

Running Head: DO WHAT YOU MUST

How To Do What You Must

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Service Experience 11/11/1981 to 06/26/2006

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## Abstract

I am Senior Warrant Officer Arunas Birbalas, the Command Sergeant Major of the Lithuanian Land Forces. In 1981 at age 19, I began my military service when I was conscripted into the Soviet Army as an artilleryman. The conditions and treatment were austere during my training at the Soviet Army Sergeant School. In 1990 after Lithuania regained their independence through mostly peaceful demonstrations, the country needed to rebuild its armed forces. Highly patriotic Soldiers, citizens, and many friendly nations helped Lithuanian create our current armed forces. My top priorities are ensuring Soldiers and NCOs are trained, gain experience, and their careers are managed with the best interest of both the Soldier and the service.

*How can you get very far,  
If you don't know you are?  
How can you do what you ought,  
If you don't know what you've got?  
And if you don't know which to do,  
Of all the things in front of you,  
Then what you'll have when you are through  
Is just a mess without a clue  
Of all the best that can come true  
If you know What and Which and Who.*

Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh*

## Introduction

I am Senior Warrant Officer Arunas Birbalas, the Command Sergeant Major of the Lithuanian Land Forces. In 1981 at age 19, I began my military service when I was conscripted into the Soviet Army as an Artilleryman. After serving the mandatory two years, I returned to Lithuania as a civilian. In 1994, I enlisted for active duty in the Lithuanian Army and served in every company position; as an instructor for Training, Planning and Control Branch of the Training and Doctrine Command; and as the Command Sergeant Major of Dragoon Battalion. I have deployed on five deployments to Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

## Soviet Army Training

The conditions and treatment were austere during my training at the Soviet Army Sergeant School. The mission I will describe was a winter mission to set up a helicopter training target area.

The sergeant commands, "Battery line up outside the barracks in winter dress!" The sound is loud and clear. Everybody runs to get a pair of felt boots. The bigger the boot size the better, as you can wrap more than one foot-cloth around your foot and ankle for additional warmth. Socks are a luxury only allowed for sergeants and those serving more than one year. Anyone else caught wearing socks is punished and might have to wash all the sergeants' socks. In two minutes the battery is lined up in front of barracks.

The temperature is  $-43^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-45^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and the battery from the Artillery Sergeant School is ready to go. It is cold, but in central western Russia the humidity is low, and you do not feel the cold as much as on the coast of Lithuania. It is a dry cold and you can not feel or see the skin on your ears, nose, and cheeks freeze. The pain comes later when the skin warms up and circulation returns after a short run. However, you can not think of the pain; you just listen to the commands. That is your first priority as any misunderstanding can cost a lap in the six foot deep snow. Standing in formation, you see the battery commander glance out of the third floor window, as you must keep your head up. To move in formation is wrong. In your first formation you learn how to stand, although it is not written anywhere, as you have memorized all the statutes from cover to cover of the book. You only have two choices, serve or go to jail.

The battery sergeant emerges from the barrack's door. You can see that he is warmly dressed as he looks stouter than he really is. Everyone in formation knows that we are going to

have a long day and maybe a night too. “Fall out, take shovels!” one of the sergeants screams. Suddenly, it is clear you are going somewhere, probably for one or two days and you will be digging.

The battery sergeant commands, “Attention!” and turns to the left, ready to report to “Pinochet”. Pinochet, the ruthless dictator of Chile, is the nickname for our Battery Commander. The nickname was earned not only because he wears big, thick, dark glasses like Pinochet, but also because of his severe character. Pinochet looked at the formation and in a deep, trained voice, he yells “What the hell is that?” He is looking at a large Soldier who was not issued felt boots because there were none his size. He is wearing regular boots. “The army must be in the same uniform even if it is bad for Soldiers! You have two minutes to change your felt boots and put on regular boots!” You can guess what happened after two days in the field – almost everyone suffered some type of cold weather injury. The following week, many Soldiers were limping or had their faces bandaged due to frostbite. It looked as if we had been brawling.

When it is very cold and clear, the snow makes a nice crisp sound when stepped on. You can not form a snowball as the light snow falls between your fingers like dry sand. However, the real danger was the boot shortage and the subsequent irrational decision, not the freezing temperatures. After such a devastating event you can not build a team effectively. Soldiers are like dry sand spilling out of your team if you do not take care of them.

My experiences in 1981 – 1983, while serving in the Soviet Army Sergeant School are not sweet memories, but I remember telling my self “I will always take care of my Soldiers”.

### Lithuania’s Emerging Army

Because of my bad experiences in the Soviet Army, my enlistment in the Lithuanian Army was a surprise to my friends, family, and even for me. The Soviets occupied Lithuania in 1940 after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed by Hitler and Stalin. Our small country was frozen for fifty years. The people still feel the “pain of blood returning from circulation after freezing”. In 1990, after Lithuania regained their independence the country needed to rebuild its Armed Forces.

In 1994, the commander of my volunteer battalion offered me a full time position as the company sergeant. I turned the job down immediately because I did not want to be a career Soldier. However, two of my friends, who were serving professional service, convinced me to

join the active duty. At that time our Army had a shortage of officers and I was soon appointed as company commander. From that time on, challenges became a norm in my daily life.

I had two years experience of conscript service in the Soviet Army and most of it was as a sergeant, but I realized that our country did not need such a harsh environment. Our challenge was to change from the harsh Soviet methods of service. Training, behavior among Soldiers, sergeants, and officers needed to change to a more positive environment for Soldiers. Commanders needed to find new methods of team building, new ways to enable Soldiers to trust in what we were doing. Fortunately, everyone a felt strong sense of patriotism at that time. Patriotism keeps people together and helped us to achieve our goals. However, lack of discipline was a problem. Some Soldiers and even NCOs thought that we did not need formations, marching, or to properly wear our uniforms; we needed only tactical training and practice shooting.

At this time, we studied all military references we could acquire from foreign countries. By studying different military tactics and military styles, we found what worked best for us. With the help of our military partners from various countries, our Soldiers and NCOs became a highly trained and educated military force.

During my service, I found that service is continuous training and education. In my career, I had the opportunity to serve in all of the infantry company positions. I was lucky to be able to train with Soldiers from various countries: Denmark, Great Brittan, Italy, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, and the United States. I learned a lot from U.S. and British Soldiers about small and special unit tactics. From Danish Soldiers I learned about training, planning, and execution, about training conditions, demands and criteria. All that training built my knowledge and experience enabling my success on operations.

As an NCO, one of my most challenging appointments was to a Reconnaissance Squadron as the headquarters platoon leader. I realized that we have dedicated, self-disciplined, and creative solders.

### Knowledge, Experience, and Soldiers

Knowledge and experience are the two things that MUST go together with Soldier service. I couldn't tell which one is more important, but I know that knowledge without

experience is like a house without a roof. Experience without knowledge is like a house without a foundation.

In 2005, I was assigned as the first CSM of the Lithuanian Land Forces. My greatest challenge has been filling this newly created position.

My daily job as the Land Forces CSM is to take care of Soldiers and sergeants who are serving our country. It is very important to have direct contact with NCOs scheduled to deploy and those assigned to train them and provide supplies. Today, deployments are a main priority and a challenge for our Soldiers and NCOs. One of my tasks is to assess pre-deployment training and ensure Soldiers and NCOs are prepared for their mission.

Another important issue is the need for efficient use of personnel resource management. Moving professional Soldiers to other regions causes many problems, which include moving costs, changing jobs for spouses, changing children's schools, and most importantly hindering NCOs from buying a home or an apartment. I am working closely with unit CSMs, S1s, and G1 branch to reduce or eliminated transfers requiring Soldiers to move to a different region. Personnel resource management is a difficult task, but if done well it can make the difference for NCOs and their families. Commanders will also be happy having the right NCO in the right job.

Personality conflict between Soldiers can escalate into serious problems. This usually happens between a younger officer and a junior NCO and is caused by different communication styles. All of these issues should be immediately taken to the CSM. Usually everyone understands that people are different, but by this stage neither one of them cares to clarify the other's ambitions. Usually, an explanation is all that is needed for them to understand the communication differences between courage or rudeness, wits or a mean joke, cleverness or deception, and friendship or protection. When a new commander enters a unit, he needs to watch, learn, begin building teams, and then lead as he sees fit.

As a CSM, I am responsible for preparing NCOs to take on positions of greater responsibility. I need to carefully review the NCOs background and his character. Some NCOs are very good leading Soldiers, but they hate to do paper work. Others NCOs are good at paperwork but can not lead Soldiers. I have to recognize a NCO's abilities, talk with them, and make recommendations to the commander. There are two good ways to understand and know a Soldier; one is to read their personal data sheet and the other is to dig a trench together – I prefer to use both.

Most NCOs never complain about their service problems but the CSM must recognize their problems and help without asking. Our Army spends a lot of money to train and educate NCOs, but it is also important to take care of Soldiers to keep them performing well for the Army.

### Conclusion

Evolution in the Army never stops, which also means a Soldier's evolution never stops. Everything you learn and experience helps to accomplish the unit's mission.

Knowledge and experience - experience and knowledge. If someone asks me, "How long does it take to learn how to lead Soldiers?" My answer is "All your life." If someone asks me, "How to get experience?" My answer would be "Go to the people, don't stay too long in one place, and touch everything with your own hands and mind."

*"Under a standing stone water does not flow"* (Lithuanian proverb)