

# The tension between management science and military science

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## Abstract

*Institutions for officer education, and the RNLMA is no exception, have always faced the problem of relevancy of the contents of their curriculum. The educational history of the RNLMA is replete with 'course-corrections' and since the 1960s there has been a tension between the roles of the officer as manager and warrior. The present article describes the relevant factors that account for this tension and the many ways in which it manifests itself.*

## Introduction

This year the RNLMA celebrates its 175th anniversary. Since the establishment of the officer education at the RNLMA in 1828 there has been a continuous reflection on the desired content of the study programme. There have been strong variations in this content over time and they have depended on the officer profiles used at a given time. An essential characteristic of the education is its continuous adaptations as a result of the changing demands of the officer profession. Therefore the education can be qualified as strongly dynamic. Since the 1970s there has been a drastic change or renovation every ten years or so, and there are even intermediate 'corrections'. At this moment in time an intense effort is made to realize a rather fundamental change: the introduction of the Bachelor-Master structure.

Of old there has been a certain tension between the various visions on the education requirements, which seem to have been dominated by a strong emphasis on a management approach since 1980.

The following section presents the factors (nine in total) that create the field of tension in the education along with the effects of certain recurrent bones of contention. One point in particular will be addressed: the tension between management science and military science. Finally, some conclusions will be given.

## Factors of tension

### *The complexity of the officer profession*

Officers have to be able to operate in environments as divergent as peacetime management, combat situations and violence in war, peacekeeping and peace enforcing situa-

tions, internal conflicts and crisis situations resulting from political, religious, or ethnic strife. In particular in international joint and combined operations they have to work in environments that seem to become increasingly complex, and therefore more risky. Kofi Anan once expressed this complexity in a conversation with his military advisor Major-General F.E. van Kappen, Marines (ret.) as follows, 'Peacekeeping is like giving first aid to a rattlesnake'.

The above-mentioned complexity seems to be less in peacetime situations and in the normal day-to-day management. In spite of what is often said about the armed forces' very complex external and internal environment, which is supposed to make decision-making, control and management exceedingly intricate, it is not more or less so than for other companies or government organizations of the same size. Incidentally, it cannot be ruled out that the internal environment and management of the armed forces is made more complex than is strictly necessary.

The officer has to be able to act adequately in different environments (peacetime, crisis control situations, humanitarian operations and war). Depending on the situation he has to play the role of warrior, diplomat or manager. In the course of his career as an officer he will have to function on various levels, such as the executive, policymaking and managerial levels. Because of the many demands made on him, an almost spontaneous tension emerges between the time available for education and the time needed to prepare the officer for the execution of his function in all roles, in different situations, on different levels.

### *The many facets of the officer profession*

As was mentioned above, the officer has to be all: soldier or warrior, diplomat and manager. But he also has to be an integral administrator, leader, head, decision-maker, planner, monitor, stimulator, example and change manager. He must be up to a physically demanding job, and he also has to have mental strength, which is directly related to the essence of his profession, the handling of (the ultimate form) of violence. He must be able and prepared to use violence, but he must also be strong enough mentally and physically to undergo it. (Van Kappen, 2003: 53) The heart of the military profession lies in the handling of the (ultimate) instrument of violence.

In combat situations and in crisis circumstances, on the one hand, but also in peacetime management, the officer must be able to lead his subordinates effectively, and this is where the tension emerges. Leading means a totally different thing in either situation. In this respect, too, Van Kappen (Van Kappen, 2003: 54) provides a telling example: 'Thinking and deciding behind a desk, with a cup of coffee in a comfortably warm room, with all the reference books at hand, with soft, relaxing music in the background and a

good night's rest, is not such a big thing. There are many people who can do that'. And he is right here, especially also because for many important issues there is a longer period for project groups or staff departments to prepare a decision and, if necessary, external advisors can be called in. Although Van Kappen does not actually say it, these are the specific circumstances in which decision making takes place in peacetime circumstances within the armed forces. There are many officers, indeed, who can do this, and in practice there are many officers who do just that.

This brings up the interesting question (and an important point of tension) of whether decision-makers for the peacetime management of the armed forces must have received a military officer education. The answer may very well be negative, as it is questionable whether this an essential requirement for the decision-making and the command and control of the peacetime management, with regard to such aspects as personnel, materiel, finances, training, controlling, information, and auditing.

It is exclusively for command and control purposes in combat and peace operations (warfare, peacekeeping, peace enforcing and crisis control operations) that officer qualities are needed, making a military officer education an absolute necessity. Effective leadership in these circumstances stands in stark contrast to that of peacetime management. Van Kappen substantiates this as follows, 'Thinking and deciding "on your feet", under time pressure, hungry and tired in an environment of chaos and violence, that's what it is all about. There are not many people who can do this without an intensive training; besides, it cannot be learned from a book' (Van Kappen, 2003: 54).

Nor from theory, it could be added. It requires quite a bit of practice, experience and training to make the right decision in a split second, under the pressure of enemy fire and snipers, possibly with dead or injured soldiers in full view. There is no doubt that stressful situations such as these require a different sort of leadership than the above-mentioned office conditions. It is for this good reason that in the military training much attention is given to handling stress. Here, too, there remains a certain tension between the stress and the fear that actually come up in combat situations and the stress and the fear generated in adventurous training activities such as diving, parachuting, working at heights and abseiling. They are of a different order.

### *50 years of peace*

After World War II the Dutch armed forces almost exclusively and continuously operated in a peacetime environment. The chance of an officer losing his life in an armed conflict during the Cold War was estimated to be many times lower than the chance of someone becoming involved in a fatal car accident in the almost car-less island of Schiermonnikoog. In fact, after World War II the officer profession was one of the safest

and risk-free professions of all.

The statement that 'content and quality of military training and education are best served by an occasional war' may be a bit bold, but it nevertheless harbours an element of truth in it. It is likely that the officer training would have been completely different if the Dutch armed forces had had to operate regularly and in a prolonged war situation at home or abroad. In the post-World War II period a field of tension developed itself, perhaps unintended and almost unnoticed. There was no more fighting; training, planning and managing, all the more. By and by the armed forces began to be seen as a (training) company, to be managed as if it were an organization from the world of business. The armed forces became a company. This view gained momentum when around 1990 the *Beleid Bedrijfsvoering Defensie* (BBD - Defence Management Policy) was developed, in which there was much attention for *Verbeterd Economisch Beheer* (VEB-improved economic control).

The policy framework for improved management was based on a number of principles, a.o. result-responsibility of commanders, decentralization, unless..., mutual trust and independent action. The policy framework also encompassed a new management concept, featuring such principles as management at arm's length, line management, output control and a separation of policy and execution. Simultaneously a new planning and control system was introduced. Operation schedules, management contracts and covenants were used as instruments in the practical realization of the management control cycle. This policy from 1993 was developed and implemented over the years and it was brought up to date in the BBD 2000. The field of tension will be obvious: in this period management science had won the day, in theory, in the education as well as in practice, against military science, much to the disappointment of many operational officers.

### *Barrack style or university style*

For years the question whether the officer education should be vocational or academic has been a source of tension. That it is still very much topical appears from the re-structuring of the academic education of the faculties at the RNLNC and the RNLMA in order to tie up with the Bachelor-Master structure. This factor of tension could not be more plain than in the invitation to a symposium held on 15 May 2003 on the occasion of the RNLMA's 175th anniversary, entitled 'Captains of industry? Trends and challenges in military education'.

The symposium dealt with the tension between the military education in 'barrack style' and the academic education in 'university style'. One of the points made was that this tension has become topical because of the changing tasks of the armed forces and the military profession. It may very well be possible that these changes have the poten-

tial to break through this field of tension, as the new tasks of the armed forces point at an education that enables the officer to execute his military job, rather than lead a company in a academic way.

For the time being, however, the tension seems to be there, which leads to the following questions:

- Can the military identity be retained in an officer education based on a university model?
- Can the education have a (sufficient) academic level if it takes place in barrack style?
- Can a military officer of good quality be educated when an education is chosen (consciously or not) that intends to train future 'captains of industry'?

Answering these questions will exercise the minds of many commanders responsible (including the Commanders in Chief) and educators involved (including military and civilian lecturers) for some time to come. The academic part of the education is being restructured and this seems to point at a choice for the university style. Following the example of the universities, the armed forces have opted for the introduction of the Bachelor-Master structure. The faculty staff of the Faculty of Military Sciences in formation have the important task to guarantee and develop the military character of the education. Within the context of the formation of the Faculty of Military Sciences and the introduction of the BaMa-structure, there are also ideas to open up the academic part of the education to civilian students, in particular for subjects such as strategy, military science, crisis control, logistics and management. Concurrently, the possibility is studied of cadets and midshipmen following a part of their education at civilian universities even more than is already the case.

Another possible point of tension is the question of who determines the content of the curriculum: the military, who state their needs (the Commanders in Chief), the Board of Governors, or the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Military Sciences (professors, lecturers and scientists). Military people all too easily take it for granted that it is the military top; after all, who pays the piper calls the tune, besides, who knows better than the leadership of a Service what is necessary and good for the education of their officers? Often the academic staff too easily assume that it is the departments and their professors; after all, who knows better than the expert lecturer what academic education encompasses and how it should be organized, certainly with a view to academic recognition of the programmes by the universities?

There is still one more minor field of tension with regard to the question whether officers should be educated for their first function(s) or for an extended career within the armed forces. The short education for the first function only, should be much more practical and hardly academic; conversely, the 'long' education should be much more

conceptual and theoretically founded. Parallel to this is the distinction between the terms of commission: BBT (short-term commissioned officers) for a limited number of years, directed at fulfilling the subaltern officer functions, who follow a short education and BOT (long-term commissioned officers) for an extended career, directed at fulfilling key functions in higher ranks in the military organization, who follow the long course.

#### *Patronizing or own responsibility*

A permanent field of tension concerns the question if and to what extent the cadet and midshipman can be given their own responsibility during their education. Does the education of a professional, independent, active, creative and responsible future officer benefit from giving him a high degree of responsibility or by taking him by the hand? Military educators tend to set priorities for the cadet and midshipman by indicating exactly when and how something must be done. In doing so, a strong emphasis is laid on following rules, regulations and procedures and on checking whether the detailed assignments have been carried out accordingly by the cadets and midshipmen. In other words, they are under close scrutiny.

Most civilian lecturers prefer to give them more freedom and are convinced that patronizing is the wrong way to instill a sense of responsibility. They are of the opinion that their students have a responsibility of their own for completing their education, in any case the academic part. This implies the cadets and midshipmen must be able to make their own choices. The road to the desired final result is paved with priorities of their own choice. This does not mean that the lecturer may neglect to confront the cadets with their achievements or absence thereof. This field of tension, therefore, is directly related to the extent and intensity of coaching of the cadets and midshipmen.

The recurrent discussions on the (extent of) lecture attendance shows there is a field of tension between lecturer (military or civilian) and student. In this respect the cadets tend to compare their situation with that of university students, but this comparison does not quite hold (or rather, not hold at all). The university student faces the strict assessment of his study results and, moreover, is not paid to follow the education. The military student is paid, though. He is an employee, enjoys a decent income and can make use of excellent facilities for sports, messing, accommodation and study (almost) free of charge. The discussion on lecture attendance can be closed once and for all by stating that paid employees can be expected to meet the targets that have been set for them. It goes with the job to attend lectures and participate actively in them in order to have the best chance of achieving satisfactory study results.

### *Three pillars*

The officer education is founded on three pillars:

- Military training and education by the Department of Military Training and Education
- Academic study of and research into military management (academic education) by the Faculty of Military Sciences in formation
- Character development and group building, realized to a large extent within the Corps of cadets and midshipmen

Throughout, there is the need to expose the aspirant officers to all sorts of stressful situations, so that they can cope with the heavy trials of the battlefield and the possibly traumatic experiences they may have when they are sent out in peace operations to crisis areas and disaster situations. This is done, for instance, in the introduction period, by physical exhaustion and sleep deprivation, by being forced to sleep in a dormitory, by adventurous training activities, the boarding school system, strict social control and sometimes by isolation. This is not all, for sports and games, not to mention important social occasions (Corps days, parties, sports contests, etc.) lay considerable claim on the remaining available time.

The three pillars interfere with each other as far as their objectives, requirements, claims on available time are concerned and, according to some, they offer aspirant officers the opportunity to more or less hide behind one or more of them. Another reason may be the fact that the number of aspirant officers has grown, whereas the number of lecturers and cadre has decreased as result of the need to educate more efficiently, effectively and cost-consciously.

### *Teaching and research*

Particularly among civilian lecturers tensions may rise when the teaching load becomes too high compared with the time available for research. In general the career possibilities of civilian lecturers are better served with good research results and articles published in renowned international journals than with good teaching results only. For military lecturers the opposite is true.

With regard to teaching there is also the tension between the general legitimation of the subject taught and the applied or military nature of it. This implies that civilian lecturers must know the military organization and they must be able to prove and explain the relevance of their subject to the cadets and midshipmen.

With regard to research there is a tension between conducting general academic research, on the one hand, and the need for carrying out defence-oriented academic



research, on the other. Research is and remains one of the foundations of good military academic education. It has to be defence-oriented, and it can be mono-disciplinary as well as multi-disciplinary. The accreditation of the education within the BaMa-structure, aspired for by the defence institutes of higher education, greatly increases the need for this defence-oriented research. As it is, this ambition brings along obligations with regard to the relation between teaching and research, in that the development of knowledge by the students has to take place through an interaction between teaching and academic research in the relevant disciplines. Accreditation is impossible when the academic military education is not fed by research results from its own educators.

### *Strings of function and educational requirements*

For many years now officer profiles have been used within the armed forces. They form the starting point for the requirements that an officer should meet in order to be able to adequately and competently fulfil the expected roles in the various environments on all levels. These requirements have a direct bearing on requirements with regard to character building, personal characteristics, ambitions and experiences. Usually this leads to long lists of competence and function requirements. The most recent of such lists at the RNLMA contains an enumeration of 42 competence points, plus an additional 10 personal characteristics, at which the education is supposed to be directed. But this is not all. Each of the pillars has more and sometimes contradictory requirements for the cadets and midshipmen. To name a few:

- the academic education by the Faculty: the cadets have to follow academic education, make assignments, study independently, pass tests, write a final paper, do written and oral presentations, possess social and communicative skills, etc.
- the department of military training and education: the cadets and midshipmen have to have a good physical condition, their physical toughness must be trained and military skills acquired, they have to accept military discipline, leadership qualities have to be further developed, they have to learn command and control, map reading, shooting, fighting, ...etc.
- character development and group building in the Cadets' Corps: foster personal development, solidarity and group cohesion, impart camaraderie, fellowship and loyalty, learn how to cooperate, organize, and network, instill obedience, trust and confidence, norms and values, build up mental resilience, observe etiquette, but also adopt a critical attitude and 'zacve'(independent, active, creative, responsible, ethical, etc.



In the academic part of the education lists like these can be found along with elaborate and detailed enumerations of objectives, conditions and knowledge requirements of all the subjects of the education.

Taken together all this (some one hundred requirements) can cause some trouble, especially when it is not sufficiently clear in which way all they are or have been translated into the curriculum and how it is tested whether they have all been realized, ultimately at the moment of handing out the officer certificates.

### *Military science and management science*

The managerial aspect of the initial officer education as a management education has become very successful over the past decades, to the detriment of the military aspect of the education. Where should the primacy lie in the educational philosophy: with the managerial or the military approach? Or is there a possibility for a middle way?

In the present article there will be no plea for a one-sided managerial approach, as this element has gone too far within the military education over the past few years. So some criticism is called for here, which will involve a limited repetition of some of the arguments used before.

The Dutch armed forces have not seen any operational action for almost half a century. Officers who had graduated from the RNLMA found themselves in an army that was almost exclusively occupied with peacetime management, planning and training. In fact the organization had become a training factory. The education had to lead as much as possible to external certification, and even a bureau was established for the purpose. External educational and certificate requirements became more important than military ones.

The *raison d'être* of the armed forces had been lost out of sight, even if there was much thinking and discussion on their justification and objectives. Throughout the organization countless mission statements were formulated. The primary process, however, became increasingly less important as a basis for the content of the officer education.

A military officer education of its own within the defence organization can only be justified if the officers get something there which they cannot get anywhere else. That education must be founded on the justification of the armed forces themselves. It is all about an officer education which enables them to carry out their essential tasks, derived from the objectives of the armed forces.

Those objectives do not justify the education of managers, organizations experts, sociologists, psychologists, ICT experts, technicians, engineers or personnel managers, jurists, or logisticians, rather than officers. It was, however, going in that direction.

The primacy should lie with the academic preparation for the future profession,

although for the execution of that profession the officer must have the necessary knowledge of management, sociology, psychology, ICT, personnel management, law, logistics and a number of other specialisms.

As a parallel may serve the education of the Military Administration of the past. Until the 1980s the RNLMA produced more than half accountants. When this was stopped it was replaced by the education for almost half managers. Later still, managerial know-how was an important part of the common education of all cadets. There was some sense in that, as very many, if not all, officers were employed in the peacetime organization at the time. But the armed forces do not need their own education institute for that, as a management education can be found in many places outside the organization.

Much has changed, however, over the years. More and more officers are sent out to take command of military personnel during operations in the context of peace mission, a fact which has had resulted in more interest for military science.

With the advent of BaMa and the opening up of the military education to civilian students and the opportunities for further study of officers at civilian academic institutions, the danger increases that once again the focus of attention is not primarily an education that is optimally geared to the realization of the new mission of the armed forces. New budget limitations and a wish for further embedding of the armed forces in the Dutch society intensify this danger.

Management, or to put it more widely, management science must remain a major element in military education, but it should be coordinate and in service to it. Its content should be determined not by the knowledge needed by officers employed in the management of peacetime armed forces – no military education is needed for that - , but in the management of the armed forces as an expeditionary organization. This requires a basic knowledge of management science to be applied to the management of expeditionary missions.

The above-mentioned non-specific subjects should be taught and given military relevance in such a way that the management and control of expeditionary missions (preparation, execution, winding down) run as smoothly as possible.

The contrast between ‘military science’ and ‘management science’ should not be exaggerated. There is only a seeming contrast when ‘management science’ goes over into ‘military science’, and the borderline is often difficult to define. Several subjects which are now presented as military are in essence normal civilian subjects. This holds good, for instance, for international relations, ICT, logistics, sociology, psychology, history and technology. These subjects belong to ‘management science’, but only deserve a place there if they have been given sufficient military relevance. They have to be re-moulded into subjects that are rightfully called ‘military science’, and they become ‘military ICT’, ‘military sociology’, ‘military psychology’, ‘military history’ and

‘military technology’.

The military educational institutes should not educate future top-of-the-bill managers, but top-of-the-bill officers. Of course these officers must have a critical attitude, and preferably be creative, they must have stamina, must be good achievers, able to cope with pressure and stress, have leadership qualities, be able to negotiate, be good change managers, be dynamic, etc.; but all this must be directed at functioning adequately in crisis and war situations.

This will lead to a different content of these subjects than when they are exclusively geared to peacetime management in stable circumstances like those occurring in other companies and organizations. And the level must be academic. Studying these subjects must contribute to acquiring an academic level. The lecturers of the Faculty of Military Science impart this academic attitude by stimulating the critical faculties of the cadets. In this way an academic military officer education will be established. It will produce officers who meet the required profile of academic intellect, capable of acting critically and independently, able to control the spectrum of violence, trained to make the right choice in difficult circumstances, bent on the conscientious execution of their task.

## Conclusion

The fields of tension described above have positive as well as negative effects. The leadership and educators responsible must ensure that in the end the positive effects are the dominant ones. It will keep the organization ready to continually fine tune the programmes to the officer requirements. The primacy in a high quality officer education lies with military science, and management science is a major contributor to that education in a serving role. Military education cannot do without science, especially because of its role in developing the critical intellect of the future officer.

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