

"DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF PLATOON COMMANDERS IN PEACETIME OR WARTIME CONDITIONS"

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INTRODUCTION

"Wars are lead and won by people, not machines. The human dimension in war operations, will from now on be the factor that decides the victor... In fragmental battles lead today:

- decisive, experienced, inventive and adaptive command,
- capable daring soldiers,
- training and unity amongst army groups is required.

Today, war is lead by smaller formations, dispersed across the battle-field hence a greater burden is placed on the lower ranking officers and their commanders for quality and succes (Bartone & Kirkland, 1991).

For a long time the question "What makes a good commander?" has been asked. Today questions ask: a good commander is needed, but in what conditions and in what situations (Hunt & Phillips, 1991)?

In 1959 Mann (according to Pennington, 1997) conducted numerous reasearch in which he was searching for individual relationships between personality and leadership. He mentioned that there are seven characteristics to being a leader:

- a higher level of intelligence,
- a higher level of self-confidence
- an ability to adapt to new situations
- dominance
- extrovertedness
- sensitivity towards the wants and view-points of others
- and a lower level of conservatism.

Reasearch conducted during the War in The Republic of Croatia (Hajnc & associates, 1994) showed that from the aspects of Croatian Army officers and non-commissioned officers, the most important characteristics are courage, military skills and managing skills.

In short, it is considered that a successful commander in wartime conditions, is one who is able to give clear and precise commands, one that demonstrates concern, and sets a good example for his military group. A successfull commander in peacetime conditions, displays job perseverance, restores clear communication and leaves a good impression amongst the subordinates in his field.

To date, many world experiences regarding contemporary wars, speak of the commanders conduct in smaller formations (platoons) as being a vital factor in military readiness. In newly created conditions, for the army to survive and be victorious, it needs to form itself into smaller military groups and dispersed across the battle-field. The soldiers need to be trained and independant in bringing forth decisions, whereas the commanders of the smaller military groups have to complete their duties without obtaining orders from army intelligence. From this it is evident that modern battles are most often battles of smaller dimensions. These types of battles were most frequent during the Homeland War in Croatia.

This study was focused on platoon commanders, and for several reasons:

- it is platoon commanders who had crucial role in the Homeland War, as their units operated as self-standing units,
- in peacetime, platoon commanders make an important factor of development and reorganisation of the Croatian military,
- platoons constitute primary groups in the military, where the cohesion is very important, and the commanders have the influence on soldiers' commitment to the primary group, and thereby on the overall motivation and performance of the platoon.

PROBLEMS AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to:

1. establish the platoon commander's characteristics perceived as desirable by the troops,
2. establish whether the characteristics desirable in wartime are equally welcome in peacetime,
3. ascertain the extent to which the non-dependent variables (the duty/rank and combat experience) affect the perception of desirable commanders of platoons in peacetime and wartime respectively.

METODOLOGY

1. Study subjects

Study subjects were members of a professional (guard) brigade of the Croatian Army (N=160). Based on the non-dependent variables (the duty exercised/rank and war experience), four groups of studies were extracted:

1. soldiers with no combat experience (N=40),
2. soldiers and non-commissioned officers with combat experience (N=40),
3. platoon commanders (N=40),
4. officers superior to platoon commanders (N=40).

2. Measureable instruments

The study questionnaire titled *POZ* was specifically tailored this research. The questionnaire contained two identical lists of the twelve selected characteristics of platoon commanders (in all common combination a total of 66 pairs according to the lists). The characteristics are as follows: open, careful, psychologically stable, honest, strict, combant, resourceful, good organiser, optimistic, dominant, professional and human.

The task of the surveyed pairs was to choose which characteristics were advantageous compared to others.

In the first category, surveyed pairs chose those characteristics that they considered to be desirable regarding the duties of a platoon commander in peacetime conditions, whilst the other pairs chose desirable platoon commander's characteristics in wartime conditions.

In conclusion, general information about the pairs surveyed were linked to non-dependent variables of this study, from the time they were serving and performing duties/rank in the Croatian Army.

3. Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted in groups according to arrangements agreed upon by commanders. No time limits were set for the completion of the survey. On average it took 15 minutes to complete the survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical processing of results were conducted in the following manner:

- For each characteristic, the average number of selected responses were calculated;
- The average number of selected desirable characteristics by the pairs, was the basis for establishing a rank of desirability during peacetime and wartime conditions;
- No.1 being the most desirable characteristic and No.12 being the least desirable characteristic;
- The importance of links between peacetime and wartime conditions regarding the desirable characteristics of a platoon commander were tested.

We tested the importance of differences between peacetime and wartime conditions in relation to the individual desirable characteristics of a platoon commander. (Independently of the characteristics' ranking) and how they were perceived by those surveyed.

We compared the surveyed groups in relation to the differences in perceptions regarding the desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions, in order to be able to determine the possible impact of non-dependant variables (combat experience, rank/duties performed, due to the perception of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander).

On the basis of the average number of selected desirable characteristics by the pairs surveyed, a rank of desirability during peacetime and wartime conditions was created (number 1 being the most desirable characteristic to number 12 being the least desirable characteristic) thus testing the importance of links between peacetime and wartime conditions in relation to the desirable characteristics of a platoon commander.

Linked to the first aim of the study, the platoon commander needs to be a good organiser, professional, psychologically stable, resourceful and independent of the conditions whilst competing his tasks (according to evaluations of those surveyed).

Linked to the second aim of the study, according to the evaluation of all surveyed (table 1.) it is desirable that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions is foremost professional, a good organiser and honest. In wartime conditions the commander needs to be a good organiser, psychologically stable and professional. Coefficient rank-correlation totals $\rho=0.59$ and it is statistically significant with a 5% risk. Collected coefficient rank-correlation show that overall, pairs surveyed did not consider there to be a big difference between the desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions.

Table 1. Ranks of desirable platoon commander's characteristics in peactime and wartime conditions, as perceived by those belonging to a Guard brigade

CHARACTERISTIC	RANK	
	PEACETIME CONDITIONS	WARTIME CONDITIONS
OPEN	6.	9.
CAREFUL	7.	6.
PSYCHOLOGICALLY STABLE	5.	2.
HONEST	3.	7.
STRICT	11.	12.
COMBANANT	12.	4.
RESOURCEFUL	4.	5.
A GOOD ORGANISER	2.	1.
OPTIMISTICAL	10.	10.
DOMINANT	9.	8.
PROFESSIONAL	1.	3.
HUMAN	8.	11.

Independent of the rank of individual characteristics, we endeavoured to established if there exists a difference between the preceptions of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peactime and those in wartime, amongst all surveyed. According to results obtained, a platoon commander in peactime conditions as compared to wartime conditions needs to be open, professional and human. In wartime conditions, in comparision to peactime conditions, he needs to be more careful, combatant and dominant.

One of the aims of our study was to establish to what extent non-dependent variables (duties performed/rank and combat experience) influence the perception of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peactime and wartime conditions.

Table 2 - Ranks of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions, perceived by soldiers without combat experience

CHARACTERISTIC	RANK	
	PEACETIME CONDITIONS	WARTIME CONDITIONS
OPEN	4.	10.
CAREFUL	10.	6.
PSYCHOLOGICALLY STABLE	5.	3.
HONEST	1.	7.
STRICT	12.	12.
COMBANANT	11.	1.
RESOURCEFUL	7.	5.
A GOOD ORGANISER	3.	2.
OPTIMISTICAL	9.	9.
DOMINANT	6.	8.
PROFESSIONAL	2.	4.
HUMAN	8.	11.

*coefficient rank-correlation totals $\rho=0.25$ and is not statistically significant with a 5% risk

Table 3- Ranks of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions, perceived by soldiers and non-commissioned officers with combat experience

CHARACTERISTIC	RANK	
	PEACETIME CONDITIONS	WARTIME CONDITIONS
OPEN	3.5.	9.
CAREFUL	8.	7.
PSYCHOLOGICALLY STABLE	5.	3.5.
HONEST	1.	6.
STRICT	11.	12.
COMBANANT	12.	3.5.
RESOURCEFUL	6.	5.
A GOOD ORGANISER	3.5.	2.
OPTIMISTICAL	9.	10.
DOMINANT	10.	8.
PROFESSIONAL	2.	1.
HUMAN	7.	11.

* coefficient rank-correlation totals $\rho=0.45$ and is not statistically significant with a 5% risk

Table 4- Ranks of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peactime and wartime conditions, as perceived by platoon commanders

CHARACTERISTIC	RANK	
	PEACETIME CONDITIONS	WARTIME CONDITIONS
OPEN	6.	12.
CAREFUL	9.	6.
PSYCHOLOGICALLY STABLE	3.	1.
HONEST	4.	7.5.
STRICT	10.	11.
COMBANANT	12.	5.
RESOURCEFUL	5.	3.5.
A GOOD ORGANISER	2.	2.
OPTIMISTICAL	11.	9.
DOMINANT	7.	7.5.
PROFESSIONAL	1.	3.5.
HUMAN	7.	10.

*coefficient rank-correlation totals $\rho = 0.55$ and is not statistically significant with a 5% risk

Table 5 -Ranks of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peactime and wartime conditions, as perceived by officers superior to platoon commanders

CHARACTERISTIC	RANK	
	PEACETIME CONDITIONS	WARTIME CONDITIONS
OPEN	6.	9.5.
CAREFUL	8.	7.
PSYCHOLOGICALLY STABLE	5.	1.
HONEST	3.	8.
STRICT	10.	9.5.
COMBANANT	12.	5.
RESOURCEFUL	4.	2.
A GOOD ORGANISER	2.	3.
OPTIMISTICAL	11.	11.
DOMINANT	7.	6.
PROFESSIONAL	1.	4.
HUMAN	9.	12.

* coefficient rank-correlation totals $\rho = 0.55$ and is not statistically significant with a 5% risk

As we compare the collected coefficient rank-correlation, we can observe that all coefficient rank-correlation have a positive result and are not statistically significant with a 5% risk.

Likewise we can observe that combat experience and higher rank reduces the differences in perception of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions.

We are able to observe that combat experience and a higher rank increase coefficient rank-correlation and that combat experience and a higher rank lessen the difference between perceptions of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions.

In what ways combat experience impacts on the differences between perceptions of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions, were examined. We continued to compare results between soldiers without combat experience to results from soldiers and non-commissioned officers with combat experience. (Hence, all lower ranking platoon leaders) by using this method we endeavoured, to obtain a non-independent variable of "duties performed" under control. Soldiers without combat experience, considered that the platoon commander in peacetime conditions, in comparison to wartime conditions, needed to be more dominant, whereas soldiers and non-commissioned officers with combat experience, considered that a platoon commander in wartime conditions needed to be more professional. Both groups considered all other individual characteristics to be equally desirable in peacetime and wartime conditions.

In what ways duties performed/rank impacts on the differences between perceptions of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime and wartime conditions, were examined. We continued to compare results of soldiers and non-commissioned officers, platoon commanders, and officers superior to platoon commanders.

Soldiers and non-commissioned officers believe that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions as compared to a platoon commander in wartime conditions needs to be open, careful and honest. Whilst platoon commanders consider that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions as compared to wartime conditions, needed to be psychologically stable, a good organiser and a professional. Both consider all other characteristics equally desirable in peacetime conditions. In contrast, during wartime as compared to peacetime conditions, soldiers and non-commissioned officers considered that a platoon commander needed to be open to a greater extent, whereas platoon commanders considered that a commander in wartime conditions needed to be psychologically stable, resourceful and professional. All other characteristics were equally desirable in wartime conditions according to those surveyed.

On comparing results of platoon commanders and officers superior to platoon commanders, we concluded that platoon commanders, in comparison to officers superior to platoon commanders, consider that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions needed to be psychologically stable, whilst other characteristics were equally desirable in peacetime and wartime conditions according to both.

In concluding the study we compared the results of soldiers and non-commissioned officers, and officers superior to platoon commanders. Soldiers and non-commissioned officers, in comparison to officers superior to platoon commanders, considered that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions needed to be open and careful, whilst officers superior to platoon commanders considered that a platoon commander in peacetime conditions needed to be a good organiser and professional. In relation to other characteristics, there are no differences between the perceptions of desirable characteristics of a platoon commander in peacetime conditions amongst these two groups. In contrast, during wartime conditions, soldiers and non-commissioned officers, in comparison to officers superior to platoon commanders, believe that a platoon commander needs to be open. Officers superior to platoon

commanders believe that a platoon commander in wartime conditions needs to be resourceful and dominant. Differences in perceptions concerning other desirable characteristics of platoon commanders in wartime conditions, were not evident amongst the two groups.

By the end of the study we were able to conclude that duties performed/rank by those with combat experience indicated lesser differences between the groups perceptions in relation to the desirable characteristics of a platoon commander, in wartime and peacetime conditions.

CONCLUSION FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. In general, platoon commanders should above all, regardless of the situation, have good managing skills, military skills, psychological stability and resourcefulness.

2. The desirable characteristics of platoon commanders in wartime are good managing skills, psychological stability and military skills, whereas in peacetime the required military skills, followed by managing skills and honesty, are preferred.

3. It was found that the higher ranking positioned and the more war-experienced subject indicated lesser differences in desired characteristics of platoon commanders in wartime versus peacetime, and greater emphasis is on duties performed/rank.

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