



## Leadership Training in the Nigerian Army: An Assessment of the Performance of Platoon Commanders

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**Abstract.** The training of leaders in the military is of utmost importance especially that of the junior officer cadre. Junior officers in the Nigerian Army (NA) are expected to possess certain attributes; they must know what to do, when to do it and influence others to follow their lead. In other words, they should possess attributes that will make them effective leaders. This paper aims to examine the performance of Nigerian Army Commanders in the Junior Officer Cadre to establish the effectiveness of the training of junior officers and their performance as platoon commanders in the Nigerian Army. The findings of the study reveal that despite the update and construction of training curricula and training centres for Nigerian Army personnel, Junior officers' performance on the field continues to fall short of expectations due to insufficient training, as he lacks the necessary tools to meet the tasks on the field. The demand for manpower is high, and the number of cadets undergoing training has grown over time with little correlation to the number of instructors. This has an impact on the quality of training thereby affecting their performance in the field. Through content analysis of secondary data, this work discusses the various challenges faced in the training of Junior Officer Commanders. The paper explains that there are diverse challenges in the leadership training of the Junior Officer Cadre which serve to hinder their effective performance as Platoon Commanders, and therefore the training currently adopted may not adequately address or prepare them for the tasks ahead. Thus, the paper concludes by recommending that Nigerian Army should consider collective training for its personnel in oversea military institutions; establish a combined training course for Platoon leaders and Platoon Sergeants in order to breach communication gap and create more synergy between them; expanding the roles of the Nigerian Army Cyberwarfare Command (NACWC) to train Junior officers in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and its possible

applications in warfare; construct training villages in order to portray realistic training environment to improve the performance of Junior officers in combat amongst others.

**Keywords:** Military training, military leadership, Platoon Commanders, military education

### 1. Introduction

Leaders make decisions that affect us all almost daily in every sphere of life. Leadership is the backbone to every aspect of life, this exists in various ways such as leadership in government, leadership in the religious aspects and up to leadership in a family setting. Leadership in any form demands a level of understanding of its set up. The success and development of any society is therefore integral to the quality of its leaders. Quality leadership motivates the people to a higher level of performance through their strong human relations. It is an important function of management which helps to maximize efficiency and to achieve organizational goals (Newcomb, *et al*, 1996) In reality, leadership is one of the most important aspects of being a military commander, the victory and success of any military is integral to the quality of its leaders. (Army leadership, 2020; Hoijberg, *et al*. 1999). Military Leadership is the process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation. Command is the authority a person in the military service lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of his rank and assignment or position. A Junior Commander on the other hand, is a junior officer of the lower cadre, who commands the platoon. Platoons are commanded by junior officers, usually a second lieutenant and lieutenant or an equivalent rank. Junior Officers are trained at the military academy after which they earn the commission to become second lieutenants and lieutenants. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Defence

Academy (NDA) is responsible for the training of cadets who are subsequently commissioned as junior officers into the Nigerian Army. Other institutions with responsibility to train officers include the Armed Forces Command and Staff College (AFCSC), as well as the Nigerian Army School of Infantry (NASI) to name a few, are corps training Institutions. The leadership training of junior officers in these military academies are confronted with challenges which have affected the output of junior officers in the field. This is due to numerous factors, which when coalesced, bring about dwindling performances of Platoon commanders especially in counter-insurgency operations (COIN). It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to address the challenges which affect the performance of the Junior Officer Cadre in the Nigerian Army. The paper gives an overview of training of junior officers in the Nigerian Army, and it also examines how the effectiveness of the training of junior officers augments their performances as platoon commanders in the Nigerian Army. Thereafter, it discusses the challenges in training of junior officers and suggests a way forward. This is because the training of junior officers reflects on their performance in combat.

## **2. Overview of Training of Junior Commanders in the Nigerian Army**

The Nigerian Army since its establishment has been engaged with training of officers. Training is a vital tool in achieving success and efficiency in the output and performance of the military. Training provides discipline and instruction directed towards the development of professionalism with a view to enhance proficiency in the Nigerian military. The origin of training in the military dates to 335 BC in Athens where young males received compulsory military training on the use of weapons and martial arts to improve their combat efficiency and readiness because of the constant conflicts in the ancient cities. In modern times, organised military trainings were conducted in England during the civil wars between England and Scotland in the period 1638-1660. In 1775, military training was conducted in America during the American Revolutionary Wars where the continental army formation was trained to meet the demands of the war.

In Nigeria, military training can be traced to the period of the creation of the Royal British West African Frontier Force (RBWAFF) which evolved into the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at independence in 1960. (Duke,2019). The form of training received at the early stage was mainly for the army to assist the British during the world wars. After independence, the army training

became necessary because the new personnel needed to be trained in the art of defending the territory and the nation's interest using military force. However, by 1964, military training changed direction with the establishment of the Nigerian Defence Academy, which involved military education.

This military education and/or training which primarily involved the learning of tactical and rudimentary skills like first aid and field hygiene, map-reading, patrolling, post duties and military drills among others, to ensure that military personnel (both combatants and health workers) were ready to go on to carry on their task of defending the country. By 1967-1970, training in the Nigerian military depreciated because of the civil war where young men were recruited without proper training into the military to preserve the unity of the nation as against the secessionist Biafrans. After the civil war, the nation had a very large military force without proper training. Thus, it became necessary for Nigeria's military to organise a middle-level and advanced military trainings and courses for effectiveness and efficiency in the discharge of military duties. This explains the establishments Naval and Air Force Training Commands, Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jaji, and the Infantry Corps Centre and School (ICCS), the Department of Army Training and Operation (DATOPS) supervised by the Chief of Training and Operations, Army (CTOP 'A') among many others were established to train the military to meet the standard of global best practices.

The military has highlighted the importance of continuous training of personnel to prepare them for future leadership roles. Developing military leadership is an important investment to make for the future of the army because it builds trust in relationships and units, prepares leaders for future uncertainty, and is critical to readiness and the army's success (Army Leadership, 2020). Junior officers undergo leadership training for effective leadership of the platoons they would subsequently lead.

The Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna was established to train and prepare officer cadets for the officer cadre. Over time, the training curriculum was adjusted to suit the contemporary challenges faced by the country and its national interest (Aladi, 2015). NASI for infantry officers is also charged with developing young officers. The Armed Forces Command and Staff College which is a defence establishment is geared towards enhancing the professional prowess of military officials of the three arms of the Nigerian military and civilians in the Ministry of Defence (MOD), through the in-depth

studies of command-cum-staff operations (Otu, 2019).

Due to the evolving nature of security demands and combat roles of junior officers, the training reflects on the performance of the officers on the field. Post training on passing out from the Nigerian Defence Academy is necessary to improve the leadership and command skills of officers. Nigerian Army School of Infantry provides leadership training and courses to develop the junior officers as their tasks and roles expand. The courses are also aimed at developing and enhancing the combat and leadership administrative skills of the junior officers and military leaders in the Nigerian Army.

### **3. Challenges in Training of Junior Commanders**

A major factor in the military's shortcoming has been the lack of effective leadership particularly from the junior officer commanders. There is need to improve on the training and retraining of junior officers of the Nigerian Army to overcome the challenges they face as they carry out their leadership responsibilities in the army. Junior commanders lack the requisite tools to suit the responsibilities on the field due to inadequate training. The demand for manpower is high, and over the years the increase in strength of cadets undergoing training has increased with little relation to the instructors. This affects the quality of training which thereafter reflects on the field. The quality of the training needs to be improved upon to enhance the performance of junior commanders on the field.

The current contemporary challenges are diverse and therefore the training currently adopted may not completely address or prepare junior commanders for the tasks ahead. The preceding paragraphs elaborate on the challenges faced in the training of junior commanders in the Nigerian Army.

#### **3.1 Lack of Updated and Applicable Curricula**

The curriculum for training in military institutions is necessary for achieving goals and objectives for the training of junior officers as platoon commanders. But the curriculum in the Nigerian training institutions does not meet the threshold and is sometimes not relevant to the context at play. The training syllabus used by the military training centres does not comprehensively cater for the contemporary security challenges facing Nigeria (Kumapayi, 2011). Even though, conventional war is the primary aim of the Nigerian Army, however, it has found itself more

involved in internal security situations, an assertion that was further reinforced by Otu Effiong (2019). The study recognised that the training institutions in Nigeria, over the years, have been dedicated towards the training of its military for peacekeeping missions as the twin issues of insurgency and terrorism, which are recent developments had not yet reared their ugly heads in the nation. This had proved to be consequential in the efficiency of platoon commanders as the syllabus is hardly adjusted to provide for this need. Thus, in a study by Maikomo and Ngomba, it is perceived that the training curriculum at the Nigerian Army military academies has not been able to reflect the training needs of the Nigerian Army troops counterinsurgency operations (COIN) such as in Operation Lafiya Dole (OPLD). He asserts that many of the programmes indicated at the training curriculum is not covered at the various military training academies in Nigerian Army (Maikomo, 2013). There is therefore the need to review its training curriculum for enhanced counter-insurgency operations for junior commanders.

#### **3.2 Poor Quality of Training for Junior Commanders**

The military in Nigeria is understaffed and undertrained. Despite the elaborate training institutions, and the service headquarters issue training directives to units and formations annually; effective training continue to decline over the years. Many reasons account for this decline, the training centres lack qualified instructors, instructor to cadet ratio to achieve results is inadequate thereby tactical training and its overall quality is increasingly in decline which leaves much to be desired. Junior officers as platoon leaders require a high standard of training to meet the modern trends to asymmetric warfare. For example, leadership training for counter-insurgency operations requires training equipment that are unique. However, the equipment holding in various training centres in Nigerian Army training institutions are inadequate and do not enable efficiency of platoon commanders and their subordinates (Kumapayi, 2011). It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian Army consider expanding its training capabilities to accommodate and meet up the strength requirement.

#### **3.3 Inadequate Use of ICT Relevant Sources**

The timely receipt of, and exchange of information is inherent in the operations of a platoon unit. This is because the free flow of information enables a platoon unit to identify hostile tendencies and likely actions before and after an operation. Most

adversaries rely on ICT for their communication and planning. According to a study by Kumapayi (2011), ICT training in the Nigerian Defence Army and other Nigerian Army training institutions is circumscribed to basic operations of computers. In developed countries like the USA, weaponised ICT operated gadgets are employed for warfare. An example is it's the USA's military use of tactical drones and attack drones, others include computerised unmanned ariel vehicles (UAVs), built by its Army. The Nigerian Army therefore needs to extend ICT training beyond the basic use of computers. This may be achieved by broadening the scope of the newly established Cyberwarfare Command to incorporate a broader spectrum of an enhanced training of its personnel to apply ICT in all kinds of warfare. This would improve and encourage ICT skill employment by junior commanders.

### **3.4 Lack of Adequate Instructors at Training Institutions**

Training at military institutions requires adequate manpower in the form of principal staff and instructors which are required to administer the officers and conduct training for students. For effective training, qualified instructors are required to enhance and develop the performances of junior officers as platoon commanders. However, the Nigerian Army training institutions lack adequate manpower thereby, limiting the training capacity of schools which has undermined military training of junior commanders. (Maikomo, 2013). Lack of adequate manpower thus, serves as a contending issue for the efficient performance of junior officers as platoon commanders. The Nigerian Army postings of capable instructors to its training institution for training of officers should be prioritized. Also, the Nigerian Army can employ the use of retired service personnel to serve as instructors at these institutions. Furthermore, training aids such as instructional training videos such as the British Army Instructional Military Training clips for all subjects can be created to fill in gaps and used for effective teaching of junior commanders during and after training sessions.

## **4. Way Forward**

Considering the challenges and need for improved training of junior commanders which will impact their performance on the field, there is the need to improve training of junior officers in the Nigerian Army. The importance of training and re-training in the army cannot be over emphasised. Training is the hallmark of professionalism. Ogbaji (2014: 187)

emphasised the assertion by General Rommel in her paper thus:

*War makes extremely heavy demands on soldiers' strength and nerves. For this reason, make heavy demands on your men in peacetime exercises. It is difficult to maintain contact in fog... Advances through fog by means of a compass must be practised, since smoke will frequently be employed. In a meeting engagement in the fog, the side capable of developing a maximum fire power on contact will get the upper hand; therefore, keep the machine guns ready for action at all times during the advance. All units of the group must provide for their own security. This is especially true in close terrain and when faced with a highly mobile enemy. Too much spade work is better than too little. Sweat saves blood...*

Some further considerations are discussed below.

### **4.1 Collective Training of Platoons/Units in Oversea Military Academies**

In the past years, Nigerian military personnel have been trained in foreign countries like the United Kingdom and the United States military to enhance the efficiency of junior officers in combat operations. (Jamieson, 2017). However, the training is done in small numbers and in most cases, individually and not the whole platoon/unit. This serves as a constraint to the adroitness of the platoon unit as per the lack of uniformity in training. To overcome this difficulty, it is suggested that when sending platoon commanders to foreign countries for military training, the platoon as a unit should take part. The importance of the collective training of the platoon unit in combat operations cannot be overemphasized as this would augment understanding and confidence between the platoon unit in combat operations.

### **4.2 Improve Relationship Between the Platoons Commanders and Platoon Sergeants**

According to a study by the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, the Platoon commander (PC) and Platoon Sergeant (PSG) leadership team is a unique and an influential pair of roles that exist in the army (United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioural and Social Sciences, 2018). For a platoon to succeed, an effective partnership must exist between the Platoon commanders and the Platoon Sergeants. Many of the tools and training currently available to junior officers in the Nigerian Army focuses mainly on learning tasks necessary for performing their duties or managing relations with superiors and their

platoon subordinates. However, less focus is placed on developing working relations between the Platoon Leaders and Platoon Sergeants that would ultimately enhance platoon efficiency (Kumapayi, 2011). There is therefore, the need to comprehensively indoctrinate and develop a working relationship between the Platoon Leaders and the Sergeants. More so, it is necessary to develop a guide to assist in building a professional relationship between the two. The guide would be used when a new leader or sergeant enters the platoon, enabling the two leaders to arrive at a shared understanding of their partnership and their platoon. It also doubles as a snag in a situation where the Platoon Leader is inexperienced, he would consequently seek mentorship from the Platoon Sergeant. In a similar vein, the junior officers in the Nigerian Army have the tendencies of relegating the importance of non-commissioned officers. There are instances where the commanders bully and browbeat their subordinates. This is an adverse attitude and approach to leadership as a platoon commander. The United States (US) Army had the same setback especially in its wars, whereby, commanders tend to intimidate their subordinates and have a somewhat demeaning attitude towards them. However, to resolve this, the United States Army established a school where commissioned and non-commissioned military personnel collectively train without any rank, name, or other forms of anterior identifications, called the 'Ranger School'. They commit to a 62-day small unit tactic and leadership course that develops their functional skills, which is designed to physically stress students to a point short of death (Lock, 2005). The training has been one of the major solutions to the inefficacy of junior commanders in the field. The same could be replicated in the Nigerian Army whereby, cadets, right after commissioning and before engaging in combat operations, could be trained in such military school as the Ranger School.

#### **4.3 Use of Technology Driven Innovations for Training and Instructional Videos**

Military organizations in the world have historically turned to technology to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of their training. Two examples of these technological innovations whose development have been substantial are the Computer Assisted Instructions (CAI) and Simulation-Based Instructions (SBI) (Mustafa, et al, 2011). The Nigerian Military training institutions need to introduce the computer assisted instructions and simulations for the training of junior officers. An example of such programme is the Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching (PLATO) which was specifically designed for the development and presentation of instructions by the

US Army (Donald, *et al*, 1961). It allowed for digitized graphics with animation to be displayed along with text during teaching operations. This would be of immense importance to the training of junior officers as it tends to adjust the space, sequence, and difficulty of task so that learning is accelerated allowing junior officers to learn and focus on 'what they need to learn' rather than 'what they already know'. On the other hand, simulation innovations should be used by the Nigerian Army for the training of its junior officers to make them effective platoon commanders; this is so because simulations create a combat-like environment and concentrate on learning through interactions with the authentic 'real world' experiences which is inherent to the effective training of junior officers to prepare them for combat operations. To further buttress this, Captain S. T. Payne (2020), when he was commenting on the potency of realistic exercise in the British Army, asserts that "*No amount of Sandhurst-type leadership training by itself can replicate the lessons one learns on realistic exercises in a close-to-realistic training environment and alongside the people with whom you'll deploy*". This initiative thus gives the junior commanders a notion of how the combat field looks like in real-time. The Nigerian Army should accommodate more slots in the newly established Land Forces Simulation Centre for training of its junior commanders, producing animated videos and instructional training videos.

#### **4.4 Prioritise and Develop on Advanced Situational Awareness**

Junior commanders operate in a complex environment requiring that they attend to multiple information sources, prioritise among competing and sometimes conflicting goals, and make rapid decisions all under highly stressful conditions where the loss of life, either their own or that of their subordinates is a constant threat. To complicate the issue, the junior commanders are relatively inexperienced officers with minimal service time, training, and experience to draw on. In this environment, superior Situational Awareness (SA) provides tremendous advantages to those with the ability to acquire it and the experience to use it. Situational awareness is conceptualised by Endsley, as the 'perception of the elements in the environment within a volume of time and space the comprehension of their meaning and the projection of their status in the future' (Endsley, 1993). In this regard, the Nigerian Army training institutions should develop an advance technology, leadership development and training concepts targeted at enhancing situational awareness at all echelons. This

is so because, in a demanding combat environment where infantry platoon leaders operate, superior situational awareness brings survivability and optimizing lethality.

#### **4.5 Preserve a Realistic Training Environment for Military Training**

The Nigerian military training institutions like Nigerian Defence Academy and Nigerian Army School of Infantry only provide basic tactics training, which is no doubt significant to combat operations. But of more importance is carrying out realistic practical training for the junior officers. Building on Bourdieu's theory of social practice (Bourdieu, 1993), carrying out realistic pre-deployment training should occur in a militarized field of power, identified, and located within a field which should be shaped by the structures of the real combat environment. The interplay of social norms, practices and discourse that determine the behaviour and thinking of enemy actors that operate within the field should form the field's habitat. This is to provide junior officers with the ability to think ahead and anticipating the unknown, the unexpected, thus possibly countering an oversight long before it becomes an obstacle. Appending to this, unlike the basic tactical training where junior commanders are trained to 'see what they can do', using realistic pre-deployment settings enables them to 'see and perceive what the enemy can do'. Captain Payne acknowledged its significance in the British Army when he asserted in an interview that "...*I would say the training regime for operations as a whole underwent a huge operational transformation... All that realistic training gave confidence to the Platoon commanders...the British Army was (anecdotally) pretty poor at the Company and below level at the start of say, Iraq. Blokes talk about the really ropey drills they had. All that improved hugely. The realistic pre-deployment training was really heavily invested in to test and rehearse those levels of command.*" (Payne, 2020).

#### **5. Conclusion**

Despite the establishment and updating of training curriculum and training centres for Nigerian Army personnel, the performance of junior commanders still falls below the standard as observed on the field. This can be cast on the variables of different training and diversity of skills within a unit, and therefore the need to conduct more combined training for Platoon commanders and their men. The Nigerian Army should therefore consider collective training for its personnel in oversea military institutions. The

establishment of a training avenue for Platoon leaders and their Sergeants would breach the gap between them. Recurring weak cooperative attitude between Platoon leaders and the sergeants has gravely affected the performance of junior commanders on the field. The Nigerian Army can therefore establish a combined training course for the two groups to breach communication gap and create more synergy between them.

Globalisation and Technological advancement have since time immemorial advanced with every passing minute. The need for constant update of ICT knowledge gives an edge to an individual. The need to be updated and ICT-compliant not just in basic computer application but its employment in warfare would improve the performance of a junior commander. The Nigerian Army should therefore consider expanding the roles of the Nigerian Army Cyberwarfare Command to train the young commanders on ICT and its possible application for warfare. Furthermore, cyberwarfare command should be able to accommodate large scale training via real life simulated training of junior commanders to prepare them in line with the modern trend of warfare. The Nigerian Army can also consider employing the use of instructional training video aid for officers to enhance assimilation.

Situational awareness can be a tool to draw out field experience for them to quickly adjust and prepare themselves for future tasks. The Nigerian Army training institutions should therefore develop concepts to enhance situational awareness for junior commanders. As the security challenges evolve globally, it also affects the nature and pace at which the Nigerian contemporary security architecture operates. The evolving nature and situation on the battlefield need be brought to bear on the junior commanders operational and combat readiness. It is therefore imperative that realistic training environment be used for training. The Nigerian Army could construct training villages to portray realistic training environment to improve Junior Commanders performance in combat.

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