

AN EMPIRICAL SURVEY ON BASIC MILITARY TRAINING IN SLOVENIAN ARMED FORCES

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Before employment in the Slovenian Armed Forces, all candidates have to finish basic military training. The empirical survey, done in 2011 on a group of military candidates in a Slovenian Training Center, checked the motivation, level of skills and education, attitudes of leaders, military identity, prestige and social support of these candidates. The results confirmed the skills' and fighters' orientation of Slovenian soldiers, but surprised with the paleomodern motivators for military job.

Key words: *basic military training, Slovenian Armed Forces, training center, unit cohesion, motivational factors, leadership, military reforms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Basic military training in Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) is an obligation for all candidates for employment in that institution. As in other military organizations also in the Slovenian one there is a need for freshmen's transition into military professionals. The 3-month program of basic military training in Slovenia was established after the suspension of conscription in 2003, and was carried out by a team of instructors and officers in a training center that belonged to the Command of Doctrine, Development, Education, and Training. In a process of transformation of SAF in last few years the training center was reorganized in the sense that all the activities and command are executed by non-commissioned officers. Since the Command of Doctrine, Development, Education, and Training has also been transformed (back) to the Center of Military Schools, the Training Center is now part of the Center of Military Schools.

The Training Center is located in Vipava, in the Western part of Slovenia, in upper part of Vipava Valley. This is

not meaningless. Namely, in that part of Slovenia there are difficult climate conditions – strong wind called burja, cold and windy winters, hot and dry summers. The climate definitely influences the basic military training of the military candidates. The center is comprised of some relatively old military barracks, where the command, classrooms and dormitory are located, as well as a library and a chapel. There are also some storage buildings, the kitchen and dining room, a small military museum, some training facilities (assault course, simulators, etc.), and a brand new gymnasium. Close to the center there are small firing ranges, a new modern military shooting range and also terrains for moderate mountaineering. The Training Center has been awarded several times for its clean and tidy surroundings.

As stated on the official recruitment webpage of SAF [1], the basic tasks of the Training Center are:

- executing the programs of basic military training of candidates for professional soldiers, soldiers on volunteer military service, and military reservists;
- executing the programs of military

training for acquiring military occupational specialty;

- participation in executing specialist parts of training of non-commissioned officers, officers and warrant officers;
- executing military practice for the students of the military modules at faculties.

The program of basic military training has been slightly changed several times. The main changes of the program are usually connected to its arrangement – from a unique one to the gradual program with more phases. Namely, there are several groups of candidates that have to finish the basic military training: candidates for private soldiers, candidates for warrant officers, candidates for officers, and also students of particular study programs, the military reservists and the soldiers on volunteer military service. The professional needs of those groups are, of course, different. So, the first training phase is usually the same for all candidates, but the next phases are adjusted to their future military role.

Today's program aims at the candidates who:

- master basic military knowledge and skills,
- develop working habits,
- establish a high level of patriotism and other values,
- develop a proper attitude to the military job and military organization,
- develop loyalty to the SAF and the Slovenian state,
- achieve a proper psycho-physical preparedness for military service,
- develop military discipline and self-discipline, and
- develop a sense of belonging to the military collective (postanivojak.si).

Following these aims, it can be concluded that the basic military training in SAF has its own framework. Despite that, the basic military documents – the military doctrine, for example – speak about military training and education as a complete and uniform process [2].

It is defined as a process of acquiring and developing special and functional military knowledge, skills and habits for executing the tasks of military defense and other tasks of SAF [3]. In debates of experts inside and outside of the military it was exposed several times that the process of military education and training should be partly split. The personnel at the lower organizational levels should deal mostly with training and those at the higher mostly with education. However, the middle levels – the cadets of School for Officers, for example - should be trained in some skills and educated in military and other needed knowledge. Anyway it should be stressed that performing military job demands skills and knowledge of different kind at all organizational and hierarchical levels.

Regarding the skills and knowledge of soldiers that finished the basic military training in the training center, there were a lot of dilemmas in the past. In the units the military leaders were not satisfied with the new soldiers that had just come from the training center. It can be concluded that in SAF the basic standards of military performance are not viewed similarly by unit commandants and by the training center. The precise instructions and also a rotation of instructors between the units and the Training Center could help overcome the differences in procedures and performance.

Lately, the Training Center has also had a problem with the number of candidates. Due to the present budget crisis and also diminished interest of candidates to get employed in the military, the SAF limited its size to 7600 of permanent members (plus 1500 reservists) (as set out in the Mid-Term Defense Program 2013–2018) [4]. Consequently, the new candidates enter the military only to replace the military men and women that left the military for various reasons. In addition, there

will be only three terms of training for soldiers on volunteer military service in 2014 (postanivovjak.si) and the training for the students will stop. It seems that, according to the training needs, at the moment there are just few positions for instructors in the training center. However, it is the most important just to keep the Training Center operative.

The Faculty of Social Sciences of University of Ljubljana – mostly the people in the defense science area and research field – has established relatively good relations with the Training Center of SAF. Many students from that faculty finished the military basic training there. Unfortunately, in 2014 there will be the last military training for the students since the military module program has been canceled. Few years ago a small group of researchers at the Defense Research Center at the Faculty of Social Sciences got also an opportunity to make an empirical survey on basic military training in SAF. The article presents and comments the results of the survey.

2. METHODS AND SAMPLE

The survey on basic military training in SAF was originally part of a cross-country survey, initiated by some researchers of ERGOMAS (European Research Group on Military and Society). They composed a questionnaire and invited the researchers from some other countries to participate in the survey. The survey covers issues such as different expectations during the basic training (demands and obstacles, knowledge), reasons to apply, quality of training, training motivators, self-perception of candidates, leadership, team spirit, profession's prestige and social support.

In Slovenia [5] the questionnaire was acquired in June 2011 from Erik Hedlund [6]. Translating, adjusting the questionnaire, and getting the permission for the research from the Defense Ministry took several months -

from June till September 2011. The field research was done on the 21st October 2011 in the Training Center in Vipava. There was a group of 19 candidates (18 men and one woman) who were in the last week of the first phase of basic military training. The group of candidates, respectively respondents, was composed of two subgroups: candidates for private soldiers (13) and candidates for Officers School (6). Some of the respondents (16) had previously finished one of the alternative trainings (three months volunteer military service) and some of them were total newcomers (3). Thus, there were two groups of respondents in terms of the period they had spent on basic military training - two months (16 respondents with previous accomplished training) or six months (3 respondents with no formal military experiences).

The respondents finished at least three-year secondary school, one of the respondents finished postgraduate study. They came from different surroundings (urban and rural), they are either single (10 respondents or 52.6 per cent) or live with a partner (9 or 47.4 per cent). On average they were some less than 24 years old. They did not come from families with military tradition (14 respondents or 73.7 per cent had absolutely no military tradition).

The results of the survey show quite clearly the nature of basic military training in SAF and reflect some characteristics of our military. The results are commented based on the information gathered through other information sources on SAF and also through the observation of training at the training center by the author.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MOTIVATION THEORIES

At the beginning of our study we wanted to see how motivated the

candidates were for the military job, the reasons for the them to join the armed forces. Actually, the question asked concerned the reasons for starting basic military training, even though entering the basic military training is – in the case of the respondents – just the first stage of joining the military. Thus, the answers also helped us understand why the respondents decided for a military job.

The respondents were very motivated to join the military. On the question on motivation for military service, a mean score on a 1-5 scale was 4.47, the highest grade 5 was chosen by 11 respondents (57.9 per cent). But before we show the factors contributing to this high job motivation of the respondents, we need to briefly overview the theoretical anchoring of our study.

Theories of motivation (psychological, sociological, organizational, etc.) mention various motivational factors. These factors are categorized as material and nonmaterial [7], intrinsic and extrinsic [8], motives of independence and motives of cooperation and belonging [9], paleomodern, modern, and postmodern [10]. The authors also discuss the connections between the performance and motivational factors. In general, extrinsic motivators can have an immediate and powerful effect, but it will not necessarily last long. The intrinsic motivators are likely to have a deeper and long-term effect (because they are inherent in individuals and are not imposed from outside) [11].

Battistelli's typology is often used to explain the motivation of soldiers for participation in peacekeeping operations [12] [6] and it is useful also for explaining the motives (reasons) for joining the military in general.

When the reasons, respectively motivation, of our survey respondents for entering the military are analysed we can see that three of them earned

very high scores (**Table 1**) – “help needy people in the area of operation”, “contribute to the national security of Slovenia” and “contribute to world peace”. According to Battistelli's typology, all three reasons belong to the category of paleomodern motivation (to be useful to others and to strengthen the country's image at international level). The modern motives (money and other personal and career benefits) are placed on the second position. The results of the survey also show that the respondents do not think that the military is more profitable for them than private industry. But the regular income during recruit school motivates them anyway.

Table no. 1 Reasons for starting basic military training (answering on the scale 1 - 10)

	Mean
Have an adventure	4.58
Personal development	6.42
Travel to foreign countries and cultures	6.05
Friendship within your own contingent	5.21
An opportunity to earn money	6.16
Earn money to finance future studies	4.37
Comfortable lifestyle (no need to cook, wash clothes etc.)	2.00
Contribute to world peace	7.05
Contribute to the national security of Slovenia	8.68
Help needy people in the area of operation	9.11
Had nothing else to do and no better option	1.42

The second question interpreted in the article deals with the expectations of respondents regarding the expectations about the effects of basic military training. Among the challenges (Table 2), the physical one was the most expected by respondents. In fact, in the

SAF there is a lot of attention paid to the physical preparedness. The military has put the information on physical standards on web pages (postanivojak.si – Poklicni vojak) in order to remind the candidates to prepare in advance. Besides, the physical and psychological preparedness and resilience are usually interpreted together as one urgent condition for executing military job. The candidates are often advised to be physically fit to be also resilient to the stress.

Table no.2 What the respondents expect from recruit school (answering on the scale 1 - 6)

	Mean
Training from which I benefit personally	4.63
Physical challenges	5.21
High psychological stress	3.42
A good team spirit	4.37
That I become more resistant to stress	4.05
That I become more self-disciplined	4.58
That I benefit from military training in civilian life	3.84
That my character will be strengthened by military service	4.37

The next topic is the military training itself – what the respondents think about it and what it enables. The results show that the majority of respondents are content with their current situation at the training center and also with the quality of training in general. Particularly, the contribution to the military knowledge and skills was well evaluated, with the exception of knowledge of other nations' cultures. Contrary to some other surveys [13], the respondents to this survey said that their motivation in the military had not declined since starting recruit school (**Table 3**).

Table no. 3 Respondents' opinions on their basic military training (agreement with the statement on the scale 1 – 6)

	Mean
I'm content with my current situation at the recruit school	4.63
I'm content with the quality of the training at the recruit school	4.74
There is mutual respect for one another in our platoon	3.47
My motivation in the military has declined since starting recruit school	2.32
Basic military training has increased my general military knowledge	5.47
Basic military training has increased my specific position skills	5.11
Basic military training has increased my knowledge of other nations' cultures	2.42
Basic military training has increased my social skills	3.68
Basic military training has been very relevant for peacekeeping operations	3.74
Basic military training has been very relevant for war fighting operations	3.79
Basic military training has been of very high quality	4.53

If we further consider the motivation for the training we can see that the platoon leader and the exciting training were the best motivators for the respondents. Also, support of parents, other soldiers and others in the social environment were important (Table 4). As already mentioned, the money was not a salient motivator of the respondents, however, it was important, too. The respondents did not find the money (salary) during the basic training as the motivational factor for training. The military is regarded as a regular job by many soldiers, but - especially with the cuts of the defense budget in last few years – the salary itself does not motivate them for work due to cuts of almost all allowances [14].

Table no. 4 Training motivators (answers on the scale 1 – 6)

	Mean
Squad leader	4.05
Platoon leader	4.84
Company commander	3.95
Battalion/regiment commander	3.18
Team spirit	3.95
Support from my environment	4.37
Support from my parents	4.26
Money (remuneration during service)	2.84
Tradition	3.16
Personal benefit in civilian life	2.84
Exciting training	4.63
Colleagues	4.32

As we can see in Table 4, the team spirit is ranged in the middle of the scale of motivators. Team spirit and cohesion are two of the most stressed characteristics of the military units. They contribute to better performance and less stress among soldiers in the unit. In the history of military training there were several attempts to form very cohesive military units like Operation Gyroscope in the 1950s [15], project COHORT in the 1980s [16], etc. The main approach to achieve this goal was common training of the unit from the beginning and also common deployment. Unfortunately, the attempts of “cohort system” were usually unsuccessful due to several factors, often connected to the lack of good leaders or just because the military in general did not support them enough [16]. The alternative more often used is an individual replacement system, where the soldiers are initially trained in the training center and then allocated to the units according to the personnel needs. SAF uses the individual replacement system for training and also for some deployments. However, usually the stabilized units are deployed to the missions. The results of

the survey in Table 5 show that the cadets at the basic military training were aware of the importance of the good team spirit and are willing to help comrades, and they participate in group work. On the other hand, many respondents expressed also some individualism. First, the majority of them (52.6 per cent) decided for themselves about the military career in the future. Second, many of the respondents were not willing to put the group’s needs before their own.

Table no. 5 Leaning toward cohesion (agreement with the statement on the scale 1 – 6)

	Mean
I follow military rules and regulations even if I’m not observed	5.26
I inform myself about the weekly program	3.84
I will help a colleague with a task that is too hard for him	5.47
I actively participate in group work	5.21
I am very self-disciplined and do things correctly even if I’m not monitored	5.05

Regarding the cohesion it should be mentioned that there are several kinds or levels of cohesion. We can differentiate among horizontal (bonding of people on the same hierarchical level), vertical (bonding of superiors and subordinates), organizational (people share the goals, values and norms of the organization) and societal cohesion (people share the goals, values and norms of the society). Even though the basic military training in SAF is not designed to establish a cohesive unit of candidates, it should contribute to the sense of belonging to the comrades, unit and organization. As established above, the attitude of respondents to the comrades (colleagues) and the unit is twofold. The attitude toward the superiors and the organization is measured with the question on executing the tasks and following rules without supervision. Namely, the individual who is bonded

to the organization is self-disciplined and needs less supervision [17]. The respondents in our survey showed a substantial level of organizational cohesion due to the strong agreement with the statements on following the rules and self-discipline (Table 5).

The work, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of leaders is an important factor of successful training. The respondents strongly agreed with the statement that good superiors can motivate recruits to pursue a military career (mean score is 5.37 on a 6-point scale). The respondents were also quite satisfied with the leaders' attitudes toward candidates. They mostly agreed with the statement that in general the superiors treated them fairly and respectfully (mean score is 5.00 on the 6-point scale).

The survey also contains a question about the social prestige of the military and a military career, and the question on perception of soldiers. The respondents evaluated the public prestige of the military quite differently. The mean scores are relatively high (Table 6) but the individual evaluations ranged from 1 to 6 on a 6-point scale. Some doubts of military personnel on public prestige of SAF can be understood due to some criticism over our defense policy and some troubles regarding supply of military equipment and weapons. There was also a public initiative to abolish (transform, in fact) SAF [18]. However, the public opinion surveys show relatively good public perception of SAF. In the last few years, the military in Slovenia is ranking high especially in public trust measurements, particularly when compared to the results of other social institutions included in the same measurements. Generally, it seems that the SAF enjoys a stable and relatively good reputation and trust among Slovenian population. In the past, however, there have been some oscillations regarding public trust

in the military in Slovenia. They were more or less connected either to the signs of the politicization of the military, or some other political process (such as non-invitation of Slovenia to NATO in 1997) or to the reluctance of people to serve in the military. Nevertheless, after 2003 trust in the SAF has stabilized at a relatively high level [19].

Table no. 6 Prestige (agreement with the statement on the scale 1 – 6)

	Mean
A cadre position in the military is still highly respected by society	4.32
I think that my environment will support a military career	4.79
The high prestige of an officer motivates me to also pursue a military career	3.84
Officers are still held in high regard by society	3.95

The question concerning the perception of soldiers by their own country answered by the respondents is an interesting and a unique one. Evaluation of oneself and of one's own group is always a difficult task. In the question there were thirteen components (see Table 7) which had to be evaluated by the respondents on a ten-point scale. The mean scores range between 5.79 ("level of civilian professional skill") and 7.05 ("level of military skill" and "soldiers follow rules and policies") that is neither high, nor low. The mean scores show that Slovenian soldiers are relatively good in military skills, that they are disciplined and also physically fit. Some other important components (education, fairness, morals and ethics) are evaluated lower. We can also see that the respondents evaluated the components very differently. Almost all grades of the scale were used at every component to describe the Slovenian soldiers. Consequently the Standard

Deviations of mean scores are very high - ranging from 1.853 ("physical ability/level of fitness") to 2.692 ("level of fairness"). It means that the respondents had very different experiences with the military, and maybe it also suggests that there are no common views about the Slovenian military (its social and professional characteristics) among its members. When the results are crossed with the military status (candidates for privates or candidates for officers) it turns out that the candidates for privates evaluated the components higher than candidates for officers (due to the small samples only the difference in answers for the components "level of education" and "level of civilian professional skill" are significant). According to that we could presume that the officers of SAF are more pessimistic about the SAF than ordinary soldiers. However, this thesis is statistically not proven by the present survey and should be researched on bigger samples.

Table no. 7 Perception of soldiers of own country (evaluation on the scale 1 - 10)

	Mean
Motivation	6.37
Ambition	6.05
Level of education	5.83
Level of civilian professional skill	5.79
Level of military skill	7.05
Reliability	6.37
Morals and ethics	6.00
Social skills	6.00
Level of fairness	5.95
Level of firmness	6.11
Level of friendliness	6.42
Physical ability/level of fitness	6.89
Soldiers follow rules and policies	7.05

At the end we shall add some discussion about one of the important

issues in today's defense policies. What is a "nature" of a modern soldier? Is he/she a fighter, peacekeeper or humanitarian? After the beginning of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of this century the armed forces of participating states have started to call for stronger warrior ethos of their armed forces [20] and to train the soldiers in that manner. Slovenia is no exception. High military officers have often stated that SAF would develop into military with fighter's character [21]. Actually, the analysis of military tasks in last two decades (after the Cold War) shows that most of the armed forces should develop the capabilities and competences to execute the tasks of the whole spectrum of tasks in military and peace operations and also to easily transform from one role to another.

The present survey contains a question as to how the respondents see themselves as military persons. The results show that the war fighter was a prevailing image (mean score on a ten-point scale is 7.11). A peacekeeper got a mean score 6.37 and an aid worker 5.00. The respondents were not unique in answering. The answers ranged from 1 to 10, the Standard Deviations are around 2.8. We can see again, that the self-perceptions are not common. However, the fighter's character of the training is evident from that particular question as well as from questions on skills and knowledge of candidates.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the military training, SAF of independent Republic of Slovenia had two crucial points in its (only) some more than twenty years of history: developing training programs for conscripts after 1991, and basic military training programs for professional soldiers after 2003. Of course, this is

a simplification of the evolution of the SAF, however it stresses that the training programs must be also developed and transformed in accordance with circumstances (social conditions and needs etc.). Particularly after accepting the volunteer (professional) manning of the SAF, the training and education of military men and women has been in constant crisis and consequently under reforms. The survey on basic military training that was done in 2011 on a sample of one group of 19 candidates for privates and officers in a Training Center of SAF in Vipava actually did not have a goal to resolve any of the most difficult problems of training and education of SAF. The intention was just to find out which are the prevailing characteristics of the basic military training and warn about the troubles, if there are any.

The survey showed that the candidates for the military job are prepared to contribute to the national and international security goals (paleomodern attitudes), that they mostly see themselves as war fighters, that the money cannot be a motivational factor for the employment in the military, that the physical challenge is the most salient one, that the unit cohesion or corporatism is not obvious (individualism is also present), that leadership is correct, etc. It is good that the level of military skills is evaluated high, but we should be concerned about other aspects of education, and also ethics. In this respect, it is worth concluding that regardless the future tasks of the armed forces education is an important pillar in the development of a professional defense force.

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