is the ultimate victor in everything; It is He that gets the most out of life"

Gilbert K Chesterton

Bibliography

1. Rear Adm AP Dalvi (Retd), 'Naval Academy and the HRD Challenges Ahead'. The Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol CXXXIX No. 576, p. 238.
2. Col Ali Ahmed, 'Transformation of the Officer Corps'. War College Journal Volume No 37 Spring 2008 Number 01, p 72.
3. Lt Col Sushil Kumar & Lt Col Mridul Sharma, 'Grooming of Young Officers: Yesterday & Today'. EME Journal Vol 5 Issue 1 Apr 2007, p.6.
4. Maj Gen Kuldip Singh Bajwa (Retd), 'A Young Leader in Sappers'. SAPPER, Oct 2005, p 60.
5. Report on proceedings: Conference on Professional Military Education dated 25 Mar 2006, accessed online at '<http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/housepmeconference.pdf>' on 17 Aug 2009.