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NCO Training in Modern Warfare: Challenges and Prospects

Resume. This research examines the current state of non-commissioned officer (NCO) training in the context of modern warfare. It identifies key challenges and issues related to NCO preparation and propose approaches to improve the effectiveness of NCO training in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Keywords: non-commissioned officer (NCO); Ukrainian Armed Forces, military training; leadership development, professional development.

Problem statement. “As General George Patton famously said, The Army goes as the NCO go”. This is absolutely true. NCOs, as frontline leaders, are the driving force of any military unit [1]. In the context of the ongoing war with Russia, the role of NCOs in Ukraine has become even more critical. However, the existing system of NCOs training in Ukraine faces a number of challenges.

Modern warfare in Ukraine has presented the Armed Forces of Ukraine with unprecedented challenges. The rapid pace of change on the battlefield, the use of new weapons, and hybrid warfare tactics demands a high level of professionalism and adaptability from Ukrainian military personnel [2]. The issue of training non-commissioned officers, the backbone of any army, is particularly acute.

NCO is not merely a follower of orders but also a leader capable of making independent decisions in complex combat situations, motivating personnel, and ensuring mission accomplishment. However, the existing system of NCO training in Ukraine faces a number of challenges: a shortage of experienced instructors, insufficient funding, rapid changes in the nature of warfare, and inadequate attention to psychological preparation [3].

Regarding the shortage of experienced instructors, it should be noted that losses among experienced military personnel with many years of combat experience have led to a severe lack of instructors capable of passing on their knowledge and skills to the younger generation. Limited resources do not allow for adequate material and technical equipment of educational institutions, the purchase of modern trainers and simulators, or the necessary repairs. The tactics of warfare are constantly changing, new types of weapons are appearing, which requires constant updating of training programs and retraining of NCOs [4]. Psychological resilience, the ability to work under stress and make decisions under pressure are no

less important qualities for a modern NCO than military skills [5].

To address these challenges, a range of measures must be taken, including:

Rapid retraining and up skilling: Developing intensive retraining programs for NCOs that take into account modern challenges.

Involving veterans: Actively engaging experienced combat veterans to share their knowledge and skills with the younger generation.

Modernizing the training base: Equipping educational institutions with modern trainers, simulators, and other training tools.

Expanding international cooperation: Seeking experience from partner countries, participating in joint training exercises, and exchanging best practices [6].

Improving social benefits for NCOs: Enhancing material support, living conditions, and other social benefits to attract and retain qualified specialists.

By investing in NCO training, we are investing in the future of our army and the security of our state.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Historical context of NCO training in Ukraine. Cossacks, as a military-political organization, always paid great attention to the training of their personnel. The starshyna (senior Cossack), as a layer of experienced Cossacks, played a key role in the functioning of Cossack forces. The starshyna performed a wide range of functions: from military command to administrative management. They were not only warriors but also judges, diplomats, and estate managers [7]. The training of the starshyna took place primarily during combat and daily service. Young Cossacks learned from more experienced comrades, mastering military affairs, survival skills, and leadership qualities. There was no systematic training in the modern sense, but there was a clear system of passing on experience from generation to generation [7]. The Cossack

starshyna was distinguished by a high level of self-organization, responsibility, and dedication to their cause. They were people who had a deep understanding of military affairs and could make independent decisions in difficult situations [7].

The Soviet period was characterized by mass training and ideological indoctrination. In the Soviet Army, the NCO training system was built on a rigidly centralized principle. The main goal was to train a large number of NCOs for mass armies. NCO training was accompanied by powerful ideological indoctrination aimed at fostering loyalty to the Soviet regime. Significant attention was paid to the technical knowledge necessary for servicing various military equipment [8].

The Soviet NCO training system had a significant impact on the Ukrainian army after World War II. Many of the methods and approaches developed in the Soviet Union were borrowed and adapted to Ukrainian conditions.

Ukraine's independence marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of its armed forces, including the NCO training system. In the early years of independence, the Ukrainian army experienced a deep crisis, which negatively affected the NCO training system. Subsequently, various reforms were developed and implemented aimed at modernizing the armed forces and bringing them closer to NATO standards [5].

The Russian aggression in 2014 became a catalyst for further changes in the NCO training system. There was an acute need for qualified specialists capable of conducting combat operations in modern conditions.

The modern NCO training system in Ukraine is focused on developing leadership qualities, giving NCOs more independence in decision-making, and using modern technologies in the training process [6].

The main trends in development include: decentralization, particularly the transition from a centralized training system to a more flexible one that takes into account the specifics of different branches of the military; an individual approach, with an emphasis on the individual characteristics of each NCO and the development of personalized training plans; the use of modern technologies, such as the widespread use of simulators, trainers, and other interactive training tools; and integration with NATO standards, directly adapting training programs to Alliance standards.

Historical experience shows that the role of the NCO has always been important for the effectiveness of any army. The modern Ukrainian

army is actively working to improve the NCO training system to meet the challenges of today.

The goal of the article is to analyze the challenges and prospects of NCO training in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the conditions of modern warfare.

Core Material. Contemporary NCO training curricula in Ukraine have undergone substantial revisions to enhance practical skills and align with the demands of modern warfare. The foundational military training encompasses a broad spectrum of disciplines, including tactics, marksmanship, engineering, and medical care, with a particular emphasis on field exercises. Specialized training is tailored to specific military occupational specialties such as infantry, artillery, and armored units, focusing on weapon systems, tactical employment, and personnel management. Leadership development, decision-making under pressure, and effective unit management are pivotal components of the curriculum. Proficiency in foreign languages, notably English, is increasingly emphasized to facilitate international cooperation and participation in multinational exercises.

A tiered network of educational institutions, including military institutes, training centers, and military academies, has been established to provide NCO training. These institutions are continually evolving to ensure the highest quality of education.

Comprehensive evaluation systems, incorporating theoretical examinations, practical assessments, and certification processes, are employed to gauge NCO proficiency. Moreover, the integration of modern technologies such as simulators, trainers, and computer-based testing has enhanced the objectivity and efficiency of assessments.

Integration into NATO is one of the priorities of Ukraine's defense policy. Therefore, great attention is paid to the internationalization of NCO training.

In particular, cooperation with foreign partners is a crucial element. Ukrainian NCOs participate in joint exercises with militaries of other countries, exchange experiences, and adopt best practices. The implementation of NATO standards is also a priority. Training programs and methodologies are adapted to NATO standards. The use of Western weaponry is another important aspect. NCOs are trained to work with Western weapons and military equipment.

The modern NCO training system in Ukraine is actively developing, aimed at improving the professional level of NCOs and

adapting them to the requirements of modern combat. However, to fully meet NATO standards, a number of challenges still need to be addressed, including those related to financing, logistical support, and the development of the infrastructure of educational institutions.

One of the priority areas of development is the expansion of the network of training centers for NCOs. This will allow: increasing the number of trained specialists, in particular, meeting the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine for qualified NCOs. It will also make it possible to reduce training time, in particular, thanks to an increase in the number of training centers, it will be possible to train a larger number of NCOs simultaneously. Another advantage is the ability to bring training closer to the deployment locations of units, which will reduce transportation costs for personnel and ensure greater continuity of the training process.

In parallel with the expansion of the network, it is necessary to improve the equipment of training centers with modern simulators, trainers, and other training tools. This will allow creating more realistic conditions for training NCOs and increasing the effectiveness of training.

The creation of a unified information system for managing NCO training. The introduction of a unified information system will allow: automating management processes, in particular, collecting, processing, and analyzing large amounts of data on NCO training. It will also improve training planning, in particular, it will allow developing individual training plans for each NCO, taking into account their specialty and level of training. It will also make it possible to track progress, directly monitor training results, and make timely adjustments to the training process. In addition, it will ensure transparency through open access to information about NCO training for the leadership of the Armed Forces.

Strengthening the role of NCOs in the management system. NCOs are a key link in the unit management system. To more effectively use their potential, it is necessary: to delegate authority, in particular, to give NCOs more independence in making decisions at the tactical level. It is also advisable to increase responsibility, in particular, to create conditions for NCOs to be responsible for the results of their work. The next step is to provide motivation. To do this, it is necessary to develop a motivation system that would stimulate NCOs for professional growth.

A crucial element is the involvement of partner countries' experience. Direct cooperation with NATO member countries will allow for the adoption of best practices, namely, studying the experience of other countries in training NCOs and adapting it to Ukrainian conditions. This will also allow for the standardization of training, that is, bringing the NCO training system in Ukraine closer to NATO standards. Equally important is the fact that this will contribute to integration into the Alliance, demonstrating Ukraine's readiness for cooperation within NATO.

Conclusions. An analysis of the current state and prospects for the development of the NCO training system in Ukraine allows us to draw the following conclusions: in recent years, the NCO training system in Ukraine has undergone significant changes aimed at adapting to the challenges of modern warfare and integrating with NATO standards. This is based on the following factors: modern training programs cover not only military training but also the development of leadership qualities, personnel management, and international cooperation; an active process of equipping educational institutions with modern trainers, simulators, and other training tools; broad cooperation with foreign partners, participation in joint exercises, and the implementation of NATO standards.

New approaches to NCO training allow for: increasing the level of professional training, forming a new generation of leaders, and increasing the combat readiness of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

However, for further development of the NCO training system, it is necessary to: continue to expand the network of training centers, which will allow for continuous training of NCOs and increase the accessibility of training; also, to introduce new technologies, in particular, actively use modern technologies to increase the effectiveness of training; next, to strengthen the role of NCOs in the management system, directly delegating more authority and responsibility to NCOs. Another aspect is to increase the social status of NCOs, in particular, to ensure decent service conditions and social guarantees.

Prospects for further research lie in the analysis of the effectiveness of new training methods, the study of the influence of psychological factors on the effectiveness of training, the development of a knowledge and skills assessment system, and the study of the experience of other countries.

In general, it can be stated that the NCO training system in Ukraine is in a stage of active

development. However, to achieve maximum efficiency, it is necessary to continue improving existing mechanisms and developing new approaches.

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Підготовка сержантського складу в умовах сучасної війни: виклики та перспективи

Анотація

Сучасна війна в Україні поставила перед Збройними Силами України безпрецедентні виклики. Швидкі темпи змін на полі бою, застосування нових видів озброєння та гібридні методи ведення війни вимагають від українських військових високого рівня професіоналізму та адаптивності. Особливо гостро стоїть питання підготовки сержантського складу, який є хребтом будь-якої армії.

Сержант – це не просто виконавець наказів, а й лідер, який здатний приймати самостійні рішення в складних бойових ситуаціях, мотивувати особовий склад та забезпечувати виконання завдань. Однак, існуюча система підготовки сержантів в Україні зіштовхнулася з низкою проблем: дефіцит досвідчених інструкторів, недостатнє фінансування, швидкі темпи змін, недостатня увага до психологічної підготовки.

Для вирішення цих проблем необхідно вжити комплекс заходів, зокрема, це швидке перенавчання та підвищення кваліфікації, тобто розробка інтенсивних програм перенавчання для сержантів з урахуванням сучасних викликів. Наступним елементом є залучення ветеранів. Активне залучення досвідчених ветеранів бойових дій для передачі своїх знань і навичок молодому поколінню. Ще одним важливим елементом є модернізація навчальної бази. Оснащення навчальних закладів сучасними тренажерами, симуляторами та іншими засобами навчання. Не менш важливим елементом є розширення міжнародного співробітництва, зокрема залучення досвіду країн-партнерів, участь у спільних навчаннях та обмін найкращими практиками.

Перспективи подальших досліджень полягають у аналізі ефективності нових методів навчання, дослідженні впливу психологічних факторів на ефективність підготовки, розвитку системи оцінювання знань та навичок, вивчення досвіду інших країн.

Загалом, можна констатувати, що система підготовки сержантів в Україні знаходиться в стадії активного розвитку. Однак, для досягнення максимальної ефективності необхідно продовжувати вдосконалювати існуючі механізми та розробляти нові підходи.

Ключові слова: сержантський склад; система підготовки сержантів; Збройні Сили України; засоби навчання; міжнародне співробітництво.