

Soldier duties as a form of shaping the ethos of military service

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ABSTRACT

The war which broke out on February 24, 2022, as a result of the military aggression of Russian Federation against Ukraine once again shattered the state of relative peace in Europe and re-evaluated the perception of threats, shifting focus from non-military threats to military ones. Thus, the issue of the readiness of the state, including the readiness of its military forces acting as its armed wing, for another potential military conflict came to the forefront of all discussions conducted in the political, scientific and social world. Events on the international arena coincided with measures undertaken as part of the Ministry of National Defence. These consist primarily in increasing the number of soldiers in the Polish Army (ultimately up to 300,000 soldiers), increasing combat capacity through modernisation and purchasing modern armament, as well as improving combat capabilities, as assumed by the Development Program of the Armed Forces for 2017-2026 [1]. It is worth noticing that the process focuses not only on supplying the army with modern equipment, but also on shaping in soldiers those features that will be useful both in peacetime and in wartime. What is meant here is soldier duties understood as fulfilment of a certain moral obligations to the Homeland, nation, as well as both military and civil environment. Duties can also be understood in the context of a specific vocation, mission, or responsibility to be fulfilled towards those who established a particular entity, in this case the Polish Army, to fulfil tasks prescribed by law and put their trust in them. In the course of the research, the soldier duties which are relevant to the process of building the ethos of military service and the way in which these duties should be shaped were identified.

KEYWORDS

Polish Army, service ethos, soldier duties, social competences



1. The role of a military organisation in a democratic state

The experience of the Polish state and other democratic countries indicates that the military organisation of each state is, similarly to culture, one of the most separate, autonomous attributes of a nation and state, resulting mainly from differences in geopolitics, traditions, state and military culture as well as in the goals and interests of individual states [2].

The role of the army in the state and society was perfectly explained already in the 16th century by N. Machiavelli who stated that “the foundation of every state is a good army and that wherever there is no army, it is difficult to create good laws and to create anything good in general” [3, p. 73].

The question is which values the army contributes to the state, nation, society and citizens. The answer to this question can be formulated as follows:

- 1. for state institutions:** creating fundamental statehood ties; maintaining the identity, sovereignty and independence of the state; securing the durability, stability and protection and defence of state institutions and structures; securing the functioning and enforcement of law, power, security and public order; supporting the implementation of the internal and foreign policy of the state with military force; deterring military threats; creating the image of strength, efficiency and credibility of the state in its own society and the international environment; supporting authorities and society in situations of special non-military threats; continuous training and military organization of the society.
- 2. for the nation** it is the fundamental national symbol which creates and carries nation’s military traditions; protects and defends national values and interests, as well as shapes the sense of national unity of subsequent generations; co-creates national strength and is an ideal of and motivation for service to the homeland; it is the main source of national pride and both civic and patriotic engagement.
- 3. for the society, including local communities:** it creates social bonds; provides protection and defence of the society while creating conditions for safe development; provides military support for governmental, local and non-governmental organizations; creates a sense of national security within a society; the general territorial defence service is the main test for citizens’ attitudes and social values.
- 4. for the citizen:** it means acquisition and maintenance of civic and patriotic traits and values through military service; preparation for the defence of the homeland, local communities, families and oneself; inclusion in the co-creation of the state, nation and society through a military service

and responsibility for their protection, defence and development; military tradition and military service shape positive motivation in life and belief in one's capabilities.

The bond that connects the military with the society is also worth mentioning, especially at the local level. This relationship was captured accurately by Gen. W. Stachiewicz (Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces during the years 1935-1939): "Neither a society without an army, nor an army without an active help of the whole society, will be victorious" [4, p. 728]. Preparing the society to support the army and military operations was called the military organisation of a civil society by Gen. W. Stachiewicz.

An extremely important aspect of mutual relations between the society and the army is the spiritual bond, especially visible in situations of direct war threats. As I. Pyszora states, researching public mood in Pomerania on the eve of the outbreak of World War II: "The army was constantly close to the society, which satisfied its sense of security through exactly such contacts" [5, p. 164].

It is also to be observed today that the relationship between society and the army is visible in the joint actions of local government authorities, local communities and commanders of military units. On the other hand, the profession of a soldier is characterised by a narrow specialisation, established learning principles which are adapted to the contemporary battlefield requirements and an extensive hierarchy based on issuance of commands [6]. These and many other factors cause the society to expect from soldiers a guarantee of security, impeccable conduct while serving the state and the nation and readiness to help in situations of threat, including non-military ones.

2. The essence of soldier duties in historical approach

In order for the Polish Army to meet the hopes and expectations imposed by the society, soldiers themselves should possess certain character features and interpersonal skills which will guarantee credibility in the eyes of the nation for them. Nowadays, while talking about interpersonal skills of soldiers and commanders we consciously or intuitively realise that they are not an invention or discovery of modern science, but their origin dates back to the times when national armies were created, and in the case of our country – when the Polish Army was established. Although there was no such term as interpersonal skills back then, it was the concern of many commanders to prepare/educate both themselves and individual soldiers so that in the face

of war threat they could fulfil their fundamental duty towards the nation and the state, i.e., be ready to defend the homeland.

The *Internal Service Regulations* issued by the Ministry of Military Affairs in 1924 states that “The value of an armed force is determined by its ability to achieve victory. This capability is composed by the values of the soldiers who form the armed force. The spirit galvanising the army and manifesting itself in the level and intensity of **soldier virtues** is first and foremost of decisive importance. Additionally, victory depends on stamina, capacity to withstand the heavy exertion of combat and accurate knowledge of its means” [7, p. 7].

It is directly from the soldier virtues that the so-called **soldier duties** stem, also called the powers of the spirit, which means psychophysical properties derived on the basis of analysing combat experiences [8]. In a broader context, duties should be considered as certain obligations which a soldier accepts while entering military service and which he keeps in the course of the service in relation to the Homeland and the nation as well as the army, local and family environment.

Spiritual qualities, soldier virtues or, finally, soldier duties, both in the last century and today are one of the most desirable qualities and features conditioning the process of effective command, and thus chances of achieving victory on the battlefield, regardless of its nature. Even when a soldier is equipped with modern weapons but is not endowed with well-developed soldier duties building the ethos of military service, the weapon alone will become a meaningless tool in their hands.

Already in the interwar period the first thematic publications, textbooks and regulations appeared, which systematically and explicitly termed and described the phenomena and processes discussed. Among the authors dealing with this issue, it is worth mentioning such well-known figures as Marshal J. Piłsudski or Colonel M. Porwit [8], as well as Brigadier General S. Sosabowski [9].

Which soldier duties were valued by the commanders and educators among the soldiers of that period?

Col. M. Porwit identifies several fundamental groups of the needs for shaping soldier duties [8]:

- 1) making a soldier aware of their role as a soldier-citizen;
- 2) making them aware of why they prepare for war and what training should look like;
- 3) making them aware of why they follow orders, how they should execute them, what to do when there is no order or the order is no longer viable;

- 4) making them aware of how to behave during the service and how to live honourably;
- 5) making them aware of their obligations towards their colleagues;
- 6) revive the love for the Homeland and the sense of blood ties, alternatively making them aware of the obligation to be loyal and faithful to the Republic of Poland;
- 7) revive one's self-esteem as a human being, the feeling of which is the encouragement for other soldier virtues.

In turn, Lt J. Górski pointed out that discipline and courage need to be put first, as a moral fibre that gives rise to other traits, filling the soldier's spiritual silhouette to the full. Amongst them he distinguished the following [9]:

- 1) comradeship, brotherhood, kindness;
- 2) love for and fidelity to the Homeland;
- 3) dutifulness;
- 4) obedience;
- 5) perseverance at work and in combat;
- 6) capacity of devotion and sacrifice of one's life;
- 7) high independence and reasonable initiative in the outlined framework of action;
- 8) mental resistance to propaganda and demoralising manifestations of combat.

3. Soldier duties of today's Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland

Nowadays we can find plenty of interesting scientific publications on the subject of soldier duties, including those based on empirical research. Among many researchers dealing with this issue, it is worth mentioning such authors as W. Chojnacki, J. Maciejewski or M. Liberacki. However, the analysis of the literature on this subject should be preceded by the presentation of three important normative documents.

The first of them is the Act on Military Service of Professional Soldiers dated 11 September 2003 [10], which was repealed by the Homeland Defence Act dated 11 March 2022 [11]. Although the provisions of the first act have ceased to apply, it is worth quoting them while speaking of the features of a modern soldier: "A professional soldier has a special duty to defend the Republic of Poland and devote themselves to the service for the Nation and the Homeland. They should be a paragon of patriotism and honour; their service should

be performed loyally and conscientiously; they should be a just and attentive commander, guardian and educator, a disciplined subordinate, a sincere and good colleague" [10, Art. 43]. In fact, this short fragment presents a complete picture of the positive qualities of a Polish soldier: a subordinate, commander and a colleague.

Remaining with the Homeland Defence Act, it is worth mentioning the secondary regulation to the above-mentioned legal act, being the regulation of the Minister of National Defence of July 4, 2022, on the official military evaluation [12]. This document regulates the issue of soldiers' evaluation during their active military service and it concerns various aspects, including their competences and predispositions. In order to perform it, an evaluator should consider the following characteristics of a subordinate: responsibility, accuracy and speed of making decisions, resistance to stress and hardships of service, planning and structuring work, communication skills and ability to work in a team, obeying regulations, standards and rules, self-development and improvement of qualifications, caring for equipment and property, impeccable conduct and manners, as well as attention to appearance. The attitude and conduct outside the time of service are also subject to assessment.

Another document in the same vein, but concerning a different matter, is the Code of Honour of a professional soldier of the Polish Army [13]. Although this document is not a source of universally applicable law, because it was adopted by the resolution of the Assembly of the People of Trust of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland dated October 17, 2006. It is a set of specific principles concerning the ethics, honour and dignity of professional soldiers. Among the individual chapters of the code are those concerning the fundamental virtues of a professional soldier, which are: patriotism, bravery, honesty, responsibility, justice, truthfulness and professional solidarity. The contents of the code refer not only to the professional environment of soldiers, but also to their social environment in which they should present the highest moral values, or even be a paragon of good conduct and manners.

The code also indicates that on the battlefield every soldier should display bravery, courage and prudence, and set an example for others with their attitude. In addition, a soldier should take care of the image of the army and the ethos of service with which they identify themselves. The acts unworthy of a soldier according to the code are in particular the following: treason of the Homeland, cowardice on the battlefield, hypocrisy, self-serving, failure to fulfil the obligations adopted.

The review of scientific literature in the field of soldier duties should start with the presentation of the results of research carried out by W. Chojnacki,

who indicates features of people performing the military profession such as: discipline, sense of responsibility, personal dignity, sense of justice and honesty. Among instrumental qualities, of importance are the following ones: firmness, decisiveness, balance, physical and mental resilience, courage, ability to command. Among the social competences, the following are worth mentioning: the ability to cooperate and interact, conscientiousness, good manners and empathy [14].

The results obtained by M. Liberacki are convergent with the presented research. This author distinguishes the following characterological and social predispositions which a soldier of the Polish Armed Forces should have: self-discipline, good manners, the ability to listen and cooperate with subordinates, responsibility, firmness and decisiveness, mental and physical resilience, fairness and honesty [15].

In the presented considerations, it is worth paying attention to the issue of the duties of the Polish Armed Forces soldiers in relation to the external environment. This matter is referred to both by the Code of Honour and one of the criteria for professional opinions. The behaviour of soldiers in public space builds not only the image of a single person, but also influences the ethos of service in the society. This concept is most generally understood as a certain set of ideal cultural patterns, clearly defined, which are applied and implemented by members of a given group [16], but – as K. Świercz correctly notes – the ethos of military service is being increasingly excluded from the area of thinking about state security [17], because the emphasis is placed on the number of soldiers, their armament and munitions, and not on their quality. The negative consequences of this practice may be visible in the next few years, adversely affecting public opinion about the Polish Armed Forces.

On the basis of the data collected during a study carried out in April 2022 by the SW Research survey agency on the subject of the most respected professions by the Polish people [18], the profession of soldier was not highly ranked. The study was carried out between 27 and 28.04.2022 by the SW Research survey agency on a representative sample of $n = 1014$ adult Polish people as part of the OmniWatch48 omnibus study. Method: online interviews, CAWI. Sample source: SW PANEL panel research. In this study, the first three places are occupied by a firefighter, paramedic and a doctor, respectively; with a professional officer in the rank of a Captain of the Polish Armed Forces ranked twelfth, after a qualified worker (e.g., lathe operator, construction worker) and a shoemaker, and before a self-employed farmer in a medium-sized farm [18]. While the position of the first three professions can be explained by the post-pandemic situation and the high public recognition of these professions

during the struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic, it is difficult to find explanations for the eighth position of soldiers who, after all, took an active part in counteracting the pandemic on an equal footing with other uniformed services, especially the soldiers of the Territorial Defence Forces. The army was assessed much better from an institutional point of view. In the research from 2020 on the level of trust in selected institutions, carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre, the army was ranked second, after the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, and ahead of NATO and Caritas, achieving 83% in the level of public trust [19]. There is a high probability that further research results in this area may raise the position of the Polish Armed Forces in the eyes of the society, to which the war raging in Ukraine may undoubtedly contribute.

Conclusion

Shaping soldier duties is one of the key elements in the process of educating a soldier in the army. It is a tedious, long-term process which requires well-thought-out procedures and content. Certainly, the purchase of armament and equipment, which we have heard so much about in recent months from the mass media, is a much simpler operation. On the contrary, we have heard so much less about the moral process of shaping young people into valuable soldiers. Another logical difficulty should be noticed in the matter under discussion. A soldier undergoes preparation for wartime – but it is done in peacetime. Therefore, it is difficult to verify the quality and effectiveness of this preparation. Any tests, trials or declarations of courage, bravery and combat readiness might be unreliable. However, while defective military equipment can be withdrawn from the military operations or exchanged for another one, the soul and morale of soldiers cannot be changed in a short time. Therefore, it should be the concern of current politicians and commanders of all levels to properly shape the moral duties of soldiers. They will be verified and assessed both in the military and civilian environment, during the time of peace and war. The presented results of public opinion surveys indicate that while the position of the Polish Armed Forces as an institution is high, and the army enjoys very high public trust in Poland, the assessment of the profession of soldier (as such) is no longer so high. In part, this can be explained by the culture and national traditions, according to which the respect for the uniform was passed on from generation to generation in the Polish Nation, and the soldier was synonymous with dedication, sacrifice and the fight to defend or regain statehood. Therefore, the ethos of military service has remained; however, now it

is necessary to focus on shaping a positive image of the soldiers themselves, an important element of which are soldier duties.

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Powinności żołnierskie jako forma kształtowania etosu służby wojskowej

STRESZCZENIE

Wojna, która wybuchła 24 lutego 2022 r. w wyniku zbrojnej agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę, po raz kolejny zburzyła stan względnego spokoju w Europie oraz przewartościowała postrzeganie zagrożeń, z niemilitarnych na militarne. Tym samym na pierwszy plan wszelkich dyskusji prowadzonych w świecie politycznym, naukowym i społecznym wysunął się temat gotowości państwa, w tym sił zbrojnych, będących jego zbrojnym ramieniem, do kolejnego potencjalnego konfliktu militarne. Na wydarzenia na arenie międzynarodowej nałożyły się działania podejmowane w ramach resortu obrony narodowej. Chodzi tu przede wszystkim o zwiększenie liczby żołnierzy Wojska Polskiego (docelowo do 300 tys. żołnierzy), wzrost potencjału bojowego przez modernizację i zakup nowoczesnego uzbrojenia oraz doskonalenie zdolności bojowych, co zakłada program Rozwoju Sił Zbrojnych na lata 2017-2026 [1]. W tym procesie na uwagę zasługuje nie tylko doposażenie wojska w nowoczesny sprzęt, ale również kształtowanie w żołnierzach cech, które będą przydatne zarówno w czasie pokoju, jak i w okresie wojny. Mowa tu o powinnościach żołnierskich, rozumianych jako pewne zobowiązanie moralne do wypełnienia w stosunku do Ojczyzny, narodu oraz środowiska wojskowego i cywilnego. Powinności można także rozumieć w kontekście swego powołania, misji do wypełnienia, obowiązku do zrealizowania wobec tych, którzy dany podmiot, w tym wypadku Wojsko Polskie, powołali do wypełniania ustawowych zadań i obdarzyli zaufaniem. W toku badań wskazano, o jakie powinności żołnierskie chodzi oraz jak je należy kształtować w procesie budowy etosu służby wojskowej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Wojsko Polskie, etos służby, powinności żołnierskie, kompetencje społeczne

Biographical note

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Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.