



# GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE PREPARATION OF LAND FORCES OFFICERS OF THE BULGARIAN ARMED FORCES

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This article discusses the issues of improving the training process of Land Forces officers of the Bulgarian Armed Forces. Based mostly on the analysis of the current experience of the army leadership, the analysis of modern requirements of the security environment and the need to change the job qualifications to perform specific tasks of Army officers in the full range of missions and operations, some suggestions for improving their training are extracted. An attempt to present the main directions for increasing the efficiency of the officers from the Army preparation on tactical and operational level has been executed. Suggestions have been made for improving the current course model, which is the fundamental element of training these officers and it is associated with the overall vision for their training process. The main conclusions and recommendations of the study are presented at the end of the current scientific work.

**Keywords:** officers from Land Forces; preparation; guidelines; improvement; course model.

The comprehensiveness of the problems presented to the Land Forces (LF) as the leading type of troops in the Bulgarian Armed Forces, the limitations in the resources provided to it and the huge flow of information require the LF officers to make more concrete and complex decisions, which can happen only in the implementation of the following paradigm: decision-makers should have a high level of education and training, supported by the ability for intensive and alternative perspective way of thinking. The high requirements to command and control in the full spectrum of operations in a complex environment demand continuous training, in the course of which to create emergencies ahead of development. The purpose of the officers' preparation from Army is to work out a mechanism for quick and adequate reaction to the problematic situations, while preserving a certain freedom of action.

The need to provide military activity with trained officers from the LF requires the application of scientifically based methods and organizational forms of education and training. Modern commanders (chiefs) perform many functions as leaders, among which one of the most

important is decision-making. From this point of view, the formation and improvement of command (leadership) skills is reduced to obtaining new methods and algorithms for the work of the officer-manager to the existing tools. It should be emphasized that leadership (management) at the operational and tactical level claims much more than acquiring new skills. It requires the use of a qualitatively new style of behavior in the performance of professional duties. It is the change of the style of work, as well as the gradual transition from strictly centralized command to mission command in the formations, units and subdivisions of the LF recent years, that is the essence of the formation of operational and tactical skills. In practice, the change of style and methods of work by the officer is an adaptive change in the ways of thinking and achieving higher levels of efficiency of thought (cognitive) processes.

The above-mentioned considerations on the topic are related to the relevance and importance of this article, which are to define the importance of the LF officers' preparation process to be thoroughly researched and analyzed, giving modern recommendations for improving their training, especially in of the development of the course system. The purpose of the study is to reveal the nature and relationships in the process of LF officers training on the basis of the initial data, which are mainly related to existing national documents and practices in the semantics of the

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research topic, giving some basic directions for improving the quality of LF preparation. All the national standards are put into the framework on NATO officers' requirements related to training and education. The methodological basis is based on the objectivity and reliability of the used sources and facts. The limitations set in the article relate mainly to the study of the training of LF junior and senior officers mainly at the tactical and partly at the operational level.

In the process of analysis of LF officers' training according to the doctrinal framework of the Armed Forces of Bulgaria, it is concluded that comprehensive training of these officers for successful performance of their functional duties should be ensured with the basic idea of appropriate command and control of the headquarters and troops, and should be guided by the basic guidelines, principles, forms and methods laid down in the doctrine. For the training of LF officers, a systematic approach should be used, through which to manage individual and collective training in order to control the quality of the training and the amount of resources.<sup>1</sup>

Analyzing the published material from item 108 to item 112 inclusive from National Publication 7, it becomes clear that the training of the officers is aimed at a constant increase and improvement of their professional qualification. It is carried out mainly through training, self-training and in the course of the daily practical process. Individual training covers the entire period of the officer's service and is mainly related to training and qualification courses, where knowledge and skills are pursued to solve specific tasks. The individual training of officers should be focused on: continuous development of sustainable habits in the management of their subordinate formations; mastering the methods for organizing and conducting combat (combat operations) and the combat use of weapons and technical means; mastering foreign languages according to NATO standards. The opportunity for self-assessment helps to supplement the necessary knowledge and skills and to adequately use the provided opportunities for self-improvement. Thus, the overall system of qualification of officers provides technical, tactical and leadership training, oriented towards building leaders capable of performing their assigned tasks. The individual training of officers is divided into

initial and special (subsequent) and is carried out through training for tactical, operational and strategic level, and between each of them they maintain and improve their individual training in the course of daily training, in performing their functional obligations in the military units (headquarters) or participate in courses for acquiring additional qualification and re-qualification depending on the requirements for holding a specific position.<sup>2</sup> Collective (joint) training covers the work at the strategic and operational levels and especially in the presence of common tasks that require a very high level of interaction. Through the system of internships, qualities that are necessary are acquired, for example, for the officer from the LF to work in the headquarters of the Air Force or Navy. Preparation for work in a multinational environment occupies the highest level in the hierarchy of individual training and focuses on skills for work in a multinational environment. It is logical to require not only language skills, but also basic knowledge and skills of individual and collective (joint) training.<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of the national doctrinal and sub-doctrinal documents for the LF officers preparation, it is concluded that they define its content, clearly outlining the tendencies that their training is interrelated with the training of other officers, HQs and troops requirements for the participation of officers in operations and activities under the three types of missions of the armed forces.<sup>4</sup> At the moment, taking into consideration doctrinal and sub-doctrinal documents for the Armed Forces, the legislation regarding the establishment of a system for the LF officers training, in which precise and clear goals, methods, forms, structures are set, is well developed. The legislation should be periodically updated, while at the same time working hard to find new approaches to training LF officers.

In connection with the results thus obtained in the analysis, we should outline the main guidelines for improving the LF officers training in Bulgaria, giving a couple of suggestions for improving their training process. At the beginning we should think that, in training, the main goal should address the fact that the task of the commander is to continuously improve the ability of his/her unit to carry out its peacetime or mobilization mission. He/she will need to guide people and manage time



resources and materials to effectively accomplish ordered mission. The success of the unit depends on the commander more than any other single factor. Hence the statement that the training of LF officers should be in constant connection with the formation.<sup>5</sup>

On the second place, in addition to the application of the well-known and vital principles of the LF officers training, such as scientific approach, standardization, adaptability, clarity, systematic and consistent training, etc., the principle of "Combat Focus" must be applied. The study should stem from the main mission of the armed forces, which is associated with fighting and victory. The goal of education is to create a force trained to mobilize, fight and win anywhere, as well as into the state of Bulgaria and worldwide. Combat focus is crucial throughout the training process and is used by commanders to allocate training resources based on the requirements of the military mission. A critical aspect of the concept of combat focus is to understand the responsibility and the relationship between the main tasks of the collective mission and the individual tasks that support them. The LF officers training programs select the specific individual requirements that contribute to the implementation of each collective task in order to be trained during the same period.<sup>6</sup>

Another aspect related to the process of military education is the improvement of the methodology for conducting the disciplines, through the use of discussions, game methods, situational games and open problem solving. A number of studies are conducted to improve the communication skills of teachers, describing a number of techniques. All these actions are aimed at adapting military training to the new requirements of the security environment. In parallel with the above-mentioned proposals, steps should be taken to improve the ones used and to introduce new methods and forms in the training in order to stimulate the feedback. In this way, interconnections between the trainees and the trainers are built and the processes taking place between them are improved.<sup>7</sup>

The above areas should be linked in such a way so as to achieve optimized effective preparation, which can be reached with sufficiently effective training intensity. It follows that the limited preparation time must be always optimized in order to have better training outcomes.

The application of the guidelines leads to the conclusion that it is appropriate to train the officers of the LF in two phases: the phase of development of basic skills and the advanced phase of development and sustainability. The first phase occurs during the first few months of preparation, ensuring that the new leader achieves a minimum acceptable level of mastery of the critical tasks needed to accomplish his/her mission. The second phase is precisely the advanced phase of development and maintenance. This phase involves maintaining those competencies that have already been mastered and developing skills for new tasks. The system of additional qualification and retraining and the course system of development are used in order to expand the perspective and skills of the leader for current and future obligations. During this phase, the officer launches a self-development program that focuses on those skills that the leader needs or wants to develop.<sup>8</sup>

All the above-mentioned areas for improvement are committed to creating a unified model for the training of LF officers. The training model is a combination of all methods, forms and conditions necessary for implementing the entire training program (education). The training model gives a physical expression of the overall strategy for effective training. In the following lines we will discuss the course model of training of LF officers, which is the most important element of their training, of course, supported by all other methods and forms.

Military education at all levels in the officer education system for LF should be linked to attendance at relevant courses.<sup>9</sup> Such a model has been present in LF for many decades. An example of a more developed scheme for improving the training of LF officers, built on the basis of Bulgarian traditions and modern challenges of the security environment is proposed in Figure 1. The essence of the model is that it implements the basic vision for training of LF officers.

The system of training of officers provides formal military education and training at levels that are linked to goal setting, levels of training (tactical, operational and strategic), time aspects, officer ranks, educational qualification level and phases of intellectual development in the process of the officers' evolution, each course having its own duration depending on the need for this factor.



Some of the courses currently exist in the country, but are of shorter duration, while others, especially for junior officers, have not been applied till nowadays. The essence lies in the acquisition of knowledge and skills for work at the current and next higher level. The model for professional military training of LF officers presented in the figure emphasizes the course system, which as an option can be applied to the LF officers mainly at the tactical level, covering the initial period of the next operational level. In a few sentences below we have listed the features of the model in the face of the courses offered by it.

1. Basic course for junior officers lasting one month – practically oriented after graduating from military school. Through it, young officers from all specializations consolidate general skills for training and preparation on topics, including the tasks that all officers are expected to perform successfully, regardless of their specializations. The course unifies the general military service of the servicemen at the beginning of their officer field.

2. Specialized course for junior officers with a duration of about two months – for the development of junior officer leaders in a functional direction and

elimination of the shortcomings identified by the training of the army. The aim is to develop technically competent and confident platoon commanders, depending on the specialization. Upon successful completion of the course, the serviceman becomes a senior lieutenant rank and position.

3. Course for company commanders / section chiefs in a battalion\*– three months. Its essence consists in a system of training of officers at the captain’s level in order to acquire training for company-level command (battery) and to acquire the ability to manage sections in battalions’ HQs, as staff officers. Upon completion of the course, the serviceman is promoted to the rank of captain and assigned to an appropriate position.<sup>10</sup>

4. Staff course for junior officers – two months. Its main purpose is to prepare the combat officers and staff officers at the tactical level, mainly on a battalion theme, in order to support their combat and staff work, as well as their application for a Joint Staff Colleague at the next stage.

5. Training at the Joint Staff Colleague for the acquisition of a master’s degree in military affairs with a duration of 18 months. This type of training is associated with the acquisition of knowledge for

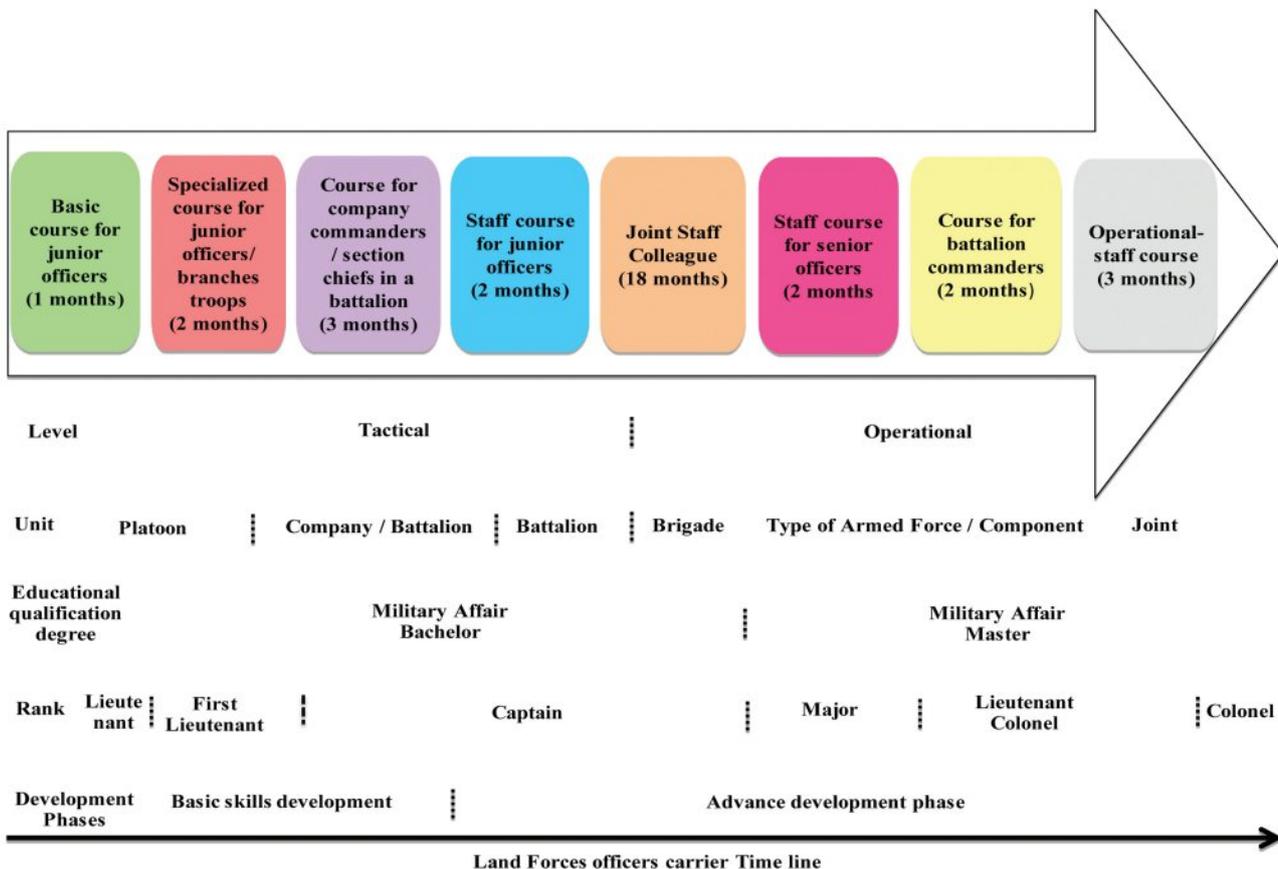


Figure 1 Course model for training of LF officers



the work of LF officers at the operational level. The connection is made with the tactical and partly strategic level, emphasizing the operational one. After obtaining a master's degree, officers are promoted to the rank of majors and hold majors' positions.

6. Staff course for senior officers – two months. The main purpose of the course is related to increasing the professional competencies of the officers for the performance of their functional duties in the positions held or planned to be held in the headquarters of formations of the Armed Forces. The trainees should expand their knowledge and skills for their construction as specialists with new views on the role and place of the formations of the Armed Forces in the general system of modern operations.

7. Course for battalion commanders\* – two months. The aim of the course is related to the theoretical and practical orientation of the training of officers from headquarters of military formations of the Armed Forces, projected to hold the positions of battalion\* commanders to perform their functional duties as commanders of battalions\* of the Land Forces and to give students complete and in-depth knowledge of modern management processes.<sup>11</sup>

8. Operational-staff course for senior officers with a time potential of three months, associated with increasing the professional competencies of officers to perform their functional duties in positions held in the headquarters of formations of the LF after graduation from the Joint Staff Colleague. The course aims to prepare officers on operational arts in joint and multinational operations, procedures for planning operations and developing documents of different nature in national, multinational and NATO format and the legal aspects of military operations.<sup>12</sup>

The above mentioned courses should be mandatory for developing the training of officers at the tactical level and partly at the operational level. The model thus defined can be supported by various general or specialized courses that officers take on the way of their development.

Based on current scientific work thus proposed, the following several conclusions can be drawn. First of all, it should be noted that the effective and efficient proposals for improving the training of LF officers are associated with the successful combination of goals, principles, methods and

forms that build a single comprehensive model for training this category of servicemen. At the same time, due to the dynamically changing security environment, its content is constantly expanding, and its main focus remains directed on its practical and practical-applied orientation. On next place, modern missions and tasks require a transformation of the training process of LF officers, and the main efforts should be focused on multi-functionality in order to increase tactical and operational effects and reduce the cost of infrastructure, combat equipment and training. Last but not least, the paradigm of improving the training of LF officers lies in the skillful combination of extremely good Bulgarian traditions in the process with future expanding the course system, which should be carefully reviewed and developed in the face of more mandatory consecutive courses in military academies in the country and abroad.

Applying the research methods used, several recommendations are made, which are described below:

1. Self-training as a main way to increase the level of knowledge and individual practical skills and habits of LF officers is recommended to be supported by a number of training courses for this type of officers.

2. There is a necessity of deployment of a more developed system of short-term and medium-term specialized courses aimed at forming specific professional competencies to achieve better training of LF officers.

3. It is recommended to have a defter combination of standard and non-standard forms of training of LF officers, which will lead to quality improvement of training and appropriate organization of the military pedagogical process.

4. The focus of the training should be directed towards acquiring leadership, control, managerial and methodological skills and abilities to transform the LF officers more to the control functions in relation to the NCO<sup>13</sup> staff, who should take over the main functions of the training of LF NCOs, soldiers and troops.

### **Conclusion**

A commander, chief, and ultimately leader can increasingly develop his/her skills for effective operational and tactical way of thinking. In fact, all this is necessary in order to perform official duties



in complex operational and tactical conditions. The basic idea is that the implementation of operational and tactical leadership requires an effective combination of intellectual abilities, as well as creative and critical thinking from the lowest to the highest levels of mental activity. As the operational and tactical environment changes very quickly nowadays, decision-makers have to learn to think quickly and flexibly, to be energetic and resourceful, and to think more and more creatively. For their part, creative decisions cannot be made without risk-taking and often deviate sharply from the standard way of thinking. As a conclusion on the topic, the opinion can be expressed that the analysis of the training of LF officers proves once again that this training is the center of gravity around which actually can be found the training of other officers, NCOs, soldiers, HQs and units of the Bulgarian Armed Forces. Conducting targeted, constant and as close as possible to the real situation training of LF officers can be supported by the introduction of some changes in the existing course system, which will achieve quality training of officers; that is one of the main imperatives for building, maintaining and improving the defense capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria.

#### NOTES:

1 (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria), *Doctrine for Training of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria*, Edition A, Sofia, 2018, p. 9-16, 21-24.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 29-30.

3 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), *Bi-SC Education and Training Directive (E&TD) 075-002*, 2016, p. 8.

4 The three types of mission of Bulgarian Armed Forces are as follows: mission defense; mission support for international peace and security; mission contribution to national security in peacetime.

5 (United States Army Reserve Command) *United States Army Reserve Company Commander's Handbook (USARC Pamphlet 350-1)*, Atlanta, Georgia, 1996, p. 1.

6 (Department of the United States Army), *FM 25-100 Training the Force*, Washington, D.C., 1988.

7 Alexina I., *Military Pedagogy*, Yurayt, Moscow, 2018, p. 32-34.

8 (Department of the United States Army), *FM 25-101 Battle Focused Training*, Washington, D.C., 1990, p. 125.

9 (United States Army Reserve Command), *AD-A 236 572 Training and Organization of the US Army Reserve Components*, Virginia, 1991, pp. 38-40.

10 (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria), *Register of Courses in Joint Staff Colleagues and Military Academies in 2022*, Sofia, 2021, p. 138.

\* There are different type of battalions in Land Forces structure: tank, mechanized infantry, artillery, air-defence, reconnaissance, alpine, logistic, engineer, etc.

11 (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria), *Register of Courses in Joint Staff Colleagues and Military Academies in 2022*, Sofia, 2021, p. 42.

12 *Ibidem*, p. 331.

13 Non-commissioned officers make up the sergeants' corps in the Armed Forces.

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