

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

**PROFESSIONAL
MILITARY
EDUCATION:
WAY AHEAD**



Lt Gen Rajiv Bhalla, PVSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned in Jun 76. The officer has varied operational/administrative experiences with tenures at Training institutions including Bhutan and AHQ in Important assignments. A career spanning nearly 40 years, he has held a number of prestigious appointments to include Cdr HC Wing, DGMT and Military Secretary.

The Profession of Arms is extremely challenging with Military Commanders, entrusted with the lives of men, lead soldiers in battle to win wars. The complexity of wars today makes it imperative for the leaders to be professionally competent and updated to face the challenges of tomorrow. The Army therefore needs to invest in the potential leaders and groom them through the rigours of Professional Military Education (PME) to train their minds for the unknown. The training and educational curriculum of the soldiers has undergone regular reviews to deliver in combat. The level of training and education gets upgraded as an officer grows in service and career. This needs to be done assiduously during peace time to prepare the leadership for the day of reckoning.

The basic principle of training is to acquire skills to execute operational tasks proficiently and educate the leaders to maneuver successfully through the fog of uncertainty. While we learn lessons from the battles fought, we however must train for the battles of tomorrow. It is therefore important to maintain high standards of training and learning to address the emerging uncertain situations confidently. This warrants the PME to be streamlined with modern day requirements to churn out creative, adaptive and ingenious military commanders.

The Training Institutions of the Army have evolved keeping in view the ever increasing demand of the organization over the years. Since the past century, the warfare has undergone major changes from trench warfare to hybrid warfare and now unrestricted warfare being imposed on us. While the capacities have been enhanced and training syllabi revised to cater for the changing concepts of war- fighting, but the training methodology continues with very little change over a period of time. The COVID pandemic is a lesson to learn and merits a de novo look into our preparations and the training to win such wars.

The benchmark events which resulted in re-orientation of our training have been the Chinese debacle of 1962, landslide victory in 1971 war, Chinese Sumdromg Chu Intrusion of 1986 resulting in adopting the forward posture, the Kargil war of 1999, RR Raisings, Op Parakram of 2001 and the recent Chinese intrusions in Doklam and Eastern Ladakh. Post all these events we reviewed our operational stance and doctrines and incorporated the necessary changes for better operational effectiveness. However, the teachings and learning modalities continued to be the same with minor modifications.

It is opined that there are three verticals of learning for an officer as he progresses in service. These verticals are 'Institutional' Learning, 'Environmental' Learning and 'Self' Learning, which are not mutually exclusive but are rather overlapping. The dependency during the initial training and service is on Institutional and Environmental learning, which graduates to Environmental and Self learning with passage of time and as an officer grows in service. During the training period and early stages of service the officer depends on Institutional learning, which is like tutoring a new entrant. As he serves in different Environments, he learns all facets specific to that area as also starts to study extensively for his Self Development. On culmination of his Regimental Command, he needs to enter into the realms of Self Learning to understand and grasp the nuances of higher direction of war and operational/ strategic issues and leadership.

The concept of Institutional learning, environmental/peer learning and self development at various stages of service is recommended to be incorporated and adopted during training courses. We have however so far continued with our largely formulated 'tutoring' modules of teaching/learning for most of the courses till the rank of a Lt Col/ Colonel. It is only at the HC/NDC equivalent courses, where an officer gets an exposure of operational/strategic level issues and is permitted to question the very concepts he has learnt. Sadly the

nominated officers think that they have earned a sabbatical year after their strenuous command tenure in operational and heavily demanding peace stations, which is also reinforced by some of the senior hierarchy. It is strongly believed that with this fixated idea, these officers are not in a frame of mind to study issues which are beyond their comfort zone.

It is therefore opined that the necessity of self learning by way of PME needs to start early to prepare our officers with critical analytical skills and handling the unknown. This is suggested to be started for officers in the 8-10 year bracket. The officers get nominated for JC course at 7 to 9 years of service and would have had 2 to 3 field/peace tenures and are fully conversant with the nuances of service. They are also well versed with the Environmental operational aspects having gone through subunit/unit/ collective training and many other formation level studies/seminars/ presentations. These officers at this juncture are recommended to be exposed to conceptual /latest developments through module system of learning. The modules could be on Obstacle systems, Defensive/Offensive Operations, Mechanised Warfare, High Altitude Warfare, CI/CT Concepts, Nuclear Warfare Doctrine etc. It is opined that we should bear in mind the exposure and maturity of these officers and not underestimate their potential and capacity to learn. The senior officers with a comparatively low level of electronic exposure themselves may not be able to fathom the kind of access these officers can have on various facets of warfare, with the technological advancement and exposure to social media and internet. Each of these officers spends anything from 4 to 5 hours a day on their smart phone.

The SC Course should avoid a repetition of DSSC syllabi as most of the officers would be qualified on it and the others should have been exposed to some staff work. This course needs to raise the bar of learning as they are all selected officers and looking forwarding to taking over command of their respective units. The course should give them an exposure at operational level for them to grasp the nuances of Design of Battle and their unit's role in the Divisional battle. Learning the operational level issues at 14/15 years service is definitely not expecting too much from the officers. The course should again have a module system to cover a wide spectrum of desired subjects.

The most important aspect in both JC and SC courses is to make the students do a lot of library and internet research. They should also prepare for the discussion and produce briefs on the allocated subjects. They should be advised against copying and the faculty needs to come down heavily on those involved in plagiarism. The learning is best and maximum when doing

assignments individually or in small groups. The primary focus is also to ensure that these officers move towards self study and self development and not be dependent on previous notes.

The other subjects which needs to be learnt and imbibed early in service by the officers as part of their education and self development is the thorough knowledge of Military History, Military Leaders and Area Studies. The officers after their YO Course need to study the life and military careers of renowned Military Commanders and study campaigns /wars which have shaped international/regional history. These could also be spelt out by the Army. This should be an extensive part in the promotion exams of the officers.

It is seen that there is certain amount of repetition of teaching post the IMA training. The repetition takes place during the Tactical and Weapon Legs of YO course, then at JC, DSSC and SC course. It will be prudent to presume that certain amount of learning at the unit level has also been imbibed, thereby starting the course from a higher level of teaching than spending a few periods on revision. The weapon training too can be done away with, to be learnt within the unit by the unit instructors or at Formation level Cadres. It would be observed that only 4 to 5 % of JCOs/OR are course qualified but the entire subunit in the Battalion is extremely proficient. The officers are rather over trained at Cat A Establishments, but still not adequately creative or ingenuous with analytical skills. This is probably due to being 'tutored' rather than educating them to develop the requisite skills.

While the competitive exam of DSSC/TSOC is tough and demands a high level of academic studies and understanding, the course content is more theoretical and repetitive with lack of adequate creative thinking. Though the students do a dissertation and case studies/presentations, but most of them are a cut and paste job with minor changes to show some originality.

The performance on courses being linked to career prospects further limits the student officers to delve into the realms of originality to avoid the risk of unconventional thinking and scoring average grades. It has also been seen that some officers may not get high grades, but are acknowledged by the peer group to be intelligent and more capable than those scoring higher grades. Therefore to avoid any pressures of dissension, the course grading should be considered to be delinked from the career progression template of the MS branch.

The core military training/education for officers is a graduated process by way of courses at the Institutions with highly qualified Faculty. However our training institutions continue to tutor the officers into a straight jacketed template of learning without giving them much opportunity to self learn and develop into thinking leaders. There is very little flexibility for officers to imbibe the necessary creative and analytical skills. The NDU as and when it comes up would provide the necessary wherewithal for the strategic exposure and learning. Notwithstanding this, many students are today pursuing undergraduate/post graduate/Doctorates on subjects relating to strategic studies with a number of Universities. We could affiliate with these universities for our officers

It is strongly advocated that the issue of PME in the Army needs to be given a fresh look and detailed modalities evolved to cover officers till the rank of Colonel. It may not be easy to ratify such bold changes within the military hierarchy, but ARTRAC needs to convince them and find a way to incorporate the changes as considered appropriate by them. The PME modules for officers till 14/15 years of service should be common for all officers and thereafter career profile specific education courses be undertaken to include non-empanelled officers for their gainful employment in close consultation with MS Branch. It is imperative for the Army to seek ways and means which are doable and inclusive within the service rather than seek external dependency with large financial implications.

CERTIFICATE

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