Training Junior Officers for Tomorrow’s Army

Subject Area Training

EWS 2006
**Title:** Training Junior Officers for Tomorrow’s Army

**Performing Organization:** United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068

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**Limitation of Abstract:** Same as Report (SAR)
“... I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. ...”

— Soldier’s Creed

The pilot class of the Army’s Basic Officer Leadership Course (Phase II) graduated on 25 August 2005 at Infantry Hall on Fort Benning, Georgia. These 173 new Army Second Lieutenants were the first graduates of the Army’s new company grade officer training program. This program collectively known as the Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) is designed to dramatically change the way in which the Army trains its junior officers. BOLC is designed to produce leaders who are ready to deploy and lead soldiers into combat. These changes to the Army’s system for training junior officers are the first but not final step towards a more technically and tactically competent officer corps. Army Officer training is undergoing a profound modification designed to produce officers who better meet the demands of our profession. We still need further alterations in our Officer Education System (OES) if our Officer Corps is to meet the needs of an operating force caught in the throes of a vast organizational transformation while fighting in the Global War on
Terrorism. The newest edition to the OES, BOLC II, will require several modifications prior to its implementation.

**Overview of the BOLC Program**

A 2001-2002 Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study concluded that the Officer Education System does not provide the company grade officer the necessary skills for success in full-spectrum operations. In order to create a more competent and professional officer corps, the panel recommended three phases of training for junior officers. The three phases of the Army’s Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) are outlined below.

BOLC I occurs during pre-commissioning and consists of training conducted at the U.S. Military Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps, and the Officer Candidate School. The objective of BOLC I is that prior to commissioning every potential officer “be steeped in the Army’s values and traditions and will possess clear knowledge of what it means to be an officer.”

BOLC II will be every officer’s initial-entry training. This phase will be six weeks long and concentrate on battlefield leadership, specifically in the contemporary operational environment. The course will
consist of branch-immaterial instruction which will revolve around small-unit leadership and tactics designed to challenge officers physically and mentally. Each officer will undergo training at one of four sites; Fort Benning, Fort Bliss, Fort Knox or Fort Sill. vi

BOLC III will consist of branch specific technical training. Since phase III is different for every officer the courses are not consolidated as in Phase II. Phase III training occurs at each branch’s Officer Basic Course (OBC) and occupies from six to fourteen weeks, branch dependent. vii Each officer receives instruction in the distinctive “skills, doctrine, tactics and techniques of their assigned branch.” viii After completing BOLC III, officers proceed to their first unit or attend more assignment-oriented training.

While BOLC Phase I and III were operational under the old two phase junior officer educational system, BOLC II is a completely new addition to junior officer training in the Army. Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) has been executing trial BOLC II courses since fiscal year 2001-02. ix The pilot classes have led TRADOC to conduct revisions to the programs of instruction (POI). After one more pilot
course at Fort Benning next January, Fort Benning and Fort Sill will begin training all new lieutenants in June.\textsuperscript{x}

**Purpose of BOLC II**

The mission of the Basic Officer Leader Course II (BOLC II) is to develop competent and confident small unit combat leaders. The A-Company 1st Battalion 11th Infantry Regiment (A-CO 1/11th IN Rgt) is responsible for the Basic Officer Leader Course II (BOLC II).\textsuperscript{x1}

BOLC II will be comprised of officers from both the active and reserve components. It will be every officer’s initial-entry training. The desired product of BOLC II is an officer leader proficient in:

- warrior tasks and warrior battle drills, who is self-aware and adaptable, who will not accept defeat and will never quit, and who will demonstrate the characteristics of an Army leader while living the Army values and embodying the Warrior Ethos.\textsuperscript{x11}

This phase will also seek to include lessons learned from the Global War on Terrorism in order to prepare junior officers who may join units already deployed or preparing to deploy.

Maj. Kevin Elder, commander of A Company, 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment, the unit charged with executing BOLC II at Fort Benning, said:
You’re looking at future platoon, company, battalion and division commanders. They get this core warrior training, a core knowledge base they’ll all have to use to deal with any situation that arises on the battlefield. It’s not to make infantrymen out of them, it’s to make warriors out of them. What we’re trying to do is make sure everyone has an underpinning of being a warrior first; being able to engage a target, read a map, conduct a convoy. It’s a lot different, and it’s different for the best.xiii

Col. Mark Ritter, 11th Infantry Regiment commander, whose unit will be responsible for BOLC II at Ft. Benning, stated:

Regardless of branch, they will be getting a large dose of warfighting skills, field craft and leadership skills. The officers will go through a common experience to ensure those desired attributes are present in all of our officers. I think it’s going to change the Army in a profound way, I think the officers who will lead our Army for the immediate conflict and in the future will be better trained to fight in the contemporary operating environment.xiv

“Leader development – while educating them to think broadly – must prepare them for the complexities on the battlefields they’ll see when they join their first units,” said Gen. Kevin P. Byrnes, the former commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, during an Oct. 27, 2004, presentation at the Association of the United States Army’s annual meeting in Washington.

We’re fighting a small-unit war. It’s being fought by staff sergeants, sergeants first class, lieutenants and captains every day. They’re the ones out on patrol; they’re the ones who are in this extremely
complex environment where things change from the minute they leave their compound until they return that evening. They may never get to accomplish the objective they had set for the day because things happen en route. We’ve got to make sure our leaders are prepared for those complexities and changes and have a framework to refer to, a handrail to grab on to, and an understanding of foundational concepts. Eighty percent of BOLC II will be conducted in a field environment. All officers will receive common instruction before going off to their branch technical courses. This is a major shift.\textsuperscript{xv}

**BOLC II, a Closer Look\textsuperscript{1}\right**

While General Byrnes is correct in that BOLC II is a shift in the way the Army trains junior officers the program in its current form leaves much to be desired if it is to fulfill the high expectations that the leaders quoted above have set for it. There are many areas in the training program which can be improved. In the paragraphs below a more detailed critique of the program is offered.

Currently five of the seven weeks of BOLC II are devoted to training. The first week of training revolves around combatives. The use of combatives is not prevalent in Army training, many officers and units do not train on them. Indeed ROTC and the various Officer Basic Courses have never focused any amount of time on this topic. Giving junior officers a significant amount of training on

\textsuperscript{1} For more information on BOLC II the weekly schedule has been included as Appendix I.
combatives could help make knowledge of them more prevalent throughout the Army and help spread the warrior spirit.

A significant portion of the first week along with the entirety of the second week is devoted to Basic Rifle Marksmanship (BRM) with the M-16A2 rifle. While it is undeniable that every soldier should be expert with their personnel weapon by the time the new Lieutenants reach BOLC II they should all be well trained its use. Every Lieutenant will have spent their two to four years of ROTC and the summer spent at Leadership Development and Assessment Course (LDAC) in training which will either be focused on this weapon (i.e. qualification) or that presupposes a working knowledge of the M-16. The time spent on BRM at BOLC II would be better spent on other material that the new officers are not already proficient at.

Five hours are allocated for Night Vision Goggle (NVG) training. While this may sound sufficient every block of instruction is scheduled during daylight hours. This scheduling rules out any practical use of these devices. The utility of such training must be brought into question.

Each platoon in the BOLC class will spend one day each on the following: Convoy live fire, classroom training on day and night land navigation, Forward Operating Base (FOB)
security planning and execution, small unit tactics techniques and procedures (TTPs), IEDs, FOB Operations, Convoy Operations, and a day and night land navigation course. The day spent at the Convoy live fire range is conducted before that devoted to Convoy Operations. This would have the live fire phase of training being performed before the officers have a clear picture of what Convoy Operations entail thus reducing the effectiveness of the training as a whole.

During the week spent on Convoy Operations there is no time allocated to mounted land navigation. Two hours are spent on GPS training; none is spent on the use of Blue Force Tracker or FBCB2. These are the platforms most commonly used for mounted navigation in the operating force. It is likely that the argument will be made that the new Lieutenant’s operational unit will provide training on the use of these complex devices. However with the rapid operational tempo it is unlikely that operational units will have the time to conduct proper training on these pieces of equipment.

Week five devotes a day each to Advanced Rifle Marksmanship (ARM), Quick Reaction Force (QRF) drills, and US weapons (M2, M240B, M203, MK19, M249). Also two and a half days are devoted to training on Urban Operations.
These junior officers will eventually serve as platoon leaders and be charged with the employment of crew served weapons. Most ROTC programs do not have access to the weapons or the ranges required to train on the employment of these systems. With BOLC II the Army will have the opportunity to train its junior officers on the use of these weapons. This will take far longer than the day set aside for the task. Week two which is currently allocated to BRM with the M-16 rifle would be better used by focusing on US Weapons with a day each divided between classroom and practical employment/live fire with the M2, M240B, M203, MK19, and M249.

The week prior to out-processing is spent on FOB mission operations in the Contemporary Operational Environment (COE). This week will be spent entirely in the field and cover such areas as traffic control points, clearing main supply routes, and security patrols. The final week of BOLC III is to be spent conducting out-processing which entails each officer’s final counseling and turn-in of their field gear. While these administrative tasks must be accomplished there will be a significant amount of unused time during which we incorporate classroom instruction.
One striking omission of the BOLC II is the total lack of training on fire support. Very few of these officers will be able to conduct live fire calls for fire or close air support (CAS) at their Officer Basic Course. BOLC II provides an opportunity to give each officer experience in employing these supporting arms. An additional week added prior to Convoy Operations week would allow the officers to become comfortable with conducting calls for fire and incorporate artillery and CAS into the rest of their training.

Conclusion

The Army’s Officer Educational System is undergoing a transformation to better support the operating forces by producing a more capable, combat-ready officer. The training is designed to be highly valuable to those deployed to the current operational environment. Our junior officers must have a greater understanding of the employment of the small unit and supporting arms in order to maximize the combat power at their disposal. While BOLC will improve Army Officer training we still need further alterations to BOLC II to maximize the limited training we have for junior officers.
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- AIMSS 2 (CCO)
- AIMSS 3 (AN/PVS 7/14)
- AIMSS 5 (ANPEQ-2A)
- PARTICIPATE IN A MEDIA INTERVIEW

**BRM 1**

**BRM 2 / FUNDAMENTALS OF MARKSMANSHIP**

**DINNER / WEAPONS TURN IN**

**STUDENT TRAINING PREP**

**STUDENT LED AAR**

**STUDENT LED SAFETY BRIEF**

**STUDENT TRAINING PREP**

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**Monday:**
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**Tuesday:**
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**Wednesday:**
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**Thursday:**
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**Friday:**
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**Saturday:**
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**Sunday:**
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### URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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Bibliography


