



**THE SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF PREPARATION FOR
OFFICERS OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE’S ARMY PARTICIPATING IN
COMMAND AND STAFF COURSES ABROAD**

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JCSP 50

Service Paper

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 50 - PCEMI n° 50
2023 - 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, international integration and foreign defense relations are major policies of Vietnam, serving the dual purpose of advancing international cooperation and contributing to national defense through peaceful means. In recent years, international integration and foreign defense relations have expanded both in breadth and depth, becoming pillars of the national diplomacy, and people's diplomacy. They contribute to building comprehensive strength, providing a foundation for early and distant protection of the homeland through maintaining a peaceful and stable environment for national development, efficiently leveraging external resources, and enhancing the role, position, and reputation of the country, and the Vietnam People’s Army in particular, on the international stage.¹

With the strong and diverse development of multilateral and bilateral defense relationships in recent times, the coordination of training military officers between Vietnam and its partners has been intensified. Vietnam regularly offers courses in teaching Vietnamese language and culture for international military students from 24 countries² and provides specialized courses in jungle warfare for some military partners. Vietnam is also a regular destination for study tours by international defense studies delegations. On the other hand, the Ministry of National Defense of Vietnam frequently receives offers to participate in various training courses from partner countries, including language training, infantry cadet training, and joint staff officer training (like the Joint Command and Staff Programme). It is evident that training coordination is an important channel in enhancing the effectiveness of Vietnam's foreign defense relations, while also serving as a means for the Vietnamese military and other nations to understand each other's goals, ideals, cultures, and perspectives better.

Every Vietnamese student sent abroad for training is entrusted with tasks related to foreign affairs, who is representing the image of the Vietnam People’s Army to the international community.³ Therefore, activities related to learning and building relationships with friendly countries are crucial. Adequate preparation for participating in courses is essential for each student individually and the supporting agencies in general. This article will address some notable issues in the preparation work for students participating in joint staff officer training courses (similar to JCSP) and propose some solutions to enhance the quality of these activities.

¹ Vietnam’s National Defense White Paper, 2019, PART 1 - STRATEGIC CONTEXT

² “Học Viện Khoa Học Quân Sự Nâng Cao Chất Lượng Giáo Dục, Đào Tạo Đáp Ứng Yêu Cầu, Nhiệm vụ Trong Tình Hình Mới - Tạp Chí Quốc Phòng Toàn Dân.” n.d. Tapchiquptd.vn. Accessed February 20, 2024. <http://tapchiquptd.vn/vi/bao-ve-to-quoc/hoc-vien-khoa-hoc-quan-su-nang-cao-chat-luong-giao-duc-dao-tao-dap-ung-yeu-cau-nhiem-vu-tr/19060.html>.

³ “Giao Nhiệm vụ Cho Học Viên Đi Học ở Nước Ngoài Năm 2023.” n.d. <https://www.qdnd.vn>. Accessed February 20, 2024. <https://www.qdnd.vn/quoc-te/doi-ngoai-quoc-phong/giao-nhiem-vu-cho-hoc-vien-di-hoc-o-nuoc-ngoai-nam-2023-740857>.

DISCUSSION

Some notable issues in preparing officers for participation in foreign courses

Participating in overseas courses for officers and non-commissioned officers of the Vietnamese army is a complex and labor-intensive activity, requiring the participation of individuals and organizations, and coordination between military and civil agencies. Each course in different countries has unique characteristics, depending on factors such as host nation's culture, society, law, and living standards, etc. Based on my preparation experience and exchanges with other students, some factors to consider in preparing for participation in foreign military courses are as follows:

For Individuals

Mindset Preparation. Being selected to study abroad, in environments with different societies, climates, cultures, and lifestyles than Vietnam, this will pose a psychological challenge that students must address and overcome. The absence of government policies supporting family members accompanying students studying abroad means most Vietnamese students go unaccompanied. The separation from family is a significant challenge that needs attention during the preparation process. In addition to preparing themselves mentally, each student needs to prepare their family members and related issues to their family and relatives because in Vietnam, men often play crucial roles in family and clan activities, therefor making psychological preparation for family members particularly important.

Language Preparation. While foreign language training, especially in English, is gaining importance in Vietnamese state agencies, the language communication skills training in Vietnam faces challenges due to a lack of suitable practice environments. Notably, military officers proficient in foreign languages often come from military language training academies or units involved in military foreign affairs. Conversely, staff and command officers frequently lack the required language skills, making it challenging to select suitable officers for joint staff and command courses. This situation complicates the application of learned knowledge to their work after graduation, as they often return to their units before attending courses. For officers at military language schools and units related to foreign affairs, the use of command skills is rarely used, while staff units greatly need this knowledge.

Knowledge Preparation. Understanding the differences in military systems between Vietnam and other countries, especially NATO, is crucial. The distinct nature of the Vietnamese military system makes it challenging for Vietnamese officers to absorb and understand the training content of foreign courses, especially the NATO countries. Therefore, early preparation and understanding of foreign military systems are vital. In my case, being the first Vietnamese participant in the Joint Command and Staff Programme course in Canada, with no prior experience or materials to refer to, the preparation time was also very short (less than a month). Consequently, I had to research everything from scratch, especially the Canadian military's system, history, cultural values, and the differences from the Vietnamese military. After the course starts, the differences in military systems have posed significant challenges for me in understanding the content of each lesson. For me, the process of studying materials typically involves three steps: reading the provided documents, comparing them with equivalent issues in Vietnam, and

extracting similarities and differences. This issue often leads to the preparation time for each of my lesson being two to three times longer than that of Canadian students, especially for the discussions. Particularly in Roto 2, the Operational Planning Process (OPP) courses highlight to me the differences in the military systems of Vietnam and Canada or NATO countries, making it difficult for me to comprehend and contribute to the planning activities of the syndicate.

Procedural Preparation. This is a critical issue in the preparation process for each Vietnamese officer. In Vietnam, the preparation work of officers only begins when receiving the appointment decision from the Ministry of National Defense. However, in my case, as the first person to take the JCSP course in Canada, different procedures in Canada and Vietnam caused delays and my appointment decision was made before the course only one month. This greatly affected my preparation process, leaving me with very little time to research and prepare the necessary knowledge for the course.

It can be seen that the preparation process of officers participating in foreign courses is very complex, including solving psychological, linguistic and knowledge challenges as well as facing complex procedural issues. These considerations will make it easier for Vietnamese officers to adapt to host nation's culture and the courses' curriculum and improve the quality of students' learning.

For Military Agencies

Support in Completing Participation Procedures. Typically, the officer's unit is responsible for supporting the officer in completing the necessary paperwork for participation in foreign courses. However, personnel assigned to handle these procedures in units often lack experience, leaving most officers to handle the paperwork related to the Ministry of Defense's appointment decision to send them to study independently. In my case, differences in the paperwork process between Canada and Vietnam, especially the need for a notarized confirmation from the Canadian Ministry of Defense regarding the readiness to accept the chosen Vietnamese officer – a process not part of Canada's procedures – led to significant time consumption. The lack of synchronization in this process not only extended the preparation time but also created pressure on the individual being sent for training, leaving them with little time to prepare for knowledge and language before departure.

Policies For Students. The issue of policies for officers studying abroad is often overlooked. Specifically, officers sent for foreign study receive only 40% of their base salary, with all allowances cut. If the host country provides the allowances, the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense will not provide additional allowances to the officers⁴. In my case, the salary received was only 25-30% of the salary earned while working at the unit. This places significant economic and psychological pressure on the officer and their family, particularly considering the cost of living in high-income countries like the United States and Canada. On the other hand, in Vietnam, applying for desired positions is not commonly practiced due to complex regulations. Therefore, the knowledge acquired from command and staff courses may be challenging to effectively apply for officers coming from language training academies and foreign affairs agencies, where officers

⁴ 4 Article 8 Decree No. 204/2004/ND-CP

are often selected to attend such courses. This is an issue that needs attention and needs to be improved in the future.

Preparation of Knowledge for Vietnamese Students. Due to differences in command and control systems between Vietnam and NATO countries, it is essential to prepare officers who are selected for foreign courses with the necessary knowledge and materials. Currently, Vietnam lacks training courses related to this content, and receiving pre-course reading materials from host countries for participants to study in advance is rare. As a result, participants have little time in their preparation, lacking relevant pre-reading materials to proactively study in advance.

Some solutions to enhance the effectiveness of preparing for participation in command and staff courses

For Individuals

Psychological Preparation. There are 5 things you need to prepare thoroughly before studying abroad: independence, positive attitude, seriousness, progressive spirit, and openness. Firstly, you need to acknowledge that during your study abroad, you will be away from your family and your homeland, living in a different country with a different culture. Independence is a crucial factor that helps you solve personal issues and cope with the challenges of work, study, and homesickness. Second, maintaining a positive attitude and optimistic outlook will help you quickly adapt to the new environment, creating a positive inspiration to start your studies and find ways to overcome difficulties easily. It's essential to note that the preparation process for the journey will also present many challenging issues, so a positive attitude is crucial to overcome. Third, a serious attitude towards preparation and studying is necessary, you need to approach preparation and studying with seriousness. Any important issues should be listed in detail using a checklist, and you should exchange ideas with your predecessors to know additional necessary notes for preparation. Fourth, having a progressive spirit, eagerness to learn is a mindset that will help you eliminate insecurities and worries during communication in the foreign study environment. Simultaneously, it assists you in absorbing knowledge more effectively. Listen, learn from your friends, and be ready to ask questions when you don't understand. One thing you also need to prepare is being openness. In the Joint Command and Staff Courses, there will be numerous extracurricular activities. Therefore, an outgoing nature is essential to help you quickly integrate into the new society and establish relationships—an important goal of the course.

Language Preparation. This preparation task entirely depends on you. Although it's the English language, each country has its distinct accent, so you need to be proactive in preparing for this aspect. YouTube and local television channels are always valuable resources for you to listen to and get familiar with the accent of the place you are preparing to go. Additionally, some host countries may arrange a sponsor family for you. You can contact them, and engage in conversations with them before you go to get acquainted and learn more about living conditions and culture. This will significantly contribute to improving your language proficiency.

Knowledge Preparation. This is a somewhat challenging issue for individuals. You should reach out to previous students to ask for insights, materials, and study experiences. Additionally, the relevant agencies in Vietnam should request the host nation to provide pre-reading materials. It will help learners gain an early understanding of the command and control system of host

nation's military. This will help the students establish foundational knowledge before participating in the course, contributing to an enhanced learning outcome.

Procedures Preparation. This aspect needs to be handled similarly to knowledge preparation. You should proactively communicate with predecessors and, at the same time, initiate contact with relevant authorities to understand and resolve any lingering issues. This proactive approach will assist the relevant agencies in carrying out their tasks more efficiently in the future.

For Military Organizations

Unified Procedure. Ensure synchronization between Vietnamese and partner countries' procedures for preparing documentation for individuals attending courses. To achieve this, relevant agencies need to be more proactive in handling documents and records. Simultaneously, individuals involved should take greater responsibility in their tasks, avoiding situations where unfamiliar or difficult tasks are pushed onto others, this significantly impacting the timeliness of executing related procedures.

Policy Considerations. Adjust Salary Policies: Evaluate and adjust financial policies to align with the financial needs of officers' families. The reducing salaries by about 70% can negatively impact the student, especially when their families face financial difficulties. On the other hand, candidate's selection is also very important. The selection of officers with appropriate expertise to participate in relevant courses is crucial. It is necessary to carefully consider choosing officers with expertise in military operational planning, who have willing to participate the command and staff courses, develop their language skills, and be ready to send them when opportunities arise. This also helps ensure that the knowledge acquired will be applied within the specific professional trade of the officers selected for training.

Knowledge Enhancement. To ensure the best readiness for the officers selected for training, Vietnamese agencies should organize short-term training courses, lasting from 1 to 2 weeks, focusing on the basic knowledge related to the command and control systems of the countries providing the courses for the students. The curriculum could be coordinated with the partner country. These contents need to be regularly updated after participants complete the courses to systematize the experiences and knowledge acquired, facilitating easier access for future course participants to the latest information.

CONCLUSION

It can be observed that the preparation for Vietnamese officers participating in command and staff courses abroad has received increased attention from the Ministry of National Defense in recent times. However, there are still existing issues that need further consideration and improvement to enhance the quality of officers before and after the training courses. To achieve good results in the courses, in addition to the individual efforts of the officers during the study period, the preparatory work plays a crucial role in ensuring readiness in all aspects for the learners. This can only be achieved through a well preparation by the learners with professional support from relevant agencies. Through this article, I hope that my insights and experiences shared will contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of strategic command courses in particular and other courses in general, as well as in Canada and other countries.

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