

## Where duty may lead us

### The 'second way' in the Royal Netherlands Army and Royal Netherlands Air Force

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#### Abstract:

*Since its foundation in 1828 the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (RNLMA) has been considered the principal tool for the officer education of the Royal Netherlands Army (RNLA) and (later) the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf). This position is not entirely justified. During almost the entire period of the existence of the military-academic officer education at Breda, there were officers who had not received their education there. The most important motivation for both Services was the shortage of qualified middle management. This situation proved to be more problematical for the RNLA than the RNLAf. From its the start as an independent Service the RNLAf has had a different organization than the RNLA and it has accepted the officers 'from the ranks' more easily.*

#### Introduction

This year the Royal Netherlands Military Academy (RNLMA) celebrates its 175th anniversary. Since 1828 it has educated the bulk of the officers for the RNLA, and since 1939 for the RNLAf. The bulk, for as long as the RNLMA has existed, there have been Army as well as Air Force officers who received their initial education elsewhere. They are known as officers of the 'second way' or 'B-category officers'. They were not, as their counterparts of the RNLMA, educated 'academically' and therefore they had to content themselves with a place in the shadows of the 'Lords of the Castle'.

Their eclipsed position is not entirely justified. They formed an indispensable element in the adequate functioning of both Services, but the institutions that educated them did not receive the appreciation they deserved. Surely, the anniversary of the RNLMA is a good occasion to put the officer education of the 'second way' into the limelight.

#### What is the 'second way'?

Military schools play an important role in the education of professional soldiers. First of all, a mandatory formal education in the application of legitimate force ensures an identical professional competence for all service personnel. The complexities of the job require some sort of education as a preparation for the future function. Besides, through his education, the soldier distinguishes himself from amateur or illegal users of vio-

lence. Moreover, because of their identical training, soldiers of the same rank are interchangeable. Secondly, military schools foster an esprit de corps, which the armed forces set great store by. Thus, a skillfully organized system of military education provides the foundation of two important conditions for the military professional: a sense of belonging to a group and the conviction that this group has unique qualities.

From 1789 onwards the professionalization of Dutch officers began to expand enormously. Before that time it had been impossible to receive a formal officer education. An officer was expected to learn his job in practice, which posed considerable problems for the artillery and engineers, the arms that were seen at the time as technical-scientific. At the close of the 18th century the officers of these arms possessed too little theoretical knowledge of technical subjects to be able to function adequately. To ensure a certain basic level of theoretical knowledge, the commanding officers of the technical arms decided to introduce officer exams in 1822. These exams generated a demand for formal education, prompting the commanders to establish schools in order to meet it. The traditional arms of the cavalry and infantry quickly followed suit.

This system, however, presented a disadvantage in that the great diversity in education of army officers led to different styles of leadership, dependent on the school they had attended. Needless to say, this did not improve the operational unity of the army as a whole. Consultations with the then monarch King William I, resulted in the establishment of the Royal Netherlands Military Academy, which opened its doors in 1828. One of its characteristics was a direct recruitment of aspirant officers, called cadets, from civilian society. Cadets of the technical as well as the traditional arms received a military-scientific education within a boarding school system. As the parents of the cadets had to pay a fee for board and lodging, a study at the RNLMA was only possible for the well-to-do. Through this system the army leadership attempted to professionalize the officer corps by making it homogeneous, highly educated and somewhat aristocratic. As will be shown in the following, the political and military policy makers have never been able to fully attain this objective.

Apart from aspirant officers coming straight from civilian society, following the initial military-academic education, there were also officers with a different background. After all, the army had the possibility to recruit from among the non-officer group. It was possible to offer an officer education to privates, corporals and NCOs with a number of years of experience in the army under their belts. The result was an education and background of officers that was fragmented still, with obvious consequences for the professional skills and esprit de corps.

### **Options available to the political and military leadership**

In retaining officers recruited from the ranks, political and military policymakers had to somehow justify their choice. Basically, they had four options, each with its own implications for the educational level, and they will be described in this section.

In the first place the system could provide the military leadership with the possibility of rewarding outstanding NCOs. The promotion to the rank of lieutenant would come at the end of the NCO's career, and a short course would suffice to give him the necessary know-how to function adequately. The incidental character of this promotion guaranteed a certain level of homogeneity within the officer corps, as the bulk of the officers had gone through the RNLMA.

Next, it could offer the possibility to make use of the expertise that only NCOs possessed. After all, they had practical leadership experience and by giving them functions in the next higher rank, this experience was exploited to the full. In practice, for the NCO this meant a promotion at a relatively advanced age. Acknowledging the practical value of NCOs, however, implied a more structured form of promotion than for reasons of reward. Thus, RNLMA-educated officers operated beside former NCOs in the subaltern officer ranks. The result was a breakdown of the homogeneity in the middle cadre of the armed forces.

Thirdly, the idea of promoting NCOs could be motivated by the need to fill vacancies in the officer ranks. In this situation the officer education from the ranks functioned as a buffer for a recruitment problem of the RNLMA. Dependent on the number of vacancies, NCOs could make the transfer to the officer ranks in relatively large numbers. If the shortage of officers extended to the ranks of field and general officers, former NCOs in the second half of the nineteenth century could, at least in theory, fulfil these functions, too. In such an eventuality extensive education was necessary in order to narrow the gap with the military-academic RNLMA education. In this manner the 'second way' could begin to compete with the RNLMA both in numbers and quality.

Finally, the possibility of reaching an officer rank could play a part in the recruitment of NCOs. A more or less guaranteed promotion to officer gave the NCO a prospect of more prestige, money and easier duties, than he would otherwise have. Thus, keeping open the 'second way' could play a role in recruiting and retaining unmarried volunteers for the army. In this option, too, relatively many NCOs would transfer to the officer corps, necessitating an extensive education in its turn.

The following sections will examine just how the leadership in actual fact justified the retention of the 'second way' of the Royal Netherlands Army and the Royal Netherlands Air Force, and how these decisions affected the educational level.

## **The 'second way' in the Royal Netherlands Army prior to World War II**

The history of the 'second way' in the land forces was closely linked to the personnel demands of the armed forces, and, by extension, the RNLMA. The nineteenth century army leadership had a demand for a highly educated, homogeneous and somewhat aristocratic officer corps and the RNLMA was the institute to provide it. The King and the army leadership, however, realized that they had to offer NCOs an attractive career prospect, as they might be lost for the organization if they got the feeling that their careers bogged down. It was because of this that in 1826, the year in which he approved the establishment of the RNLMA, King William I decided that outstanding NCOs could take an officer exam especially designed for the purpose. To be eligible for it they needed to have a number of years of service under their belts, during which they had demonstrated a certain degree of 'civilization', and an excellent execution of their task.

In doing so, King William I deliberately made the choice to allow different degrees of professionalism within his officer corps, as the NCOs took a different officer exam from the cadets. This immediately begged the question what difference would be desirable and acceptable. In 1835 the King and the army leadership decided that the difference between former cadets and former NCOs should not be too great, taking the officer exam at Breda as the norm.

This created a paradox that would occupy everyone's attention for years to come. If the 'second way' could not meet the RNLMA-norm, the officer corps would consist of officers with different backgrounds and intellectual levels. For many within the military this was clearly undesirable. If, on the other hand, the level of the 'second way' managed to approach, or even equal, that of the RNLMA, a different problem arose. If NCOs proved capable of passing such an exam, they showed they had enough capability to graduate from the RNLMA, which would make two separate educational institutes superfluous. This situation, then, would undermine the justification of an NCO-officer education.

The discussion acquired an extra dimension when the RNLMA became more academic in the 1860s. In 1869 it was formally linked to the civilian Hogere Burger School (h.b.s.), established in 1863. The underlying idea was that the teaching of general subjects could be left to the h.b.s., and the RNLMA could become a purely military vocational education. This, however, created great problems with the recruitment of potential officers, and they were even increased by the simultaneous expansion of the army. As lowering the entry requirements for the RNLMA was out of the question, the military policymakers took to establishing other officer courses. Initially, this led to a system of military education in which almost each individual arm provided its own short officer course. Most of them were only short-lived, except for the Hoofdcursus (Principal Course) at Kampen. Established in 1869, the Hoofdcursus educated aspirant

officers from the ranks of the infantry and the military administration. The military policymakers chose this arm because there was a great shortage of infantry officers (especially in the East Indies). As for the military administration, it was not considered to be academic, which made an expensive RNLMA education unnecessary.

The initial justification of the 'second way', a reward for outstanding NCOs, was pushed somewhat to the background with the emergence of the Hoofdcursus. As it was, its existence created the possibility to attain the rank of officer through a non-academic, and for the students cheap, route. In other words, it began to compete with the RNLMA, in numbers as well as quality. Although there were those within the government, parliament and the armed forces, who saw some advantages in the 'second way', its very existence went straight against the aspiration of creating a military-academic officer corps consisting of a social elite. However, abolishing the Hoofdcursus was out of the question, due to the shortage of officers, and that is why the policymakers decided to increase the level of the education at Kampen. The low student fees ensured a constant supply of candidates. This development continued for decades and led to a flourishing Hoofdcursus, producing almost half of the infantry and all military administration officers just after World War I. However, with regard to the content of the education as well as its organization, the Hoofdcursus had become very similar to the RNLMA in the early decades of 20th century. When in the twenties there was no demand anymore for two initial officer courses, this similarity proved to be fatal for the Hoofdcursus. Budget cuts and a reduction of the number of available places in the officer education allowed a centralization of these courses. Once again government, parliament and the policymakers had an opportunity to realize their ideal officer corps. The budget cuts proved to be the end of the Hoofdcursus and the last officers swore their officer's oath there in 1928.

## **After World War II**

For a long time the 'second way' remained closed. Only after World War II, when the size of the armed forces increased again after many years, was the door set ajar slightly. The post-war government and army leadership faced the difficult task of building up the army from scratch, and once again vacancies in the officer ranks had to be filled by officers who had not had a military-academic education at the RNLMA. The resumption of the officer education from the ranks took place in 1960. From that year onwards it became possible to obtain the certificate of preparatory higher and middle education (vhmo) at the so-called Biesma-h.b.s., aligned to the Air Force Officer and Cadre School, which gave a right of entry to the RNLMA. This situation lasted until 1967, when the Royal Netherlands Army re-established the officer education of the 'second way'. Like a century earlier, the 'second way' had a cold start with a rapid succession of reorganiza-

tions. A lack of funds and clear vision hampered a smooth development. This somewhat amateurish situation ended in 1974 with the establishment of the Education Centre for Officers of Special Duties (OCOSD) at Breda.

There were two differences in the way the existence of the 'second way' was justified, before and after World War II. The main difference between the Hoofdcursus and the OCOSD was the fundamental decision of the army leadership to realize a separate career for officers of the 'second way'. 'Hoofdcursianer' as the students of the Hoofdcursus were called, had, in principle at least, been able to reach the rank of general, and this had occasionally happened, although former cadets would get prevalence in filling these ranks. This possibility did not exist for OCOSD students. The army leadership wanted to preserve the most senior ranks for former cadets, so that OCOSD officers could only reach the rank of major. The policymakers, however, did recognize the qualitative and quantitative potential of these so-called B-category officers. They had followed a new type of civilian education: havo (higher general secondary education). The introduction of the Mammoetwet in 1963 had meant the end for such forms of education as h.b.s. and m.u.l.o. From then on civilian education distinguished vwo (pre-university education, consisting of atheneum, grammar school and lyceum) and general secondary education, consisting of havo and mavo (a higher and middle type, respectively). From the year the Mammoetwet was introduced, pre-university education (vwo) became the entry requirement for the RNLMA, whereas the OCOSD recruited its trainees from among the havo population. This meant a change in the composition of the students of OCOSD as, from now on, young people entered coming straight from civilian society. With regard to the NCOs, it can be said that the military leadership consciously made a conscious effort to exploit their leadership experience. This combination - appreciation of NCOs and a new educational background - constituted the second difference between the OCOSD and the Hoofdcursus.

Apart from these differences, however, there are also striking similarities between the two. In the late 1980s the level of education at the OCOSD began to rise, a development that was brought to a halt by the end of the Cold War. The drastic reorganizations resulting from the fall of the Berlin Wall, changed the Royal Netherlands Army from a large, static, preponderantly conscript army into a small, mobile professional force to be deployed flexibly. In the first instance this led to a blurring of the difference between the A-category officers and B-category officers, which was a positive development in itself. The nature of the new army demanded an increased attention for individual responsibility and development of the military personnel, for which the limited career of the OCOSD officer was ill suited. This was eventually formalized by a change of name from OCOSD to OCO, as, at least in theory, there were no 'special duties' anymore.

As in the post-World War I period, the reorganizations of the 'second way' after the

Cold War proved to be a mixed blessing. Restructuring and downsizing of the armed forces provided the framework of the reorganizations of the officer education, and soon it became clear that there was no room for two officer courses. Thus, the policymakers once more decided to end the officer education with the lesser prestige, funds and preparatory education. Consequently, the OCO was abolished in 1996.

### **The 'second way' in the Royal Netherlands Air Force**

The development of the 'second way' in the RNLAf began at a time when the organization had only just become independent, and it should therefore be understood in that context. The catalyst in the striving for independence from the Royal Navy and Army was World War II, when Dutch airmen operated within the Royal Air Force, flying British planes. Naturally, after the war the Dutch airmen, in considering the organization of the air force, leaned strongly towards the example of the, independent, RAF. After World War II the process of separating the Air Force from the Royal Netherlands Army began. In the early 1950s the Air Force leadership gave three reasons to justify an increased independence and the development of the organization's own identity. First, there was the difference in mentality of the air force compared to the land forces. Air force personnel, from the nature of their task, should possess a very high capacity for improvisation in order to function adequately. This resulted in a greater emphasis on self-discipline, sense of responsibility and team spirit than was usual in the army. Secondly, the air force was first and foremost a technical organization, which implied a need for individual and specialist technical skills, as opposed to the group technical skills of the army. This, in its turn, finally, led to a different structure to the one that was customary in the army. Strong emphasis on self-discipline was needed in order to uphold the necessary military structure.

The desire for more independence and an air force identity of its own, which formally materialized in 1953 when the Netherlands Air Force (NLAf) became the *Royal* Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf), had consequences for the existing organization. The idea found expression in the ambition of the RNLAf to have its own personnel policy, which implied the need for separate selection and training centres for air force officers. In other words, air force officers should be trained in an air force environment. This had not been common practice, hitherto, the majority of air



force officers having been educated at the RNLMA, which in the eyes of the air force cadets was strongly oriented towards the army.

What, then, were the advantages of an education in an air force environment and what was it supposed to be like? A separate educational centre for air force officers had the advantage of a greater efficiency and specific air force matters becoming generally accepted among officers, as Chief of the Air Force Staff Lieutenant-General A. Baretta put it in 1954. He attached great importance to establishing such a centre at or near an air base. It was there that aspirant officers could acquire the air force traditions. Besides, they would be able to profit from various fringe benefits of the air base, such as the presence of civilian air institutions, exercise terrain and glider clubs.

It did not come to a separation from the RNLMA and the establishment of a Royal Air Force Academy (RAFA), although planning for such an institution was well under way in the late 1950s. The RNLA leadership, however, found it very hard to find a suitable location for the RAFA. On top of that there was no room in the budget, nor were there enough qualified lecturers. Instead of establishing the RAFA, the RNLMA was reorganized to accommodate the RNLA's wishes. Thus, it became possible for the RNLA to develop its own identity and traditions within the existing framework.

Above, cursory mention has been made of the fact that not all officers of the Netherlands Air Force (NLA) received their education at the RNLMA. Already from the start, the NLA, too, had its 'second way'. There were several reasons for this. Immediately after World War II the nascent air force had a great need for qualified cadre personnel and facilities to train them. At first the NLA could not provide them, and this is why the first NLA officers of the 'second way' received their education at the Infantry Reserve Officers School (SROI) of the RNLA. This solution was far from satisfactory for either party. The RNLA needed all its attention for the build-up of its own troops and the NLA leadership felt this solution was not in line with the ambition of an air force identity. What was needed was an air force education that would offer aspirant officers the opportunity to acquire the specifics of their Service. The most practical solution would be a school for air force reserve officers.

The new school, the Military Aviation Reserve Officers School (SROML) opened its doors in 1947. In its original set-up this was to be a one-off project in order to provide the air force with executive personnel at short notice. The need for officers, however, was too great to close the school and therefore the Air Force leadership decided to give SROML a more permanent character. Thus, the Air Force Officer and Cadre School (LOKS) was already established on the first of July 1947. Its location was the Klooster Barracks at Breda and it educated NCOs as well as officers until 1948, when, in a comprehensive RNLA reorganization, LOKS was transferred to the Trip van Zoutlandt Barracks, also at Breda.

LOKS went off to a good start. Under Captain Tjark Biesma, who was to lead the school from 1953 for thirteen years, it grew into a fully-fledged institute of the 'second way'. In 1958 LOKS offered 17 different courses for NCOs and officers. There were officer courses for reserve officers of the air force, the Air Force Women's Detachment (LUVA) and regular officers. These courses were relatively short, as the RNLA, due to its specialist character, laid an emphasis on the specialist education of its officers. LOKS exclusively offered general officer education and left the specialist training to other air force units. From 1960 onwards, moreover, it became possible for outstanding NCOs to take the h.b.s. state exam at the so-called Biesma-h.b.s, mentioned earlier. On completion of this education they could apply for admission to the officer education.

At the same time LOKS specialized in officer education. In 1960 the RNLA leadership decided to train its NCOs in a separate institute, the Air Force Cadre School (LKS), which received the designation 'Royal' in 1970 (KKSL). Meanwhile, LOKS tightened the ties with the other officer education centres. Its students' association, Corps Aspirant Reserve Officers (CAROL), maintained close relations with the Air Force Cadets' Association 'De Manche', and there were annual sports exchanges with the schools for reserve officers of the RNLA and OCOSD.

From 1967 until 1975 the 'second way' of the RNLA went through several reorganizations. First, LOKS was transferred to Gilze-Rijen Air Base in 1967, where there were sufficient training and education facilities. In 1973 it was re-christened Air Traffic Control, Intelligence and Military Training School (VIMOS). One year later a new school, the School for Officers for Special Duties (SOSD), was established. SOSD's objective was to offer candidates with higher vocational education an officer training in their speciality. Although both VIMOS and SOSD did produce a number of officers, they were closed down again even before they were officially opened, to merge into the Air Force Officer School (LUOS) in 1975.

The RNLA leadership began to structure and further develop the organization and education of LUOS. The institute was meant to acquire a fully-fledged position within the system of military education within the RNLA. To this end various categories of officers were described more precisely, including their final ranks, and LUOS education was adapted accordingly.

In the 1970s the RNLA distinguished four officer categories, subdivided into service groups:

- Service Group of Air Force Officers. These officers had been to the RNLMA; their final rank was Lieutenant-Colonel or higher;
- Service Group of Air Force Officers for Special Duties (OSD). These were officers with a higher vocational education certificate. They could come from civilian society as well as be NCOs who had followed a higher vocational education in their

spare time. There was also the possibility for a selected group of NCOs and reserve officers with a havo certificate (higher general secondary education) to follow a modular officer education. The final rank for this category was Major;

- Service Group of Air Force Trade Officers. Officers of this service group came from the NCO ranks. Before being admitted to the officer education they had to serve a minimum of two years as Warrant Officers I. On completion of the course they acquired the rank of Lieutenant, which after four years could result in a promotion to Captain;
- Service Group Air Force Reserve Officers. They were conscripts who received their education at LUOS. Military personnel on a short-term contract, called KVV or, later, BBT, also belonged to this service group. The final rank of this group was usually Lieutenant. KVV or BBT personnel could qualify for a transfer to the BOT (long-term contract) category, which brought them in the Service Group of Air Force Officers for Special Duties.

Like in the RNLA, the policymakers made a clear distinction between officers with and without a military-academic education. Thus, the objectives of LUOS were essentially different from those of the RNLMA. LUOS primarily focussed on the ranks that were needed most in the RNLA, lieutenants and captains. The courses, which varied from several weeks to four years, depending on the category, were strongly practice-oriented. The pupils and students could be distinguished by the different collar and, later, shoulder strap badges. In 1977 LUOS adopted a unit emblem.

Restructuring and downsizing of the armed forces after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 forced the RNLA to reconsider its personnel policy, which involved a modernization and a simultaneous 15% downsizing of personnel in the period of 1991-1996. The modernization mainly pertained to a more flexible recruitment, education and career of the military personnel. The downsizing of personnel involved in education was realized by centralizing similar tasks as much as possible in one location. First of all, LUOS had to move from Gilze-Rijen Air Base to Woensdrecht Air Base, with a simultaneous integration into the Air Force Education Service. Soon after, KKSL followed suit. The facilities in Gilze-Rijen were not adequate anymore, due to back repairs and the distance between the separate buildings. At the same time there was ample accommodation in Woensdrecht Air Base, as the planned stationing of American nuclear cruise missiles had been called off. The Americans had already built a new infrastructure that could be purchased cheaply. This operation had the added advantage of cost savings, as the merger of KKSL and LUOS allowed lower personnel numbers and a more efficient management. The same arguments were used by the RNLA leadership in 1991 to move the Air Force Instruction and Military Education School - LIMOS (from

Nijmegen) and the Air Force Electronic and Technical School - LETS (from Arnhem) to Woensdrecht and to merge them with LUOS. This move brought the complete Air Force education together under one roof at Woensdrecht Air Base, with the exception of the RNLMA. As the new institute could hardly be called a pure officer education, it needed a new name: Royal Military Air Force School/Woensdrecht Air Base (KMSL/Vlb Wdt).

The 'second way' of the RNLAF had become a small part of an educational centre that, except for the RNLMA officer education, co-ordinated all initial military training, the pilot's training, career courses and a large number of function courses. For NCOs it was still possible, after the initial NCO courses, to follow a number of courses that would bring the officer rank within reach. Broadly speaking, this structure still exists today.

## **Conclusion**

The 'second way' found its origin in the army and there were two reasons for its existence. In the first place NCOs were to attain a reasonable prospect of promotion during their careers. Secondly, it soon appeared that the norm of the military-academic education at the RNLMA was far from appealing to civilians with a h.b.s. certificate. Promotion of NCOs into the officer ranks proved to be necessary to fill the vacancies there. To educate them, an independent institution was established - the Hoofdcursus. In the course of the years it became increasingly similar to the RNLMA, which eventually was one of the arguments to close it down, leaving the RNLMA as the sole educator of officers. This blocked the way to the officer ranks for NCOs.

The successor to the Hoofdcursus, OCO, was also justified by a shortage of officers. There were, however, two major differences with its predecessor, in that there was a maximum rank attached and the entry requirement was the new havo certificate. The similarity with the Hoofdcursus was that in its drive to attain a higher level of education it became increasingly like the RNLMA, and again the policymakers chose to close the institute down for the 'second way' as soon as the RNLMA could meet the requirements for officers.

The primary justification for the 'second way' in the RNLAF was, as in the RNLA, a shortage of subaltern officers in a rapidly expanding organization. The developments that led to the establishment of LOKS took place within the context of the drive for independence of the NLAf, particularly in relation to the RNLA. The idea was to educate air force officers in an air force environment, and the RNLMA reorganized to make this possible. LOKS, however, had a strong trump card from 1967 onwards: its location on an air base. Officers educated there, and at LUOS, its successor, were indeed educated in an air force environment. The reorganizations that were to affect LUOS after 1989

did not lead to a fundamental discussion about the existence of the 'second way'. It became generally accepted that NCOs had an opportunity to become officers, even to the extent of becoming one of the institutionalized ways of attaining that aim at the KMSL/VLb Woensdrecht.

Thus, the RNLAf accepted different categories within its officer corps more easily than the RNLA. Not all officers had to have a military-academic education under their belts. An explanation for this may be the institutional differences between the two Services. An army officer is usually a troop commander, whereas the air force is of its nature a very technical Service, with a high regard for individualism and self-discipline. In other words, an air force officer is a professional specialist rather than a troop commander. When NCOs could boast a certain experience in a specialist professional area, they could acquire the knowledge and skills required to become officers in a relatively short course.

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