

## **Ethics and Leadership Responsibility**

## *Ethics in Lithuanian Professional Military Education*

by Audrone Petrauskaite

The General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy is the youngest military institution for higher education and the only one training military officers in Lithuania. The main task of the Academy is to educate and train officers for the national defense forces. But to train highly qualified officers also means to form civically conscious members of society.

Regarding the moral maturity of officer students some of the most important questions are: What is the role of ethics in professional military education? What kind of historical experience in moral education of Lithuanian military officers we can use now? How must we train our cadets as officers and citizens of the present Lithuanian democratic society?

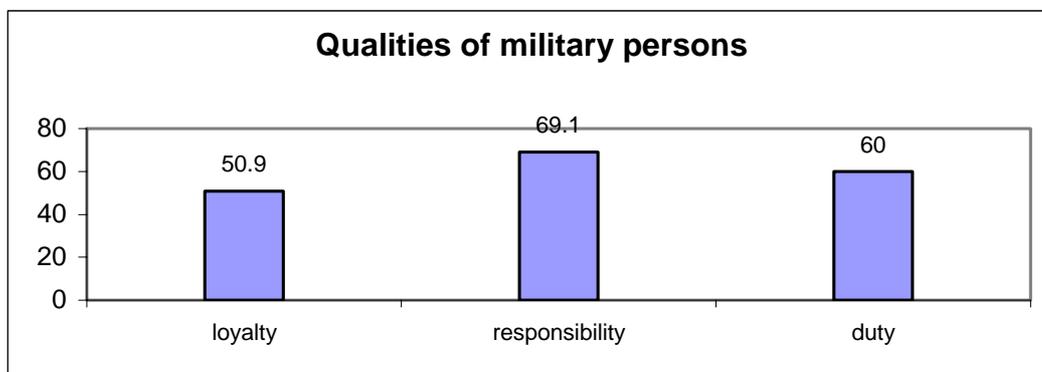
Modern society represents a very complex world of urbanization, mass culture, information, and enhancing democracy that is driven by new technologies, science and engineering. Our age has brought about not only exciting experiences, but new problems, including moral ones. The 20<sup>th</sup> century focused its efforts on finding the true notion of such moral values as freedom, duty, and responsibility. Albert Camus, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and other existentialist philosophers tried to find the most accurate definition of these categories. Albert Schweitzer and Ortega I Gasset drew people's attention to the tendencies of alienation and dehumanization as well as the manifestation of decay in moral culture. These issues, however, became even far more obvious at the beginning of the new millennium and captured the focus of constant public concern. Soldiers and cadets are also part of society and participate in the process.

The Lithuanian society is currently living under the circumstances of European integration and cooperation, thus inspiring the moral values

of democracy. For teachers, also in the military, it is very important to support that process and to define the right criteria and find the right methods in moral education. The staff of the Department of Humanities is currently working on the scientific research project "Civic Education in Lithuanian Military Forces" in order to assess the civic consciousness of cadets and officers. In the following, the major results and findings of that study are being presented.

According to Montesquieu, individual morality is the basis of republican governing. If he was right, social and political morality cannot be separated from individual moral maturity. In other words: Individual moral values must come to light in the social and political communities. One of the aims of the present study is to reveal how the cadets define such moral categories as *respect*, *responsibility*, *tolerance*, and *loyalty*; a choice that has not been accidental because these categories are especially important in the cadet's future professional activities.

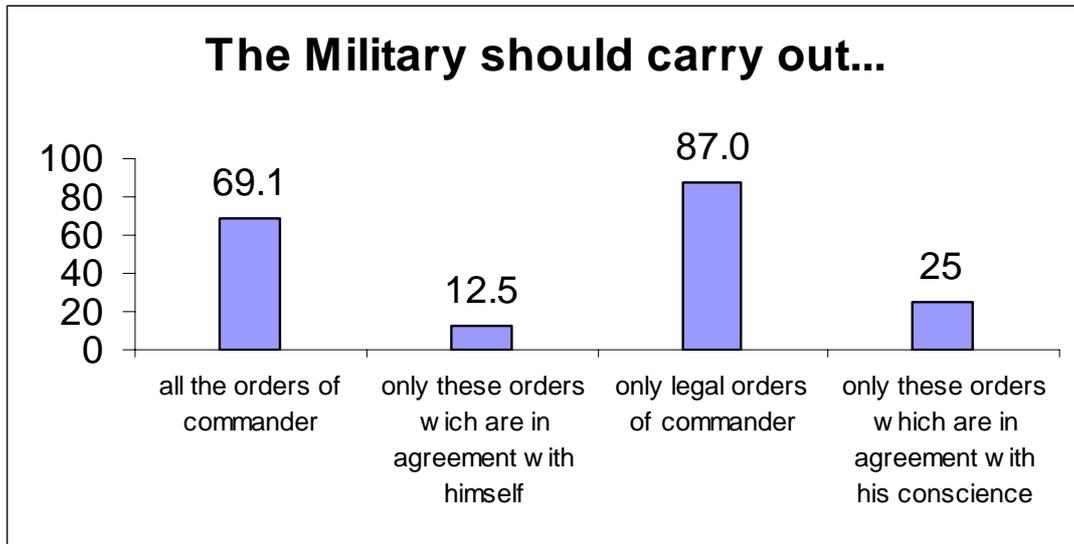
The cadets answers to the question, "What are the main qualities of the professional military person showed an unexpectedly high level of professionalism, featuring the three qualities *responsibility* (69,1%), *duty* (60%), and *loyalty* (50,9%) as most important for officers.



**Scheme 1: Most important officer qualities**

However, when the very same qualities were analyzed in a different way, the answers differed significantly. We wanted to know what kind of orders the soldier should carry out: all of them, only legal ones, or only those in agreement with his conscience. The majority of

respondents (87%) said:”I agree (or absolutely agree) that militaries should carry out only legal orders of their commander”. 69,1% also said, “I agree that militaries should carry out all orders of their commander”. But only 25% of the respondents said, “I agree that militaries should carry out only the order that is in agreement with their consciousness”.



**Scheme 2: Orders to be carried out by soldiers**

Such answers give evidence of the cadets’ misunderstanding of the notion of morality in their professional and individual activities. It appears as if the cadets perceive the military statute formally without any connection to morale and ethics, which obviously limits the category of “responsibility” to a mere fulfillment of orders.

This proves again that in order to handle moral problems and to choose the right moral criteria as well as to act in a morally conscientious way, the essence of ethics needs to be understood in the first place. With this purpose in view, the cadets have to attend a course in general ethics theory before they study military ethics. In this course the students are acquainted with principal concepts of the science of ethics, its history, objectives, and tasks, and the philosophical systems of different philosophers.

Although some see a conflict between ethics and professional military activities, because the military profession demands a strict and exact

execution of orders, it is quite clear that “no member of military profession, especially in the officer corps, can be expected to make pragmatic ethical decision without an understanding of the philosophical foundations of those decision” (Gabriel, 23).

Important as ethics is for the military man, a cadet, the future commander, it is impossible for a military to grasp and solve complex problems of professional ethics without having grasped the basics of the ethical science.

In particular, leaders and commanders should be able to form a proper microclimate within their units, handle problems among subordinates, educate and teach them. Given the nature of the military world, an officer should meet particularly high moral demands. A squad or platoon leader is by far more to his soldiers than their teacher and tutor; from an ethical point of view he is a symbol of justice, an example to be followed. It is very important that soldiers trust the decision of their leaders and are confident in their competence. But appropriate decisions do not only have to be logically justified, they also ought to be ethically motivated. As Kenneth H. Wenker claims: “...the problems we deal with on a daily basis are in fact ethical problems. We don't make ethical judgments, but all too often we make no ethical judgments ... this means that we adopt solutions to our ethical problems without the ethical reflection they demand” (Wenker, 181).

One of the main tasks of an officer (commander) is to guarantee order and discipline within his unit, as well as precise and fast execution of given military tasks. Every commander knows that only a united and disciplined unit is able to successfully execute given tasks. While commanders are very well aware of the role of their authority, the question is whether position and military rank alone guarantee authority? The answer is - yes, they do, but not absolutely. The *yes* covers subjection, submission, and other subordination regulations. But things are different with regard to *respect*. Our survey shows that some cadets and officers are inclined to think that respect is also a prerogative of statute. But this is not the case and it should be definitely emphasized and explained to students that *respect* does not belong to abstract categories. Respect is an ethical attitude, founded on the

recognition of value, honor, and dignity of an individual as a personality by another individual. Thus, respect should be grounded not only by formal statutory regulations, but also by an officer's and commander's definite moral qualities as such: tact and tolerance, self-control and discipline; patience and responsiveness, etc. Only these kinds of qualities can guarantee respect and understanding, which is the essence of modern leadership. Respect, gained by a commander's professional and moral qualities, forms the basis of his authority. Any otherwise forced or formally imposed authority will never be totally reliable. History witnesses quite a few occurrences when "soldiers refused to obey orders, robbed or killed their commanders. Such violence, for the most part, occurred on battle-fields facing defeat, and did even happen in high disciplined forces of England and Prussia" (Duffy, 136).

That is why some lectures and seminars are devoted to the issue of tolerance and its limits; courtesy and tact; manhood, bravery, and comradeship; envy and hatred; and to other relevant ethical problems. Since the issue is very broad in itself, attention is usually focused on items and questions emerging in the course of discussions and which appear to be most urgent and pressing for cadets.

Studies on military ethics bring about many debatable questions as the military profession has its own specifics. As a member of a distinct profession, generally accepted and followed ethical requirements need to be applied and determined within the social relations of a group of people, engaged in similar professional activities. The specifics of military ethics, like the specifics of any other profession (doctors, teachers, policemen, etc.), depend on the character of the occupation. Given the hierarchical character of the military, the issue of duty and responsibility occupies a particular position in the professional ethic of the military. Specific working conditions (field exercises, unfixed working hours, etc.), military statutes with strict professional regulations as well as traditions help soldiers to perceive the meaning of their activities, to estimate the results, and to properly do their duty. At the same time, these working conditions provoke a number of moral problems, above all, that of individual responsibility. Many think that "the fellowship of violence does 'liberate from individual impotence'

and makes 'drunk with power' ... It is all too easy as a member of the military profession to set aside such individual responsibilities" (Davenport, 11). The pattern to unconditionally obey and execute orders threatens the personality of a military man. It may affect his individual and civic consciousness of responsibility, provoke deprivation of conscience, and insinuate disrespect both to himself and other people. That is why the understanding of that principle is of utmost importance for every officer and will also help to resolve another ethical issue of military ethics, namely the issue of the relationship between the military and society.

In contrast to many other professions, an officer does not serve the needs of a definite person; he serves all the strata of society. The specific character of the soldier's and particularly the officer's responsibility decisively determines the role of the military profession. A wrong interpretation of this role may have a fatal impact on the fate of the whole nation. The history of Lithuania, as well as the history of other countries, confirms the validity of such an understanding.

Due to the short period of its existence (only 20 years between the First and the Second World Wars), the historical experience of the modern Lithuanian Army forces is not very rich. From the ethical point of view, to understand all the mistakes of the past is very important in order to avoid making the same ones in the future. In this respect, studying the problems of pre-war military ethics and the gap between theory and practice is not only an interesting but also a rewarding undertaking.

Lithuanian officers have always shown interest for issues of professional military ethics. They tried to understand such complex ethical categories as professional honor and to define the standards of morality for the military. The Lithuanian point of view was never exceptional or unique and did not differ much from the military of other countries at that time. Lithuanian officers underlined exclusive personal qualities such as self-discipline and high moral standards. But reality was very far from the ideals. Despite a very strong system of obedience and punishment, the biggest problem in the pre-war Lithuanian military forces remained discipline and order. Drinking, fist fights, and even duels were very popular and common among the

military officers. The system of military justice and the Courts of Honor were helpless to prevent such behavior that rested on a peculiar understanding of a soldier's honor.

In pre-war Lithuania the code of professional military ethics determined the rules of professional activities, forming a closed elitist segment within the Lithuanian society. The military segment had its own understanding of honor, distant from the rest of society, which raised it even beyond the boundaries of legal norms. Professional honor and the personal responsibility of officers were set apart from social needs and demands and the overall political and ethical consciousness of society.

However the experience of pre-war Lithuanian Army can not altogether be transferred to the present day Lithuanian Defense Forces. While many traditions were successfully revived and constitute a part of the social and cultural life of Lithuania, the perception of military honor had to be fundamentally revised. The new Lithuanian society has its own claims for the military and demands to see soldiers open-minded, with a strong sense of moral responsibility and constituting an integral part of society. Moral maturity of an individual in a democratic society is given special attention in the modern concept of military honor.

Comprehension of duty and responsibility to one's own people contributes to the solution of another important socio-political and ethical problem, i.e. public relations. Military officers should always be careful not to artificially accelerate the distance between the military and its civilian environment, but rather try to make clear the position of the armed forces as a political instrument and integral part of the Lithuanian society. Officers should remember that they are human beings and citizens first. They should be aware that they will lead individuals who join the armed forces from different social backgrounds. They should also bear in mind the present socio-political situation in Lithuania and that many soldiers do not come from the best families. Due to this fact, part of the ethics course is devoted to current moral challenges, such as corruption, crime prevention, drug abuse, suicide, etc. The ethics classes also stimulate cadets to share their own

moral attitudes, to develop discussions on the issues, and to reflect upon problematic ethical questions.

When speaking about professional military ethics we can not leave out the idea of a Code of Conduct which, in fact, makes up for a key issue in military ethics. The course of ethics covers fundamental principles and norms of the ethics of war and the rules of behavior of soldiers during military conflict. It also includes analysis of both simulated and real situations of military and soldierly duty. The required knowledge is acquired and tested in tactical exercises and further advanced officer's education.

Whereas a course in ethics alone can not radically change a cadet's moral attitude, the knowledge acquired in the process of ethics studies will contribute to the development of moral maturity and to the implementation of moral values. The achievement of these goals is also supported by other disciplines of studies in disciplines of human and social sciences, including national history, philosophy, psychology; pedagogy, political sciences, language, and culture. In addition, special attention is paid to the constant furtherance of the expertise of the teaching staff of the Lithuanian officer school.

## **Conclusions**

Historical experience and present-day studies show that officers too often have a mere formal understanding of military regulations without any deeper comprehension of its ethical meaning. Studying military ethics should help officers to find ethical orientation and to understand the moral norms and criteria for their personal and professional activities.

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