



FROM CIVILIAN TO SOLDIER:

THE CHALLENGES OF BASIC COMBAT
TRAINING IN THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE

as of 2024

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in the Armed Forces of Ukraine
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NGO "Come Back Alive!"

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The research was prepared by a team of the analytical department of **the Come Back Alive Initiatives Center**.

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Authors of the research did not either request any sensitive information about specific training centers, their personnel and management, or collect, or summarize such data, and this was not provided for by the methodology. The respondents' comments suggested in this research are depersonalized and anonymous.

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The CBA Initiatives Center is a civic organization that fosters strengthening of Ukraine's defense capabilities. The organization conducts research in the field of security and defense, formulates effective solutions, and advocates for their implementation in public policies.

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List of abbreviations

BCT	Basic combined arms training
IFV	Infantry fighting vehicle
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle
MMC	Military Medical Commission
FS/MP	Financial support/ Military pay
CIMD	Central Inspectorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine
CDDT	Central Directorate of Doctrines and Training of the General Staff
DMES	Department of Military Education and Science at the Ministry of Defense
AAF	Air Assault Forces
AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
YFC	Young Fighter Course
LoC	Line of contact
MPSS	Moral and psychological support
TMTB	Training material and technical base
TC	Training and simulation center
AME	Armament and military equipment
ATGM	Anti-Tank Guided Missile System
AWOL	Unauthorized absence/ AWOL (Absent without official leave)
DFoU	Defense Forces of Ukraine
OP	Observation Post
TRSC	Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centre

PREFACE

This research became possible through the effort of civilians and soldiers, which allows us to talk at least about an attempt to provide an unbiased balanced overview.

Authors of the research also involved a broader project team where some had direct combat experience in the Russian-Ukrainian war. At the same time, one of the main groups of respondents were BCT recruits which yesterday used to be mainly civilians but currently bearing one of the heaviest burdens in combat units and divisions.

The implementation of this kind of independent research is, by its very nature, impossible without high-quality civil-military cooperation.

This is the keynote dilemma of military research and its reforming.

People in the Defense Forces, active soldiers, in their majority have relevant experience and knowledge, but they do not always either have appropriate powers and resources, or are equipped with the methodology to conduct this kind of work.

People who are not currently part of the Defence Forces, i.e. civilians, including veterans currently belonging to civilian research organisations, have more access to resources and are much less constrained by the military and respective hierarchy, but may not always have the relevant knowledge and experience that active soldiers do.

For example, a civilian researcher, especially the one without service experience, needs to spend significantly more time to master certain topics and knowledge that are completely obvious to an active soldier. Meanwhile, it is much easier for a civilian researcher to arrange for a meeting with the Minister of Defense, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, or the Chief of the General Staff to convey to them current issues and advocate for change than for an ordinary military serviceman.

This means that in the context of researchs, the military and the public sector have no alternative but to cooperate and support one other.

Since our analysis was exploratory, it would be appropriate to conduct a number of additional quantitative and qualitative studies in the future that would provide a better understanding of the BCT issues and provide a basis for finding the right solutions.

SUMMARY

This research outlines stages of military training, describes main BCT issues, suggests key contradictions of the BCT concept, identifies barriers that reduce motivation of recruits and instructors. It also provides recommendations and sets forth areas for change which will foster improvement in quality of training for recruits.

The key concepts of this research are motivation and preparedness. In our opinion, although the mere presence of motivation does not guarantee high-quality training of future soldiers, good training is impossible without motivation. At the same time, we define 'preparedness' as a combination of the recruits' sense of readiness (subjective dimension) and the training results (objective).

Therefore, we attempted to determine at what stage and why recruits and instructors may lose motivation. Feedback from respondents was explored in detail and it proved that the respondents had many problems in common. All factors that demotivated them or prevented effective preparation are divided into three groups:

- material (household and educational);
- communication and attitude;
- organization of training.

The problems voiced by the recruits can be explained with two key reasons:

- insufficient provision of the prescribed basic conditions for training;
- higher (or false) expectations of civilians about what this training should be like.

The above-mentioned problematic factors, as well as their further analysis, allow us to say that **the quality of training depends not so much on the content of the program, but on the complexity of its current implementation at training centers**. In other words, the program cannot be implemented due to the presence of obstacles that make its full implementation impossible.

For example, a significant part of the time allocated for the training may be spent on moving people in the training center (from places of residence to places of eating, places of weapons storage, places of training and back), waiting in the forest, lining up, etc. That is, we are talking about the need **to make time-spending more efficient**.

The research also found that:

- level of motivation of the recruits generally drops throughout the BCT course;
- the health of the recruits deteriorates throughout the BCT course.

Main consequence of the identified problems is that after completing the BCT course, **soldiers do not feel well prepared to participate in combat operations** and for the service in general.

The authors of this research suggest addressing the identified problems by drawing on the experience gained through the implementation of educational and training projects by the "Come Back Alive" team. The success of these projects has relied on four key components:

- **staff** (team);
- **processes and procedures** (planning, organization of the educational process, etc.);
- **material base and support** (educational material and technical base, living conditions, infrastructure, etc.);
- **training program** (tasks, content, duration).

Among the recommendations described, **the key point of contact for implementing changes is people**, namely improving the quality of training of instructors, as well as officers holding key positions at training centers (units). This will have the greatest impact on all previously identified training problems, in particular, on the effectiveness of processes and procedures, communication with recruits and their level of motivation.

INTRODUCTION

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, the Armed Forces of Ukraine faced an urgent need to adapt the training system of military personnel to current restrictions, in particular, during active combat operations in a war of attrition.

In February-March 2022, the professional core of the Defense Forces restrained the first phase of the strategic offensive operation of the Russian armed forces in the north, south and east of Ukraine. The first waves of volunteers, especially those from areas near active combat zones, could find themselves on the front lines without prior training. At the same time, the training periods for new recruits in rear and relatively rear training centers were shortened: civilians with no military background had to be provided with at least basic military knowledge and skills as quickly as possible, so they could be deployed to combat units to help stop the enemy's advance deeper into Ukrainian territory.

Against the backdrop of the almost three-fold expansion of the army during 2022, lack of instructors, funds and infrastructure necessary to train such a large number of conscripts emerged. As a result, Ukraine began to involve partner countries in this process and at the same time increase capacities of its own training centers and units.

So what exactly does such a training entail?

First of all, the **Basic Combat Training Course**¹ (BCT) is intended and mandatory for individuals who joined the army for the first time, or for those who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the first months of a full-scale invasion and were immediately sent to the combat area (without training).

From a practical standpoint, Basic Combat Training (BCT) provides foundational theory and practice in military affairs, which increases personnel survivability and equips them with the basic capabilities needed to carry out assigned tasks. This includes firearms and tactical training, topography, first aid, and more.

From a legal standpoint, completing the Basic Combat Training (BCT) course allows a recruit to be assigned the military occupational specialty "Rifleman" (VOS 100), which serves as the basis for their further deployment to combat zones. Individuals who entered the war without being assigned VOS 100 are still required to obtain it, even if they already have combat experience, purely to avoid legal conflicts. For those with prior combat experience, BCT could be completed through an accelerated procedure. According to Ukrainian legislation, BCT and the assignment of a military occupational specialty take place at training units (centers)².

¹ The procedure for obtaining the military registration specialty "Shooter" simplifies: <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/10/19/sproshheno-poryadok-otrymannya-vijskovo-oblikovoyi-speczialnosti-strilecz/>

² On approval of the Instruction on organizing the implementation of the Regulations on military service by citizens of Ukraine in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0438-09#n3649>

Until 2022, the Basic Combat Training (BCT) program had been developed, de facto, for "peacetime" conditions and lasted three months. As of February 2024, the BCT program had a duration of 35 days (29 of which were training days), and in November 2024, it was extended to 49 days (with 42 training days)³. However, even now, the duration and components of the training program remain subjects of debate within the military and in society at large.

Due to the above-mentioned constraints (the ongoing full-scale aggression by the Russian Armed Forces, lack of resources, shortage of personnel, etc.), the Armed Forces of Ukraine face a number of problems with the quality of the BCT course. Concerns about the low effectiveness of basic military training began to be voiced actively and publicly in 2023–2024. This focus reflected the military's analysis of the reasons behind the unsuccessful counteroffensive operation of the Ukrainian Defense Forces in the summer of 2023, as well as the difficulties in tracking and mobilizing conscripts.

The problem of training was communicated most actively by the service members themselves, either through social media or by providing comments to Ukrainian and international online outlets such as The Washington Post⁴, Associated Press⁵, BBC⁶, Modern War Institute⁷, Radio Liberty⁸, Texty.org.ua⁹, etc.

Since 2018, the research team of the CBA Initiatives Center has been working on reforming the Armed Forces of Ukraine, particularly in the areas of personnel policy and training. In January 2024, while analyzing the quality of professional training of Ukrainian service members abroad, as well as the bureaucratic challenges related to the inability to assign a military occupational specialty (VOS) after completing training in partner countries and receiving the corresponding certificate, the research team decided to also focus on BCT, which military personnel undergo within Ukraine.

Above all, it is about the inefficient use of resources by the state — resources that are extremely valuable and limited compared to those of the Russian side. If people are not used effectively and the quality of their training is neglected,

³ "Basic Combat Training" Program (for training mobilized resources, version 4): <https://sprotyvg7.com.ua/wp-content/4.pdf>

⁴ Basic training in Ukraine is barely covering the basics, commanders say: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/06/02/ukraine-training-soldiers-mobilization-war/>

⁵ Poorly trained recruits contribute to loss of Ukrainian territory on eastern front, commanders say: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-new-recruits-pokrovsk-ed2d06ad529e3b7e47ecd32f79911b83>

⁶ Meeting the Ukrainian recruits preparing for new battle: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0qe9ql8v95o>

⁷ What Does European Union Advising of Ukrainian Troops Mean for the Bloc's Security Policies? An Inside Look at the Training Mission: <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/what-does-european-union-advising-of-ukrainian-troops-mean-for-the-blocs-security-policies-an-inside-look-at-the-training-mission/>

⁸ Behind the scenes of war: what happens in the "training camps" of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/uchebky-zsu-umovy-navchannya-mobilizatsiya-pidhotovka-rekruty/32835859.html>

⁹ 15 recruits per instructor. How the Armed Forces Of Ukraine disrupt the combat training of mobilized personnel: <https://texty.org.ua/fragments/112411/15-novobranciv-na-odnoho-instruktora-yak-u-zsu-zryvayut-bojovu-pidhotovku-mobilizovanyh/>

victory — or even achieving parity on the battlefield — cannot be expected.

In March 2024, the research team of the "Come Back Alive" Initiatives Center began working with Deputy Minister of Defense Nataliia Kalmykova and her team, so the request to study the problems (barriers) of the BCT course also came from the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.

Research Objective

To identify and outline the typical problems (barriers) that, as of 2024, hindered the effective delivery of Basic Combat Training in the training units (centers) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Methodology and Research Stages

The first stage of the work involved **desk research**, conducted throughout March 2024. This stage included a review of relevant legal and regulatory frameworks, content analysis, and a reassessment of the ongoing debate about reforms in the Armed Forces of Ukraine training system during Russia's full-scale invasion.

The second stage consisted of **field research**. The active phase of data collection took place from April to May 2024 and was based on the following methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, mobile ethnography, and participant observation:

- The goal of the **in-depth semi-structured interviews** was to gather data from respondents during a single conversation lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. These interviews were conducted both offline and online, with some taking place **directly in the combat zone**.
- The purpose of **mobile ethnography** was to receive continuous feedback from respondents throughout their BCT experience via online communication tools such as Signal and/or WhatsApp.

During the active phase of data collection, the BCT program lasted 35 days, allowing the researchers to stay in touch with respondents throughout the entire period (at varying intervals). This approach enabled participants to share their experiences, emotions, and feedback in near real time, while researchers could capture highly relevant information down to the smallest details.

Some respondents joined the research as early as the mobilization stage, which made it possible to cover not only the period of the BCT course, but also the stage before its beginning. This helped to better assess the effectiveness of the processes and procedures that take place when a person has already arrived at the training centre, but training has not yet begun.

It is important to note that the authors of the research did not require any sensitive information about any specific training centers, their staff, and management, and did not collect or summarize such data, as this was not provided for by the methodology.

- The method of **participant observation** involved immersion of researchers among recruits and instructors at one of the BCT locations for a certain period of time. This approach allowed:
 - to observe group dynamics and record the behavior and interaction of individuals belonging to different groups of respondents, who for various reasons did not participate in the in-depth interviews and online communication via mobile ethnography method;
 - to interact with those respondents who do not have smartphones, access to the Internet and cannot be interviewed through secure digital communication channels. Ignoring such a significant group would have been inappropriate. The researchers' field visits to combat zones also helped collect data from representatives of combat brigades.

As part of the second stage of the research, we interviewed over 50 respondents from the following five groups:

- 1) recruits in the process of completing BCT;
- 2) instructors, instructor-teaching staff and commanders of training units (subunits) and training centers;
- 3) representatives of combat brigades working with newly arrived soldiers after BCT — deputy brigade commanders for combat training and instructors of training (reserve) brigade subunits;
- 4) active soldiers who completed BCT no more than six months ago and already have combat unit experience;
- 5) specialists (military personnel and civilians) with expertise in the field of teaching, education and training in general.

Such groups of respondents were selected to form a comprehensive view of the BCT process, as relying solely on the opinions and feedback of cadets would not provide a complete picture of the topic. The number of respondents in each group **is sufficient to identify 85% of the existing problems¹⁰**.

It should be separately noted that, based on the preliminary research results obtained at the end of May 2024, an analytical brief was immediately prepared

¹⁰ Deriving a Problem Discovery Sample Size: https://measuringu.com/qualitative_sidebar/

outlining general directions for reforms needed in the BCT program. The research team then shifted its focus from purely research activities to advocacy. Between June and September 2024, the preliminary results were presented to representatives of the Ministry of Defense, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Head of the Main Directorate of Doctrine and Training of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as other stakeholders from Ukraine and partner countries.

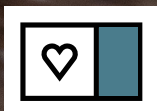
The final stage involved summarizing the collected data, conducting a comprehensive analysis, and developing recommendations and directions for change.

Research limitations

- This research is exploratory and requires further elaboration.
- The researchers did not set out to fully reveal every element and process of the BCT course from the perspective of recruits and training centers, nor did they aim to provide a detailed account of the regulatory framework for this type of training. This was due in part to the sensitive nature of the information, limited access to training facilities, and restrictions regarding relevant legal and regulatory documents.
- The research is based on qualitative methods and does not aim to measure quantitative indicators, nor does it provide evaluations of specific officials or training centers. Instead, it summarizes a list of typical problems (barriers) that, as of the first half of 2024, hindered the effective delivery of BCT, according to respondents.
- The identified problems (barriers) **are not universally present across all training centers, nor are they necessarily all found simultaneously within any single training center.** Rather, they represent a general set of issues identified through feedback from five respondent groups, rather than observations tied to any specific center.
- During the research, the authors interacted with representatives of experimental (non-standard) projects in the system of training soldiers in the Armed Forces Of Ukraine, but such examples are not representative. Therefore, for a full and high-quality generalization of the experience of such initiatives, it is necessary to study each of them separately (case study).
- Despite the presence of five different groups of respondents, the authors focused the most on recruits and instructors of BCT. Effectiveness of training depends on the coordinated work of the entire vertical - from the commander of the training battalion to the General Staff. Focusing efforts on the needs of recruits and instructors as the basis of this vertical will also cater to the needs of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine as a whole.
- It is worth noting that among the recruits who participated in the research, there was only one woman.

Chapter 1

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT BASIC COMBAT TRAINING



1.1. What happens to a person joining the army for the first time?

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of BCT aspects it is necessary to understand what happens to a person joining the army for the first time. This will help to shape an idea of the role and place of BCT in the overall process of training soldiers.

Let us explore one of the common scenarios: a person joins the army for the first time in his life — through the mobilization mechanism — and is commanded to get trained for further service in a military unit of the combat troops¹¹:

- 1. The Territorial Recruitment and Social Support Centre form teams of mobilized recruits for deployment to designated training units (centers) to undergo the BCT course.**
- 2. The mobilized person is transported as part of the team to the designated training centre.**

In most cases, Basic Combat Training does not begin on the same day. Some respondents reported that their training started only a week, two weeks, or even three weeks after arriving at the training center. During this waiting period before the course begins, recruits mainly receive their issued equipment, help with maintenance work on the training center's premises, or simply wait for the training to start.

- 3. The Basic Combat Training (BCT) course begins.** Until 2022, a three-month training program had been in place, effectively designed for "peacetime." For most of 2024, the course lasted 35 days, and as of November–December 2024, it had been extended to 49 days. Everyone joining the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the first time must undergo the BCT course. During this period, recruits also take the oath, which often happens after the course has already started, on a day convenient for the training center's leadership.
- 4. After completing the BCT course, a soldier:**
 - 1) either immediately goes to a military unit for active duty;**
 - 2) or, immediately after the BCT course, proceeds to a specialized training course¹²;**

¹¹ Military units where main task and purpose is direct participation in combat operations. The list of such units is secret, it is determined by the General Staff of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine. But for the most part, we are talking about typical mechanized, motorized infantry, airborne assault and other combat brigades.

¹² Professional training is the one that provides a soldier with a certain narrow specialization. It must be completed to become a mortarman, artilleryman, driver or gunner of an IFV, UAV operator, engineer, ATGM operator, or other. Duration depends on the specialty, but it usually it takes from two weeks to two months.

- 3) or, upon arriving at their military unit, proceeds to specialized training from there — either immediately or later in the course of their service.
5. After arriving at the assigned military unit (especially in the case of combat units in active combat zones), the soldier is usually assigned to a reserve unit (for example, a reserve company of a separate mechanized brigade), where they undergo a **period of adaptation and additional training**¹³.
- As of November-December 2024, duration of the adaptation and additional training period could be 10–14 days.
 - Some brigades of the Ukrainian Defense Forces, as part of the recruitment process, guarantee at least one month of additional training after arriving at the unit.
6. Training of soldiers is also envisaged during active duty itself or when military units are withdrawn for combat capability restoration. However, this should rather be viewed as an integral part of service. It must also be acknowledged that, given the current intensity of combat operations, additional training during service may not always take place as planned.

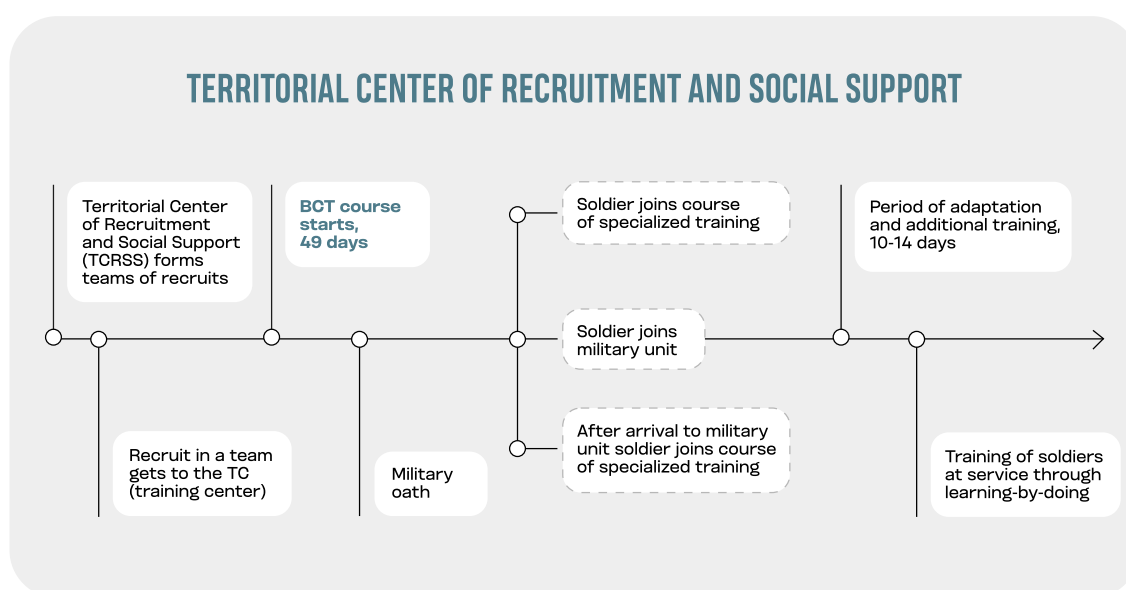


Figure 1. — The path of recruit

Thus, under the most favorable circumstances and with certain skills and knowledge acquired in civilian life (e.g., a driver's license for large agricultural machinery, experience working at a service station, etc.), or those demonstrated during the BCT course, a mobilized individual at the initial stage of service, as of the end of 2024, could receive:

¹³ Adaptation and retraining of soldiers arriving at military units of the combat force is provided for the cases where this unit is located in the area of task performance (in the combat zone). If the military unit is on recovery (withdrawal), then instead of adaptation and retraining, a coordination mechanism is applied.

+ 49 days of BASIC COMBAT TRAINING course

+ 14–60 days of specialized training

+ 10–14 days of adaptation and training
in their military unit upon arrival

= A total of 73 to 123 days of training
(as of December 2024)

In most cases, BCT may be the only preparation that mobilized individuals receive before being deployed to the frontline:

+ 49 days of the BCT course

+ 10–14 days of adaptation and training
in their military unit after arrival

= A total of 59 to 63 days of preparation
(as of December 2024)

If considering the least favorable scenario:

+ 35 or 49 days of the BCT course

There is no adaptation or additional
training at the military unit level

= There could only be 35 days of training
(from February to October 2024), or 49
days of training (from November 2024)

As seen from the examples provided, the BCT course holds a significant, and sometimes even primary, place within the military training system. In some cases, **BCT may be the only training a soldier receives before the first combat encounter with the enemy.**

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that this limited number of training days must be used with maximum benefit and efficiency for the soldier.

1.2. General information about BCT

As of the second half of 2024, two categories of training units can be distinguished where soldiers undergo BCT:

1. Training units as part of large Training Centers (Training and Simulation Center) — educational (training) centers.

For example, the 169th Training Center, the 184th Training Center, the 233rd Training Center, etc. Such centers may include dozens of subordinate military units within their structure.

2. Separate training units.

For example, reserve battalions, including training (reserve) battalions within army corps, etc.

Both categories of training units have their own advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, large Training Centers have better infrastructure and a training and material base acquired over the years, whereas most reserve battalions were established after 2022 and generally lack their own facilities and equipment.

On the other hand, the advantages of large training centers are significantly offset by security requirements related to the dispersal of personnel, which greatly complicates logistics and reduces the efficiency of both infrastructure use and the time allocated for training. At the same time, separate training units are generally easier to organize if there is the will to do so, and even under dispersal conditions, they can provide relatively compact accommodation for personnel. Overall, bringing order to a standalone training unit at the battalion level is considerably easier than doing so in a large training center comprising dozens of military units and training grounds.

After arriving at the training unit (center) to undergo BCT, soldiers generally live in dugouts, tents, or other above- or underground structures, often with 20–30 people or more, depending on the type of shelter (such as a USB-56 tent, etc.). On the other hand, living conditions vary from unit to unit. Similarly, organizational processes differ across locations.

Recruits are regularly assigned to duties and non-specialized (housekeeping) tasks, such as cooking and food distribution, guarding and securing the territory, setting up perimeters, patrolling, digging pits, waste areas, latrines, and similar activities.

During the BCT course, recruits interact with:

- representatives of training units (centers):
 - instructors (in person);
 - instructors and teaching staff (in person);
 - the team (in person).

- other recruits (in person);
- relatives, friends, loved ones, etc. (by phone or in messengers);
- with the outside world (for example, news and trends via the Internet).

The course consists of administrative, training and weekend days:

February 2024 edition of the BCT program suggests:

- administrative – 1 day;
- training – 29 days;
- rest days – 5 days.

Total: 35 days.

November 2024 edition of the BCT program suggests:

- administrative – 1 day;
- training – 42 days;
- rest days – 6 days.

Total: 49 days.

The BCT course program from February 2024 (the so-called “monthly” program) that was in effect at the time of the active phase of this research included the following blocks and subjects of research¹⁴:

Block 1. Introductory course

- National and patriotic training;
- Security measures;
- Legal training;
- International humanitarian law;
- Statutes of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Block 2. Individual training course

- National and patriotic training;
- Statutes of the Armed Forces of Ukraine;
- Communication training;
- Cybersecurity basics;
- CBRN training;
- Military topography;
- Engineering training (mine safety);
- Psychological preparation;
- Tactical medicine;
- Reconnaissance training;
- Survival;
- Tactical training;

¹⁴ Breakdown by hours per each topic and class is not supported with any clarification notes.

- firearms training.

Block 3. Platoon Level Operations Training Course

- National and patriotic training;
- Reconnaissance training;
- Tactical training;
- Firearms training;
- Combined tactical exercise;
- Reserve hours;
- Self-study (according to the unit commander's plan).

The new extended (so-called "one and a half month") BCT course program of November 2024 edition is primarily distinguished by a higher total number of training hours, but at the same time number of training hours per day has been reduced (from 10 to 8) where number of hours for collective training has been increased, Collective weapons fire training was introduced (previously absent), as well as specialized training in electronic warfare (EW) and unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Other minor adjustments were also made¹⁵.

That is, the duration of the BCT program in the Armed Forces Of Ukraine as of the beginning of 2024 was 290 training hours, and as of the end of 2024 - 368.

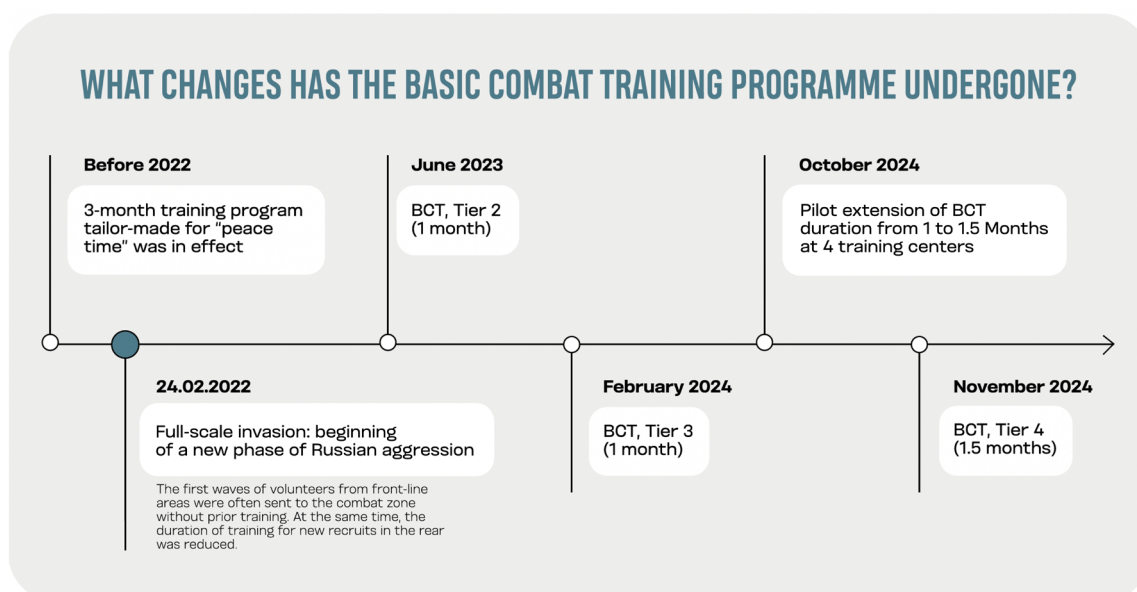


Figure 2. — Dynamics of changes in the BCT program in Ukraine

Overall, changes in training programs are standard practice. A program must remain flexible and responsive to current challenges and threats. Below is an example of how the content of the U.S. Army's Basic Combat Training (BCT) course has evolved over time. However, a program change alone does not guarantee improved training quality.

¹⁵ Follow orders and survive. What is to change in BCT?: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/bazova-zagalnoviyskova-pidgotovka-zminy-/33213379.html>

Returning to BCT in Ukraine, it should be noted that soldiers who, for various valid reasons, missed more than **30% of the training time** are suspended from further classes and are added to the next group of recruits for the repeated BCT course.

Meanwhile, training centers have a quota - only 3% of recruits can not be awarded VOS 100. Often this quota is filled in the first days or weeks of BCT due to the health of individual recruits and other reasons. The most common reason is health of mobilized due to the formality in the selection at the mobilization stage. The remaining 97% of recruits are "doomed" to successful completion of BCT. **This is because during a full-scale war and a comprehensive mobilization campaign, it is impossible not to pass BCT due to poor skills or low scores by the standards provided for in the program, which only proves once again their formality.**

However, an important role in the quality of training is also played by the functioning characteristics of the command hierarchy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ministry of Defense. As of 2024, key structural unit of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine responsible for training was the Central Directorate of Doctrines and Training (J7). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense did not have sufficient legal grounds to significantly influence the training system of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine.

Representatives of the military vertical and the government assessed this situation differently. Some believed that training issues should remain strictly within the powers of the General Staff, others that the Ministry of Defense should have more influence on the process of reforming the training system in the army. In the opinion of the authors, the issue is not so much in specific powers as in establishing stable interaction between the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff and in institutionalizing this co-operation. It also appears that both the Main Directorate of Doctrine and Training of the General Staff and the Ministry of Defense need to build up their personnel capacity and capabilities to work more effectively in the training sphere.

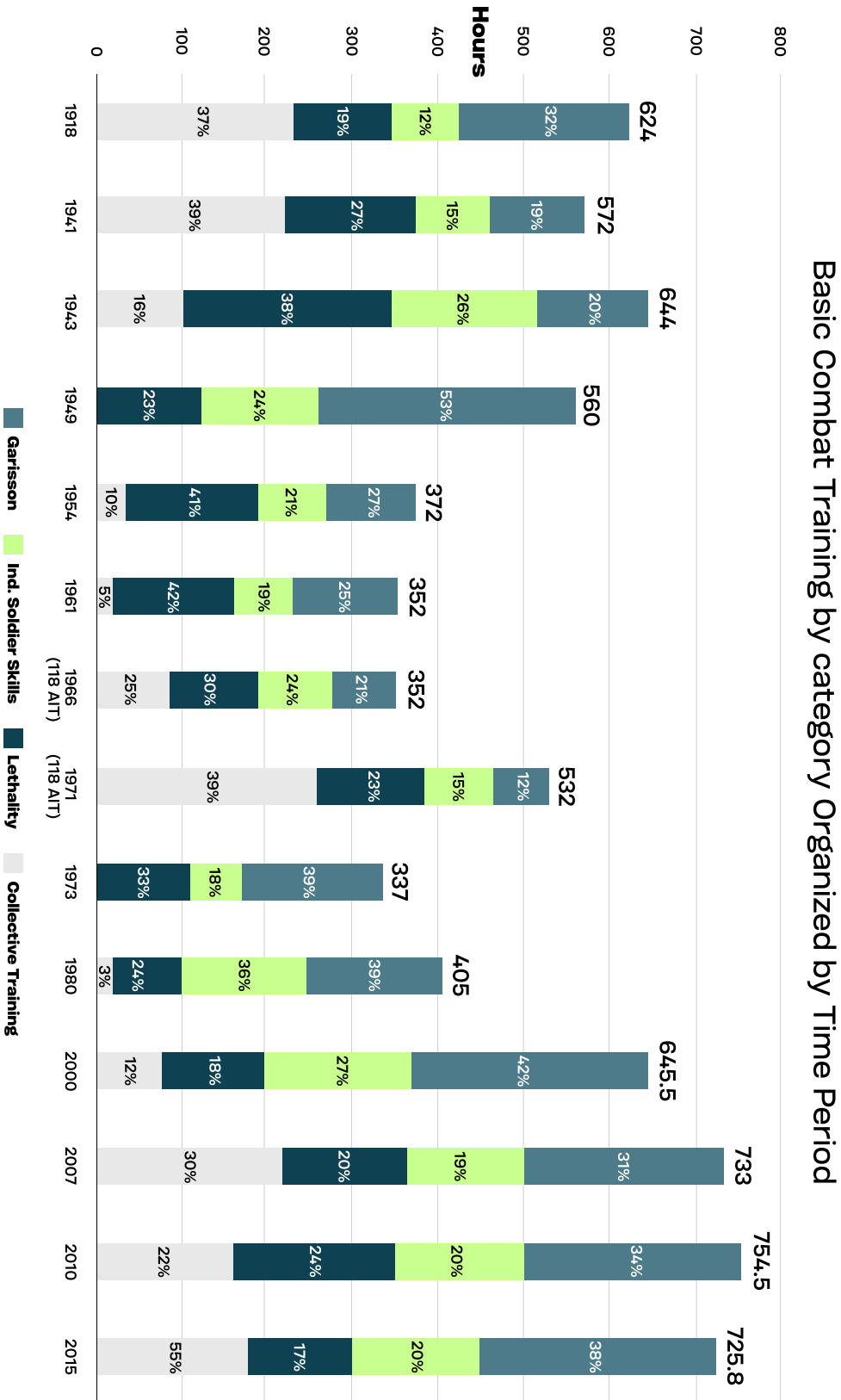
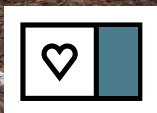


Figure 3. — Proportional changes in the enrollment to the BCT course in the US Infantry of the US Army)¹⁶

16 Learning the Lessons of Lethality: The Army's Cycle of Basic Combat Training, 1918-2019: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo132487/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo132487.pdf>

KEY PROBLEMS OF THE BASIC COMBAT TRAINING COURSE IN UKRAINE



2.1. Essential misalignment of training with the current needs of the army

Currently, the BCT process contains several key contradictions that prevent effective training of soldiers. In simple words, the situation can be described as follows: **"Basic combat training is being conducted by the wrong people, for the wrong people, in the wrong way, and at the wrong time."** What does this mean?

- **"By the wrong people."** Currently, recruits may be trained by instructors and/or servicemen holding instructor positions, but who are not formally recognized as instructors because they have not undergone proper training themselves. Due to a significant personnel shortage in the military and other war-related constraints, it is not possible to involve a sufficient number of qualified instructors who, in addition, would have relevant combat experience, have received up-to-date training, and possess the ability to teach the material effectively.
- **"For the wrong people."** Most training programs in Ukraine and partner countries were designed for young recruits in good health. However, the full-scale armed aggression by Russia created conditions necessitating the largest mobilization campaign in Ukraine's history. Due to demographic and economic factors, the average age of mobilized personnel has been steadily increasing since 2022. Currently, a significant share of soldiers in combat units are over 40–45 years old. It is also important to highlight a substantial category of personnel aged 50–55 and older, who are also assigned to combat units and formations. Under such circumstances, the effectiveness of using the same training approaches for people aged 25 and 50 cannot be expected^{17,18}. Older recruits have different health conditions, they process information differently, require different interaction methods, and thus cannot fully absorb training programs created for younger individuals.
- **"In the wrong way and at the wrong time."** Without taking into account the demographic, physiological, and psychological characteristics of recruits, it is impossible to properly teach the material. Likewise, the three-month training program designed for "peacetime" cannot simply be compressed into 35 or 49 days. The approach of merely shortening the previous program instead of completely rethinking it to meet the current needs and challenges of the legal martial law regime is rather misguided, since the issue concerns not only duration and content. The problem also lies in the fact that the principles of operation,

¹⁷ Older people to have place here. How Armed Forces Of Ukraine become army of 40+ and does lower mobilization age affect combat readiness: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/05/16/7455980/>

¹⁸ Ukraine Sends Older Soldiers to Front But Army Needs Young Men: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-05-26/ukraine-sends-older-troops-to-war-with-russia-as-army-runs-short-of-men>

organization, and planning processes of Ukrainian training centers (TCs) are still based on a three-month program designed for "peacetime."

Within the training, recruits must master two key skills:

- how to destroy the enemy's forces and equipment;
- how to preserve their own life and the lives of their comrades.

It is critically important to find a balance between these two training objectives and to convey this balance to new recruits in the most effective and pedagogically professional way possible.

This opinion was also expressed by one of the respondents:

"War is two functions: kill the enemy and don't die yourself. That's all there is. So Basic Combat Training should primarily be about 'not dying yourself.' Survival. The person must survive — survive and be ready to kill. The killing part should be taught later (including during specialized training)." — a training and teaching expert

Analyzing several recent editions of the BCT program, one can conclude that critically little time is devoted to teaching soldiers how to survive on the battlefield—far less than the time allocated to training them to destroy the enemy.

2.2. Recruits and instructors

Currently, the two main groups involved in the Basic Combat Training process — **instructors and recruits — occupy the lowest level in the hierarchy of training centers and the military.** As a result, there is no systematic assessment of the needs of the people on whom the country's defense capability largely depends. Recruits and instructors are not a top priority for the army or society, where ideally all services would work to fully meet their needs and at least their basic expectations.

The study identified 7 **main categories of recruits in BCT**:

1. **Motivated** (volunteers or mobilized). They mostly joined the army on their own free will or at least prepared themselves morally and/or physically for it. They maintain motivation and contribute positively to the learning process and group interaction.
2. **Fit for service** (mobilized; one of the largest categories; low motivation with potential for growth). Under favorable conditions, they show potential to increase motivation and better absorb the training program; sometimes capable of moving into the first category.
3. **Unmotivated** (mostly mobilized; zero or low motivation with minimal potential for growth). They joined the army as a result of an active mobilization campaign, probably in the middle of the workday or on the

way home. Throughout BCT, they poorly receive or completely reject the training material because their primary goal is to find ways to return to civilian life. They tend to interact negatively with training unit personnel.

4. Military personnel and/or recruits with prior combat experience.

They take training to obtain/verify VOS 100, able to share experience with other recruits; some may have injuries. They may conflict with the instructor staff, for example, due to the inconsistency (in their opinion) of the curriculum with the current requirements of the combat zone.

5. Unfit for service (a result of a superficial selection process or "express medical boards"). Due to serious health conditions and/or various addictions, they require extra attention from medics, instructors, officers at the training center, and fellow recruits. They are unmotivated. Such recruits essentially become a burden on the training center and do not absorb the material — neither because they can, nor because they want to.

6. Disruptive. Resist participation in the training process, demotivate other recruits, undermine teamwork, and — influenced by social media — may spread enemy propaganda narratives, etc.

7. "Well-connected". Recruits for whom VOS 100 is mostly a bureaucratic formality on the way to a prearranged appointment, typically secured through informal agreements. These may be relatives or acquaintances of senior officers or high-ranking officials. They formally "go through" BCT under the protection of leadership, which is clearly visible to other recruits and causes demotivation due to perceived injustice¹⁹. The number of such recruits is likely low²⁰, but the phenomenon — like any form of unfairness — significantly impacts the morale of others.

Productive interaction between the first two categories of recruits ("motivated" and "fit") can significantly improve the effectiveness of BCT.

"Motivated" recruits can take on leadership roles, show initiative, provide regular feedback on the quality of training, and assist their fellow soldiers where needed.

"Fit" recruits (one of the largest categories), when treated with respect, supported, and helped in addressing their issues, can become more engaged in the training process. Together, these two groups can set the dominant tone for the course — one that is crucial for the successful assimilation of the training program.

¹⁹ Textbook for military psychologists "Psychological Resilience of a Warrior", p. 69: https://sprotyvg7.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Psykholohichna_stiikist_voina.pdf

²⁰ This quantitative indicator was not measured within the qualitative study.

By investigating barriers to effective training, the authors constantly heard from respondents about **the problem of instructor's burnout and lack of instructors as staff**. The reasons for burnout and unattractiveness of service at the instructors' positions at the training center are described further (see Chapter 3).

To understand the motivation of instructors and specifics of interaction with other participants in the BCT process, they can also be divided into the following informal categories:

- 1. Instructors with relevant combat experience and teaching experience/skills.** They are most effective. They understand the pressing demands on soldiers in a combat zone, have relevant combat experience, and are knowledgeable in teaching methodology (have received appropriate training and/or already have successful teaching experience). Some of them may be willing to raise contested and problematic issues for the leadership of training units.
- 2. Instructors with relevant combat experience but no teaching experience/skills.** They may not know how to convey relevant knowledge to recruits (lack of training or teaching experience). However, some of them may raise questions before the leadership of training units (subdivisions) regarding the effectiveness of processes and procedures, needs, relevance of the program, etc.
- 3. Instructors without combat experience, but with teaching experience.** These instructors tend to show low initiative and avoid raising contentious issues. They often refrain from confronting leadership, sometimes out of fear of being reassigned to frontline combat duties.
- 4. Instructors without combat experience and without teaching experience.** Sometimes selected directly from among newly arrived recruits due to a shortage of qualified instructors. Their effectiveness is generally very low.
- 5. Instructors without combat experience who have connections with the leadership of training centers or individuals with relevant authority (so-called "connected" instructors).** They do not contribute positively to the training process, often demotivate others, and may cause harm or additional costs to the state.

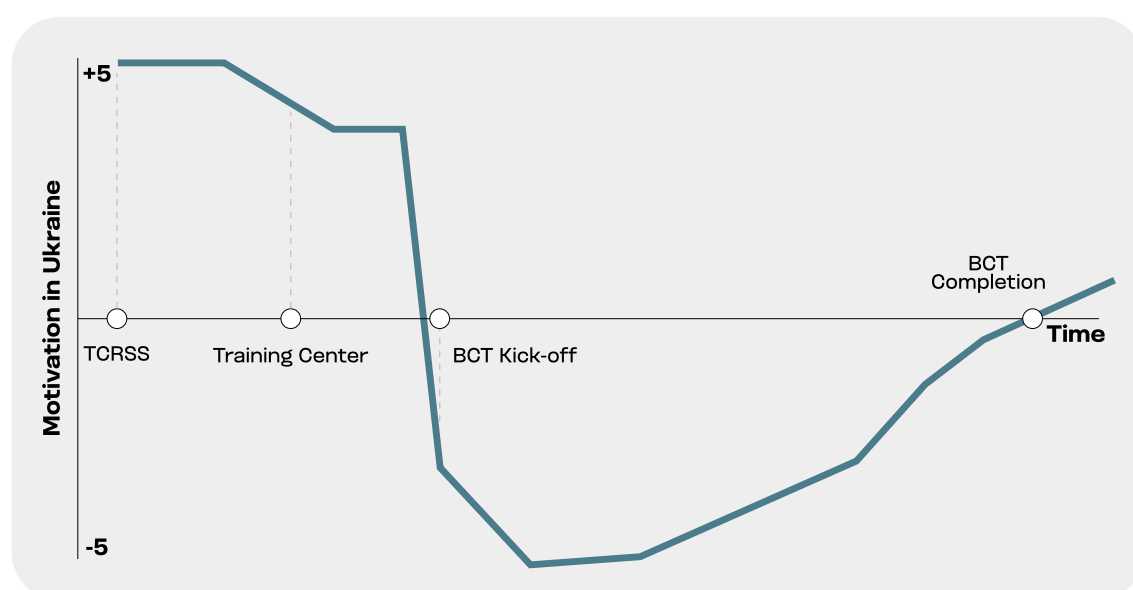
2.3. Motivation

Researchers consider motivation as one of the main factors influencing the quality of training^{21, 22, 23}. Although presence of motivation as such does not guarantee effectiveness; **without it, quality training is impossible.**

Based on the responses of respondents, it can be concluded that during the BCT course, motivation of the recruits tends to decrease. Certain categories of recruits enter the training center already with low motivation, because they did not initially want to join the army, and the level of motivation continues to fall during the training phase.

In other words, even if a highly motivated person voluntarily joined the army, for example, using a recruiting tool, after staying at the training center, they may arrive at the combat brigade demotivated and under-prepared.

To reflect changes in recruits' motivation, the research team used **a projective qualitative research methodology**²⁴. Retrospectively, recruits after completing BCT, depicted how their motivation changed from the moment of mobilization to the end of training. Below are some of the responses provided by respondents who undertook BCT in Ukraine.

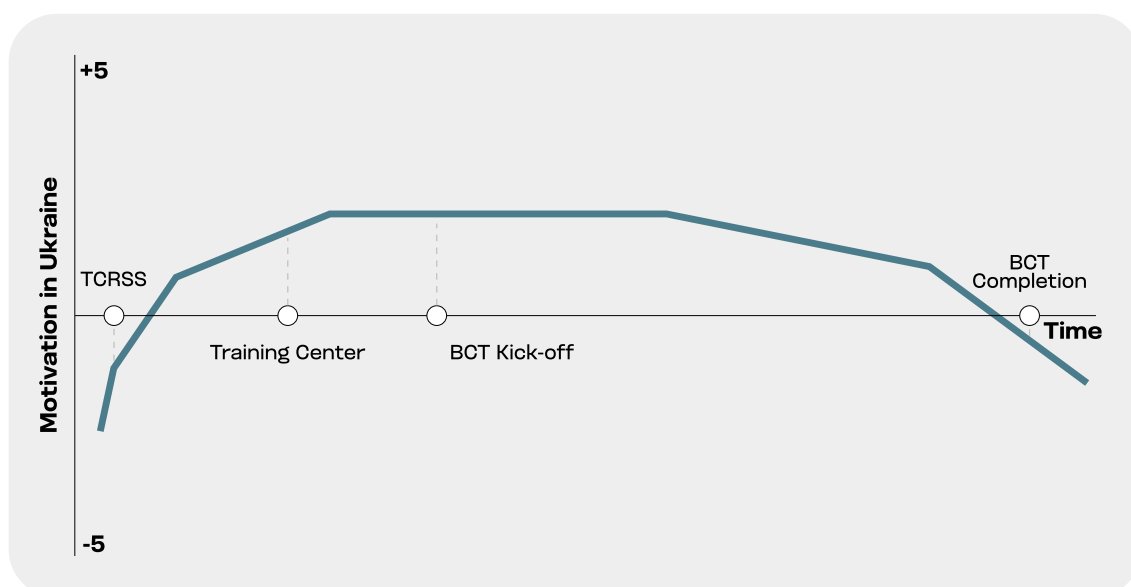
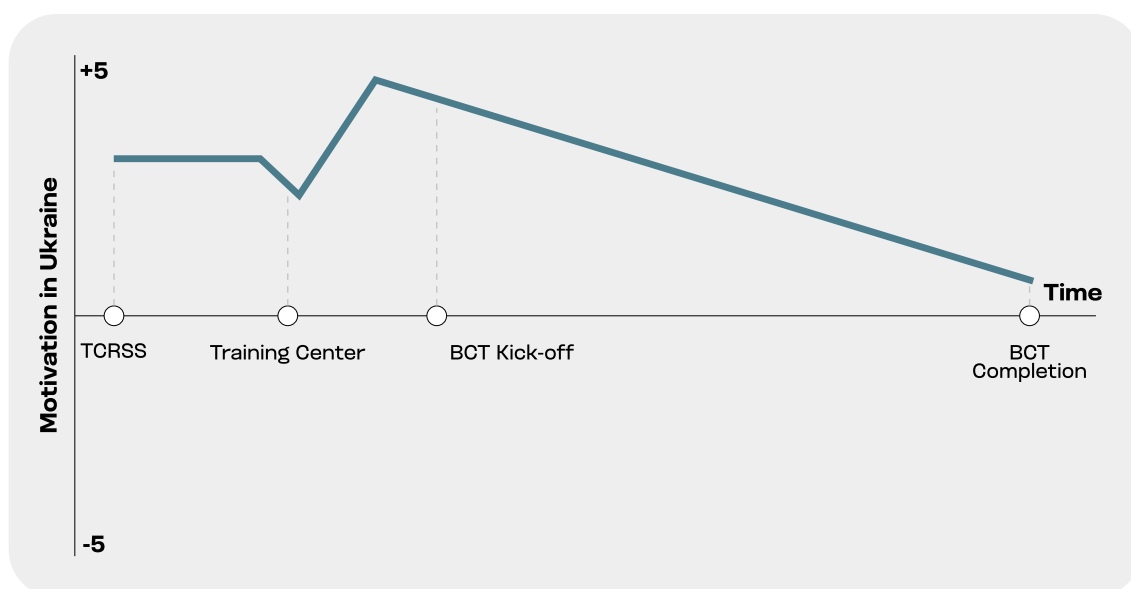
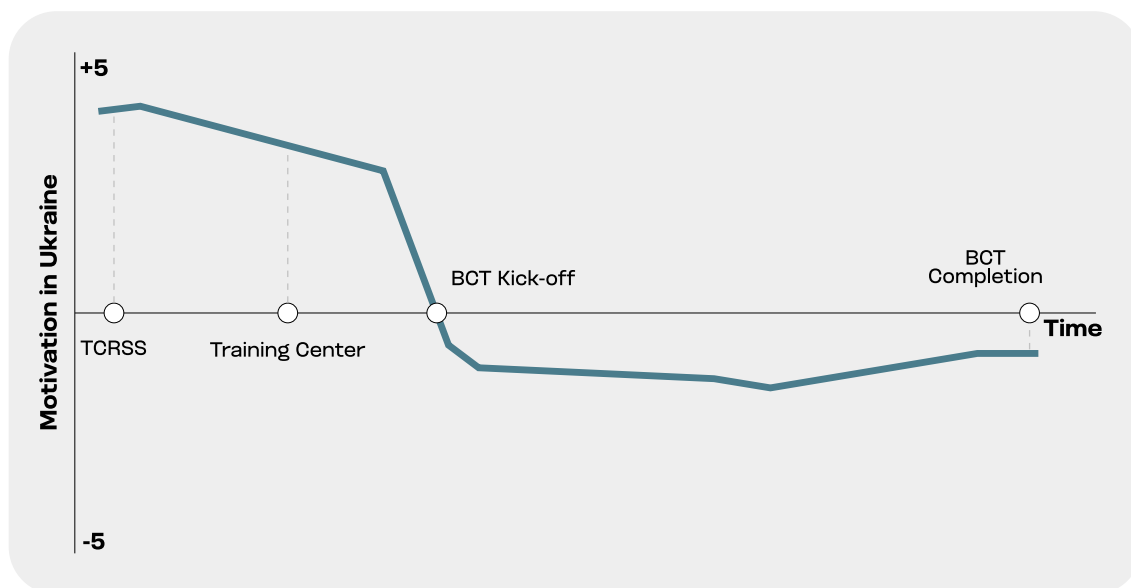


²¹ Military Review. Combat Motivation: https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20061231_art016.pdf

²² Combat Motivation: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-015-3965-4>

²³ Life as a Private. A Study of the Motivations and Experiences of Junior Enlisted Personnel in the U.S. Army: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2252.html

²⁴ Projective Techniques In Qualitative Research: <https://methods.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/sage-encyc-qualitative-research-methods/chpt/projective-techniques>



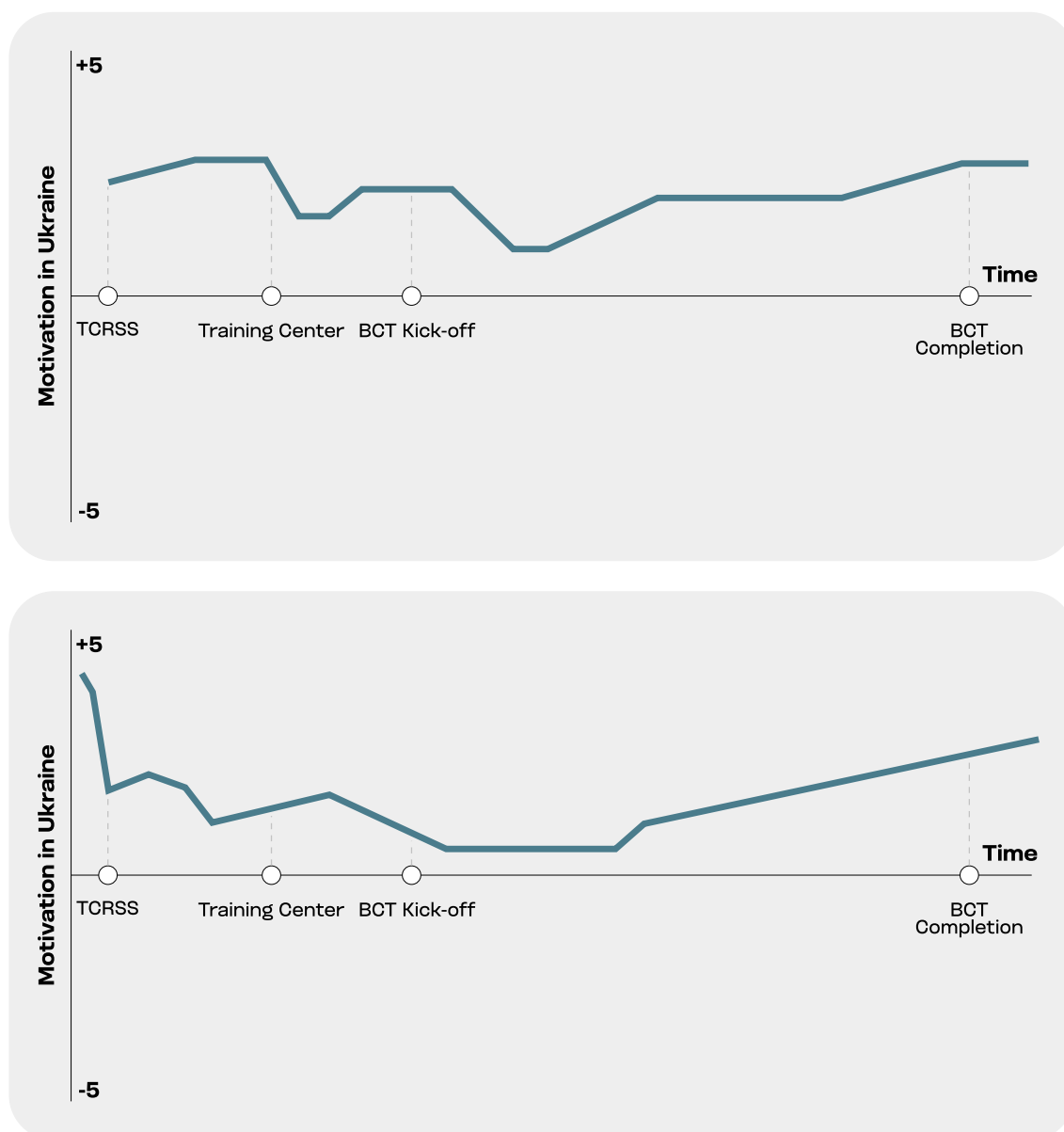


Figure 4. — Changes in the level of motivation of recruits during BASIC COMBAT TRAINING in Ukraine.

Each graph demonstrates different scenarios of change: from a sharp drop due to inflated expectations and the resulting disappointment, to wave-like fluctuations reflecting adaptation and doubts about the quality of training. In some cases, motivation initially increases and then gradually decreases, which may indicate initial enthusiasm, which is replaced with fatigue and unjustified expectations. In some cases, at the end of the research, we observe partial recovery of motivation, which indicates the benefits of certain stages of training, but the general trend indicates **systemic problems that affect the confidence of recruits in their own abilities.**

Two recruits who, while getting trained at different training centres in Ukraine, joined our research before the start of BCT, were commanded for the basic training in the Western European countries. The research team analyzed certain features of the training Ukrainian soldiers receive abroad and arrived at the following conclusion: mainly due to better living conditions and more "humane" treatment, **recruits tend to have higher motivation during BCT conducted in partner countries.**

At the same time, the respondent who underwent training in the United Kingdom rated most highly the two-day period when the instruction was delivered specifically by Ukrainian combat-experienced instructors. This led the research team to the following hypothesis: **a combination of experienced, competent instructors and a strong training and logistical infrastructure has a positive impact on motivation.**

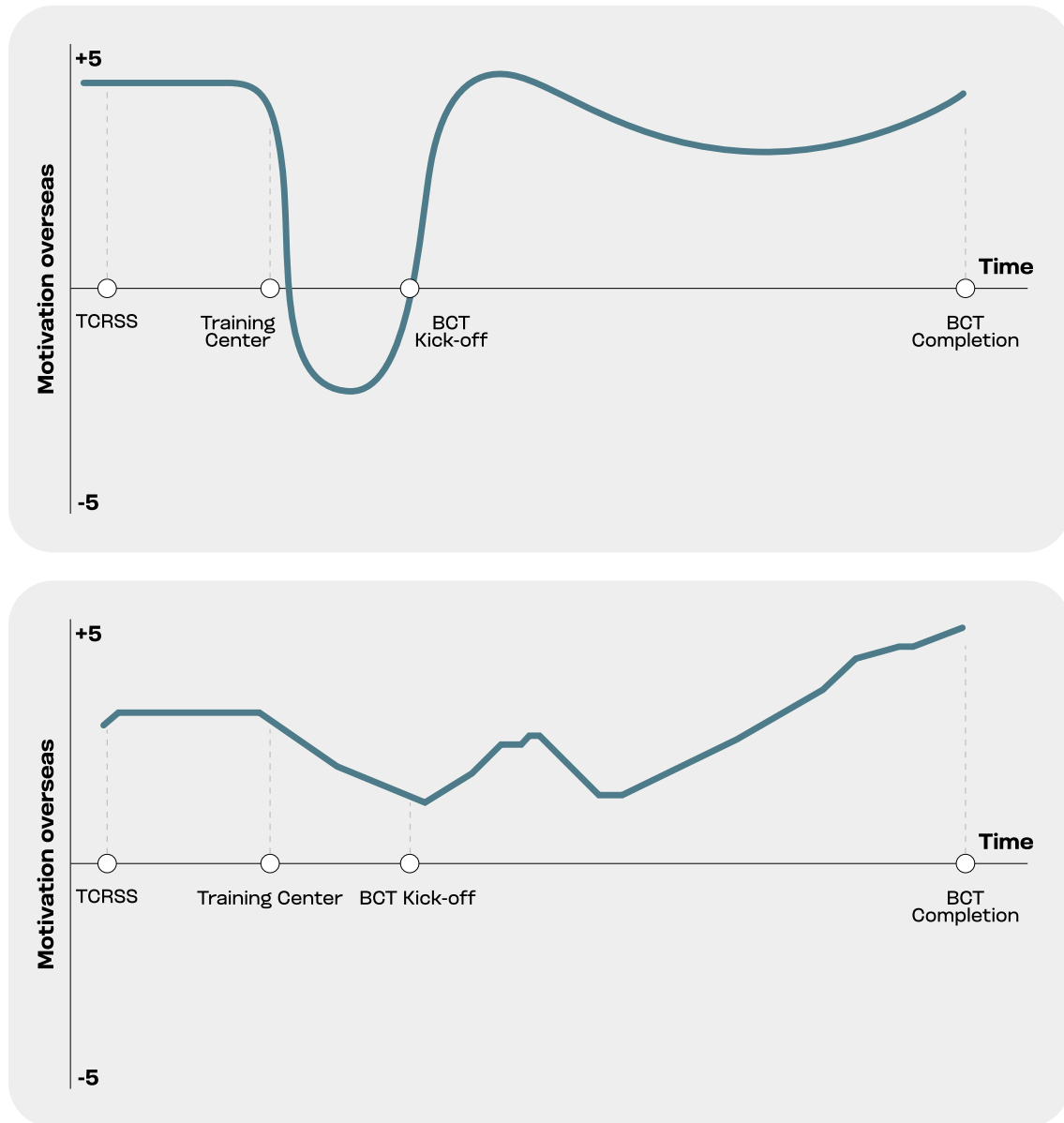


Figure 5. — Level of motivation of recruits during training: on the left — training in country No. 1 (drop in expectation of the BCT start at the Ukrainian training center), on the right — in country No. 2 (first drop — in expectation of the BCT start at the Ukrainian training centre, second drop — doubts about appropriateness of some elements of the program and compliance of the knowledge of foreign instructors with the current requirements of the battlefield). It is worth noting that, upon return, a respondent from graph #2, despite increased motivation by the end of the BCT course, noted drop in his confidence since the program abroad, compared to the experience of recruits who undertook BCT in Ukraine, turned out to be not so relevant.

A significant problem while training recruits abroad is that foreign instructors do not have **relevant combat experience**. There is also a great lack of effective **translators**, which causes some of the information to be lost. This is another factor that reduces the motivation of recruits since they see that they cannot fully master the program.

Despite the noted shortcomings, recruits who trained abroad still had an opportunity — albeit limited — to begin socializing into the military culture of the North Atlantic Alliance and to become familiar with basic NATO terminology. Additionally, exchanging contacts and experiences proved valuable—especially through conversations with people who had spent decades operating certain types of weapons and military equipment that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are now using. However, such benefits are more characteristic of overseas training for specialists. Joint training missions with partner nations can help lay the foundation for building horizontal ties between armies outside of the Soviet legacy framework.

As for Basic Combat Training conducted within Ukraine, a portion of unmotivated and demoralized recruits spend considerable time and energy during the course **searching for ways to "exit"** the military system. In some cases, they arrive at their assigned combat brigades already equipped with discharge paperwork—on the basis of health issues, family circumstances, or other grounds. Due to low motivation levels, **recruits often encourage their family and friends to avoid mobilization altogether** during conversations throughout their training. These direct negative experiences within training centers amplify and spread unfavorable perceptions of military service, further eroding public readiness for mobilization and undermining efforts to replenish military personnel.

Persistent illnesses, lack of sleep, frustration with living conditions, exhaustion from constant foot movements around the training center in full gear, feelings of wasted time, leadership attitudes, and other demotivating factors—all of these reduce concentration, willingness to learn, and commitment to continued service. Moreover, these factors **devalue the training program itself, regardless of its content**.

Due to poor living conditions and ineffective organization of training, recruits **form their impressions of how training centers, the army, and the state treat them** even before their service begins. Although living conditions are only one of the issues in basic combat training, they represent the starting point of interaction between training centers and recruits and can sharply contrast with the conditions recruits recently experienced in civilian life. Because of dissatisfaction with basic needs, recruits quickly lose motivation to learn and later, being insufficiently prepared, are unable to perform combat tasks effectively and may be more prone to injuries.

The importance of meeting basic needs for overall motivation is supported by **Frederick Herzberg's popular two-factor theory of motivation**, often cited in military analysis. According to this theory, motivation in a group is influenced by two categories of factors: hygiene factors and motivators. Living conditions and household chores, which are not directly related to the performance of official duties, fall under hygiene factors. While these factors alone are insufficient to motivate, if they cause dissatisfaction, then all other positive motivational factors will fail to work.

FREDERICK HERZBERG'S TWO-FACTOR THEORY

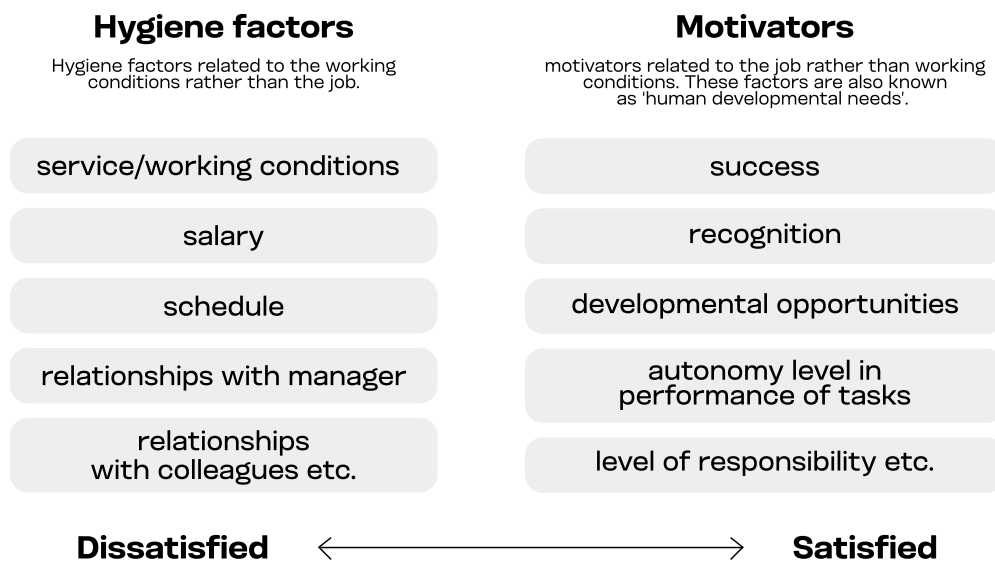


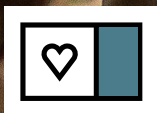
Figure 6. — Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory

Combining hygiene factors (ensuring basic conditions) and motivational factors is key to maintaining high motivation and quality training among recruits. The recruits believe that **addressing even a few of the problematic aspects** of life in the training center would significantly reduce the level of stress and demotivation.

The following sections provide a detailed analysis of the challenges facing BCT (Basic Combat Training), as well as recommendations aimed at shifting the focus toward prioritizing the needs of recruits within the AFU's training system. These changes would help create the most favorable environment for effective training of new recruits within the given timeframe and under limited resources. At present, however, **the priority in the BCT system appears to be on administrative and logistical processes rather than on actual training.**

Chapter 3

“PAINS” OF RECRUITS AND INSTRUCTORS



We closely analyzed feedback from recruits — formerly civilians — who underwent Basic Combat Training, and the instructors responsible for their training. Many problems appeared to be common for them. All factors that demotivated them or hindered effective training were grouped into three categories:

- material (living conditions and training resources);
- communication and attitude;
- training organization.

The problems voiced by the recruits can be explained by two key reasons:

- insufficient provision of the prescribed basic conditions for training;
- higher (or false) expectations of civilians about what this training should be like.

Mobilized service members perceived their negative experience as a sign of disrespect from the state and often expressed frustration over what felt like wasted time.

Our hypothesis is that reducing the number of demotivating experiences — **particularly through timely and effective communication** — will help increase recruits' motivation, leading to more effective training. As a result, they are more likely to feel prepared for service in combat brigades upon completing the program.

Disorganization and inefficiency kill my motivation." — recruit, 45–50 years old, one week before completing BCT

Therefore, **Section 3.1** of this chapter identifies the main groups of problems (barriers) that, **according to recruits**, hinder effective training. These factors are also relevant for instructors and have a similar negative impact on their work and motivation.

Additionally, **Section 3.2** separately highlights problematic factors (barriers) that relate specifically to the instructor staff.

In their responses, recruits mostly complained about material (living) conditions, disrespectful treatment, and the inefficiency of organizational processes. It is likely that they had inflated expectations regarding training conditions and compared them with civilian life. Moreover, although respondents without combat experience were not in a position to properly assess the course content, the accumulation of negative experiences interfered with their ability to absorb information and undermined their overall trust in leadership.

All the barriers mentioned by the respondents are closely interconnected and tended to recur depending on the lens through which the problem was observed. Therefore, a comprehensive and simultaneous approach to addressing these issues is key to achieving positive change. However, it is likely that even partial success in this area would have an impact on the quality of program delivery and the motivation of both recruits and instructors.

3.1. Problems (Barriers) Faced by Recruits and Instructors During Basic Combat Training

Material factors (living conditions and training resources)

According to recruits, basic living conditions in training centers are often poor and significantly impact both their physical and mental well-being. Common issues include inadequate access to drinking and utility water — both hot and cold—which causes concern and leads to unmet basic needs. Facilities for showering may be unavailable or function inconsistently, and laundry is complicated by a lack of washing machines and places to dry clothing. The same applies to restrooms and other essential infrastructure. These conditions become a source of demotivation, especially under the pressure of intensive training and physical exertion.

The lack of adequate training and material resources also causes anxiety among recruits. It creates the impression that front-line units may suffer from similar shortages in weapons and equipment. In reality, combat brigades are much better supplied than training centers.

"It's good that we finally have a shower, but it only appeared a month ago. So we're clean, but our clothes are dirty. There's no dryer, and we can't hang things inside the tent." — recruit, 35–40 years old

"It's really, really depressing to see that there's money, for example, for planting thuja and boxwood shrubs around the base, but no money to install heating in the shelter — it's just ridiculous." — recruit, 30–35 years old

"Our training grenades were just rocks wrapped in yellow tape. There were a couple of real training grenades, but only a couple, because they simply don't exist — only mock 'lemons' for imitation." — recruit, 25–30 years old

Food remains a significant issue for many. Recruits often complained about the quality of the meals, their monotony, and insufficient quantity. The products may be of low quality, improperly stored, or poorly prepared. The lack of periodic access to necessary products exacerbates the problem. This also demotivates personnel and creates a sense of indifference from the leadership.

"The food lacked enough proteins and fats. And I wouldn't have believed it myself, but we really ate about 50 grams of meat a day, and during the entire course... there were only 7 eggs. With such physical loads, this personally led to significant muscle loss for me, which I had spent a year building up preparing and training in MMA [martial arts] and at the gym." — recruit, 25–30 years old

"The food is trash. Meat is rare. You can't feed people like this" — recruit, 40–45 years old

"With all those noodles, you could cover an IFV — it would be armor." — recruit, 40–45 years old

According to respondents, medical treatment and healthcare in general are insufficient or absent, forcing recruits to self-medicate or wait until their condition significantly worsens before being hospitalized. Given that 20–30 people live together in one room (tent, dugout, etc.) and the neglect of isolating the first sick individuals, infections and viruses quickly spread throughout the entire group. At the same time, physical training in the training centers does not meet the expectations of the brigades receiving the recruits (for more details, see "Section 4"), and poor-quality nutrition only worsens the overall condition of the recruits.

"Medical treatment is taboo. To be hospitalized, you need a temperature of 39–40°C. You have to walk 5 km to the medical point. They'll reduce your fever once, then tell you to go to classes" — recruit, 35–45 years old

"I treated myself because here [at the training center's medical post] they say, 'Drink some currant tea'" — recruit, 25–30 years old

Overall, the conditions in the training units require significant improvement. Problems with water supply, electricity, nutrition, hygiene, medical care, and physical training create serious obstacles to quality education and distract servicemembers from absorbing the course material. Besides the basic living conditions, partial access to familiar civilian-life routines can help recruits gradually and more naturally integrate into the military and better assimilate information. Addressing these issues will not only increase the effectiveness of training but also promote better adaptation of recruits to service. Additionally, it will raise the level of loyalty and trust toward the training staff overall.

"The leadership lives somewhere in the city — they don't understand [this situation]. They don't understand what it means to have just two power outlets for 22 people." — recruit, 25–30 years old

Most of the material "pains" mentioned above would not have such a demotivating effect if they were communicated properly and in a timely manner by representatives of the training centers, and if there was a genuine understanding of the recruits' problems in the attitude toward them. This is clearly demonstrated by respondents' testimonies, who do not understand, for example, why recruits have to build their own living

conditions or why they are assigned certain tasks, even though most of these tasks do indeed make sense.

Communication support and the attitude toward recruits primarily depend **on the level of training and professionalism of the instructors and command staff** of the training centers (units).

Communication and attitude

The study also identified **a range of intangible factors that block recruits' motivation** and negatively affect their ability to focus effectively on training. Recruits **value "humane" treatment** from instructors, sergeants, and officers, and during the study they often emphasized this to us. Likely, overcoming these barriers is much more difficult than addressing material issues and requires time.

In those training centers where instructors and leadership actively, openly, and respectfully communicate with recruits—for example, about insufficient material resources—recruits noticeably complain less about such problems. For representatives of training centers, intangible factors may seem irrelevant or their importance exaggerated. However, we want to emphasize again that this is the perspective of recent civilians whose moral and physical condition is a crucial factor in successful training.

Problems in training centers are mostly linked to insufficient communication with recruits. They often do not understand what is expected of them, what their rights are, and how they can defend those rights. This creates a sense of chaos and uncertainty, which negatively affects motivation. The lack of clear explanations about the daily schedule, rules, and procedures breeds stress and confusion. There is also a lack of quality communication at the mobilization stage, which complicates recruits' adaptation to the training process. Uncertainty is a constant stress factor that accompanies recruits throughout the entire basic combat training course and drains necessary moral resources.

"When I arrived at the training center, it was pure chaos. It wasn't clear what I was supposed to do, where to stand, how to do things; no one explained anything to me, no one told me what my next steps were. All I was told was, 'Wait, they'll tell you everything.' So, well, I spent most of the first three days waiting and hoping they hadn't forgotten about me," — recruit, 30–35 years old

"What really demotivated us was being treated like cheap labor. For the first two weeks, all we did was dig, collect trash, chop firewood, cut branches for the fence, weave that fence, dig a hole for the latrine, and build the latrine." — recruit, 30–35 years old

"One day it rained, and they herded us into a tent where they talked for an hour about the OP [observation post], fire maps, etc., and then the battalion commander showed up and kicked us back outside into the rain, where they kept telling us the same things for another hour and a half."
— recruit, 30–35 years old

A separate problem is the attitude of instructors who often use insults and humiliation instead of constructive feedback. This not only demotivates , but also makes recruits "closed off" to learning and contributes to the spread of negative sentiments.

"We have one sergeant who has a very humane attitude. ... Unfortunately, there is only one sergeant in the company. There are five sergeants in total. The others? Well, you can only turn to them if you want to be called an idiot. And that's very demotivating, such an attitude. When you're already struggling, they tell you 'this is wrong — redo it.' No one explains how to do it right, and it's your problem — it's wrong. Then another sergeant comes along and says to do it in a completely different way, so you have to redo it again." — recruit, 25–30 years

"This looks like... well, it doesn't look normal. There's no strong repressive mechanism, no strong discipline, no morality or humanity — it's just chaos and a mess. And that's the worst part." — recruit, 25–30 years old

Recruits also often get information from social media, where demoralizing narratives dominate and no one systematically refutes them. News is delivered poorly and in fragments, which only worsens the moral and psychological state. All this increases distrust toward the command, the state, and the army itself.

"Telemarathon causes tremendous harm. We absorb the information from it in a very fragmented way, mostly in the dining hall. And mostly from subtitles, because you can't hear what they're saying on the TV due to the noise. I just yelled at a fellow soldier for the first time because of how badly he misinterpreted what he heard, and how that made him speak sarcastically about everything — including the state." — recruit, 25–30 years

"Our political officer just reads us something — some news clipping from Ukrainska Pravda. He doesn't understand a damn thing himself. Like, there was news that Denmark would purchase 28 million worth of Ukrainian weapons for the Ukrainian army — everyone burst out laughing, saying, 'What the hell is that? Who the hell — some idiot — wrote this?'... Well, their brains just broke, like [no one can explain the news properly]." — recruit, 25–30 years

Another problem is unequal treatment of mobilized soldiers versus contract servicemen, and of recruits with varying health conditions. Many expressed a sense of injustice due to the chaotic assignment process, disregard for recommendation letters, and unreasonable physical demands for those with medical limitations. Unclear rules only deepen the sense of disrespect and lead to resentment.

"The motivation of those who volunteered tends to be lower by the end [of the training program], because they're constantly treated 'like draft dodgers.' There's more and more pressure, but no positive feedback at all. What weighs on me most is the feeling that my time here has been completely useless." — recruit, 25–30 years old

"Oh, and I must add — the hatred for the Ukrainian government here is enormous. Yesterday they brought in a guy with a broken spine. I mean, he can barely walk on his own — and they mobilized him like that. At least I went through rehab. In my tent there's a man who's had five mini-strokes — discharged from hospital on March 12, mobilized here by the 27th." — recruit, 25–30 years old

In addition, elementary forms of rest and leisure are often missing, which negatively affects morale. Experience from other countries shows that providing recruits with the opportunity for a short break, space and time for informal communication can significantly increase their motivation.

Overall, the main issues in the training centers stem from a lack of quality communication, a lack of respect for personnel, a negative information environment, and organizational chaos in the training process (which will be addressed further below).

The complex of problems related to non-material motivation factors is critical not only for the effectiveness of the BCT course, but for the training system as a whole. Ukrainian training centers must be able to accumulate the necessary resources and capabilities to continuously improve their work and build effective two-way communication with both recruits and instructors. **The key — and possibly the only — way to overcome non-material barriers in training centers is through quality selection, training, and retraining of the instructor and teaching staff**, including developing their communication skills with recruits.

Training Organization

Respondents in the study — especially those who had joined the military for the first time — generally could not fully assess the content of the training program, as they had nothing to compare it to. New recruits lacked understanding of which parts of the BCT course would actually be useful in their future service. At the same time, respondents did describe cases where the **material seemed irrelevant** or lacked credibility.

It is important to note that this refers to the perception of the information and exercises by the trainees themselves, not the actual usefulness or lack thereof.

About training — the instructors' new favorite exercise to kill time is walking in two ranks in a staggered formation, formally a troop maneuver. We walked like that for about two hours before lunch today — there were no other activities." — recruit, 25–30 years old.

The described problems of training centers are reduced to poor organization of processes and procedures, which significantly reduces the effectiveness of recruit training. Sometimes, according to them, too much time is wasted on moving between locations, waiting, "meaningless" formations and inspections. As a result, during the training day, **recruits may spend more time on logistics, waiting, or non-core tasks (duties, "showmanship," etc.) than on actual training.** According to respondents, time efficiency may in some cases be no more than 50%²⁵.

"I didn't get to the shooting sessions. In the morning, during the lining-up they were choosing people for "showing-off" and took me and 4 other recruits. They were choosing according to the principle of "who is better dressed." — recruit, 35–40 years old

"Approximately an hour a day is spent standing on the parade ground in formation doing nothing (waiting for someone or something else)." — recruit, 25–30 years old

"After lunch, we just hid in the forest [because there was no possibility to organize the training process on the part of the training center]" — recruit, 30–35 years old

Another possible issue is **the inconsistency of the training program.** Some topics are repeated in certain groups and completely skipped in others. Recruits lack clear information about the training plan, and many important decisions are made at the last minute. Lack of proper coordination can also lead to situations where recruits are forced to leave classes to perform household tasks. This devalues the learning process for both recruits and instructors. Additionally, stories of recruits who, despite health problems and other formal reasons for exemption, are forced to take the course repeatedly due to certain bureaucratic obstacles are demotivating. Information about such cases is actively disseminated by the training part, and the recruits see in this the state's inability to properly use resources.

Quality of teaching, according to respondents, also leaves much to be desired.

²⁵ The value is based on the subjective impressions of the respondents of the qualitative research. Accuracy of performance value indicator for the effectively spent time was not measured during the work on this document.

Some instructors lack teaching skills, and sometimes do not even understand the topics they are teaching. Theoretical classes may be outdated or not adapted to the level of the students, which makes it difficult to process information. Practical exercises, in particular shooting, are carried out without proper evaluation of the results, which **deprives the recruits of the opportunity to understand their progress and feel prepared**. As a result, some recruits perceive much of the training process as merely formal rather than real preparation for combat.

"The instructor comes in and says, 'I don't get any of this, so I'll just, like, read it out.' Then he can't even pronounce the word 'electromagnetic' — says it's too complicated — and also struggles with 'inductive.' And he goes, 'Indu... indu... Well, this was written for some smart guys.' How am I supposed to take seriously someone who can't even read words off a page? Even if it's not his specialty." — recruit, 25–30 years old

"The shooting drills, in my opinion, are pointless. We were given 60 rounds and fired all 60 in one go with single shots at a target about 100 meters away. But the target was static — there was no way to know how well anyone shot. We weren't allowed to go check the targets; they said there was 'no time.' And with their time management, that's true — there are way too many people. And then, once again, there was the incident with the grass catching fire and having to wait for the fire truck." — recruit, 35–40 years old

"Everyone passed the shooting test — even the guy who didn't hit the target a single time. His rifle's sight was completely off, and even the company commander couldn't hit the target when he tried it himself." — recruit, 35–40 years old

In addition, recruits are not provided with proper psychological support at the training centers, and moral and psychological support specialists are overloaded with other responsibilities.

"She [the psychologist] makes an effort to be, first of all, an adequate person with everyone and so on. The problem is rather that MPSs is also overloaded with paperwork, like everyone else, well, there is simply no time, absolutely no time. The problem is that every day they ask who has problems, and there is no point in asking about these problems without getting a response to these questions anyway (because no one has time)." — recruit, 25–30 years old

The list of barriers voiced related to the organization of training demonstrates: **high-quality planning and organization of processes at the level of training units (centers) can significantly increase the motivation of recruits and the effectiveness of their training**. And in combination with changes in communication and attitudes, it can significantly affect the training system as a whole.

3.2. Problematic factors (barriers) related specifically to the instructor staff

Communication, attitude, and organization of the training processes will largely depend on instructors' quality work as key foundation of the BCT course. All respondents noted that **professional instructors play a key role in providing quality training**. They also greatly affect the level of motivation of the recruits. However, the issue of instructor "burnout" and staff shortages proved to be relevant across all training centers where we had respondents.

"What I would change — what I, as an instructor, and what the recruits are lacking — is information. Constant communication: what to expect throughout the course, what to expect tomorrow, what to expect next week. I was in Germany, took a squad leader course. I didn't have a single question during the entire course. Everything was just so clear, you're informed from day one. Even before departure, you get digital materials with everything outlined — down to details like: 'Bringing pets is discouraged because we cannot accommodate them.' Including links. Everything is written out."
— instructor

Low motivation and a staffing crisis among instructors at training centers are largely caused by the same issues faced by recruits: poor living conditions, physical and mental exhaustion, and a lack of rest. Instructors often work without sufficient breaks, which leads to resignations due to health issues or a **return to combat units, where, according to them, service conditions are better** (pay, living conditions, and respect from the society). Many of them have combat experience but also suffer from injuries or concussions, which makes serving without additional support and accommodations even more difficult.

"In 2 years there were only 2 weeks of vacation and there is no one to cover (for replacement)." — instructor

"Combat [military personnel] don't come here [to the training centres] to work because they know it's a total mess with rigid regulations. The conditions are better in the brigade." — instructor

"Half an hour — and a new course is brought in. The mattresses don't even have time to cool down." — instructor

Instructors are often unaware of professional development opportunities and are forced to teach subjects in which they lack sufficient expertise. They also report that the material and technical support for the training process remains inadequate, so they have to buy necessary supplies with their own money or seek help from volunteers. The training process is chaotic, lacking structure and predictability, which complicates both recruits' training and the

instructors' work. A significant portion of instructors' free time is taken up by paperwork — hours that could otherwise be used for rest or preparation for upcoming classes..

"Everything that is in topography, that I work with, it was all bought at my own expense, I begged it from volunteers elsewhere but everything, everything is mine, everything is mine, I am almost completely self-sufficient. At that time, the training center never asked me what the lecturers needed and so on. I have been at the training center for more than a year, this question was not raised simply: "You are instructors, you will provide all for yourself"". — instructor

"70–80% of the instructors' workload is paperwork. I'll finish talking to you and go type in the documents." — instructor

The loss of graduates on the battlefield causes some instructors to emotionally distance themselves from new recruits, which affects the level of engagement with recruits and the quality of training itself. Instructors also face dismissive attitudes from leadership, which is highly demotivating.

"You stop getting to know [the recruits] because people die. I don't even memorize their names anymore. We're sending a pediatric heart surgeon to the infantry — he's leaving now. One strike on the brigade, and he's gone." — instructor

"They [the training centre's leadership] treat instructors like cattle." — instructor

Overall, the instructors interviewed emphasized the need to ensure decent working conditions, specifically: respectful treatment from leadership, basic living conditions, effective planning, reduced bureaucratic workload, improvements to the pay system, access to vacation and rest, and opportunities for professional development and career advancement. At the same time, it should be noted that addressing the problems faced by recruits would automatically resolve a significant portion of the instructors' issues as well.

Results

The barriers that prevent effective basic combined arms training can be summarized and grouped as follows:

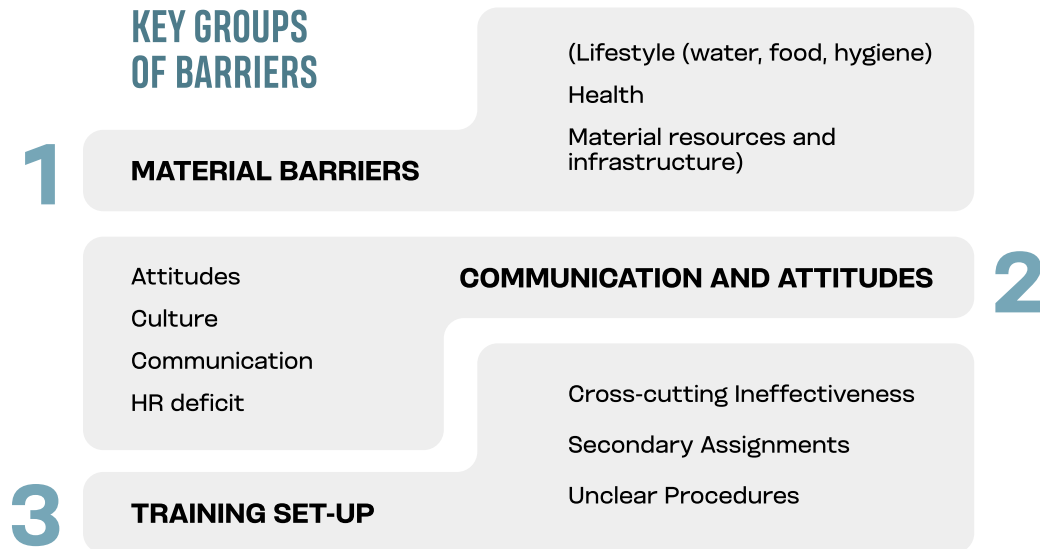


Figure 7. — Generalized groups of barriers that hinder effective BCT

This combination of problematic factors has three main negative consequences:

- **The Basic Combat Training (BCT) program is effectively not implemented or cannot be implemented.**

The problem is primarily not in the curriculum itself, but in the fact that it cannot be properly implemented due to inefficient processes and procedures (organization of training and planning), a shortage of instructors, an unsatisfactory level of their training, an insufficient training and material base, as well as limited time, which, in particular, is spent on logistics, outfits, and the need to respond to alarms.

Despite the fact that the BCT curriculum is the same for everyone, the level of its implementation varies significantly from the training centre to the training centre. According to respondents, **the main problem is not the content of the curriculum, but the systemic obstacles, inefficient processes and procedures that make its full implementation impossible.**

- **The health of the recruits deteriorates throughout the BCT course.**

Untimely isolation of patients, lack of medicines and medical personnel, nominal MMC, lack of household and educational infrastructure, low-quality food, etc. - all this can lead to a significant part of recruits

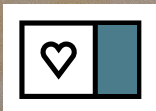
completing the BCT course with a significantly worse health condition than when they started it.

- **The level of motivation generally decreases throughout the BCT course.**

Among the reasons may be poor communication from representatives of training units (centers), unprofessionalism of some instructors, uncertainty, ineffective planning and organization of processes, lack of basic living conditions and necessary educational and material base.

And the main and most critical likely consequence of the described barriers is that **after completing the Basic Combat Training course, soldiers do not feel prepared to participate in combat operations and to serve in general.**

PERSPECTIVES ON BASIC COMBAT TRAINING FROM COMBAT BRIGADE REPRESENTATIVES AND EDUCATION EXPERTS



To enable systemic the talk about the level of training for soldiers after BCT, feedback from recruits and instructors alone is not enough. To more accurately interpret the data and better understand the state of training in general, we interviewed two more groups of respondents:

- those responsible for training in brigades - deputy brigade commanders for combat training and instructors of training (reserve) brigade units;
- civilian and military professionals in the field of education and teaching²⁶.

While we asked the first group to assess preparedness of the newcomers who had just completed BCT, we discussed with the second group the "pains" that were voiced by the recruits and instructors during the data collection phase. In addition, with both groups we sought to find the ways to improve the underpinning process of BCT course in the current conditions.

This also allowed us to highlight for the stakeholders of this research (General Staff of the Armed Forces Of Ukraine, Ministry of Defense, partner countries, etc.) current practices of a number of combat brigades and instructors, which may be useful in implementing changes in the military training system.

This approach, in particular, led us to define the key indicator for the BCT course — **preparedness**. It is not just about the quantity and quality of knowledge, skills and abilities acquired during the BCT program, but also about how each individual recruit assesses his own level of preparation. Therefore, preparedness has two dimensions:

- **subjective** — the recruit's own sense of preparedness (awareness of having acquired useful or sufficient knowledge and skills during the course);
- **objective** — current preparedness in view of the acquired skills and acquired knowledge (without awareness and/or without a sense of their usefulness or sufficiency for the battlefield).

That is, a soldier can feel ready to perform combat missions, even if his skills are not sufficient. And vice versa soldiers can be actually well-prepared, but not feel confident in his actions.

There is currently no consensus which dimension is more important . However, the authors of this research suggest that, given the specifics of the conduct of hostilities in the Russia-Ukraine war during 2024, a recruit's own sense of pre-

²⁶ A separate group of reviewers were active soldiers who completed BCT no more than six months ago and already had experience of serving in combat military units. We did not separate their feedback on the course into a separate part of the report, but it gave us a more complete understanding of the training barriers discussed in Section 3. Most of the time, we heard critical comments about the content of the program, the quality of teaching, and the organization of the training process. Most often, reviewers described this experience as ineffective, considering it a waste of time. In addition, they often compared the living conditions of the training centers with the conditions on the front line, and such comparison was not in favor of the centers.

paredness is more important than the actual presence of skills that he/she will not be able to apply at the battlefield due to uncertainty in his/her knowledge.

This leads us to the next assumption: it is not enough to simply give recruits a set of knowledge and skills. It is also necessary to show them that this knowledge works and the skills are actually useful.

Croatian military psychologist Zoran Komar, who studies how to raise psychological readiness of soldiers to perform combat missions, calls personal military training and fitness one of the key elements of a sense of security on the battlefield: a well-trained soldier has much higher faith in his own strength and weapons, and, conversely, a feeling of insufficient preparation generates fear, uncertainty, and an inability to cope with combat challenges²⁷.

4.1. Responsible for training in combat brigades

The research team attempted to view the Basic Combat Training (BCT) course as a process in which the "client" is the military unit that recruits are assigned to after completing training at the center. Since the focus is on infantry soldiers, it was decided to conduct a series of interviews with brigade deputy commanders for combat training and instructors of training (reserve) units within brigades operating in combat zones. These individuals are the ones who interact with newly arrived personnel and are responsible for their additional training.

In addition, representatives of this group of respondents shape their personal experience and the experience of their military unit on the battlefield, so they are able to compare the set of knowledge and skills that yesterday's recruits arrive with with the real requirements of the combat area. However, it is important to note that the experience of individual brigades and their units is not necessarily relevant, which is why assessments of the level of preparedness of newcomers after the BCT course vary.

Quality of training

Based on the results of seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives of the combat brigade training vertical (and taking into account comments from other reviewers), it can be concluded that, in their opinion, **the level of training of recruits after completing BCT is insufficient.**

All respondents in this group, without exception, gave a critical assessment of the preparedness of newly arrived personnel after completing Basic Combat Training (BCT). They emphasize that this is not only slowing down combat coordination, but also creates high risks when performing tasks on the front line.

²⁷ Textbook for military psychologists "Psychological Resilience of a Warrior", p. 70: https://sprotyvg7.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Psykholohichna_stiikist_voina.pdf

"The training is extremely poor; personnel arrive untrained," — Deputy Brigade Commander for Combat Training

"There is no graduate who is well-prepared" — Deputy Brigade Commander for Combat Training

In their opinion, newly arrived soldiers are not ready to perform tasks on the battlefield. Insufficient training significantly increases the risk of losses due to errors that could be avoided. According to the commanders of combat brigades, the main problems of the replenishment that comes to them after BCT are the unsatisfactory level of the following basic knowledge and skills:

- possession of weapons;
- communication basics;
- fundamentals of engineering training;
- tactical medicine, etc.

They particularly drew attention to the poor physical training of the newcomers. The combat brigades expect that at least back and legs of the new recruits, which bear the main load during service, should be in good shape (or at least relatively healthy). The issue of physical fitness is directly related to the health of recruits entering training centers and then military units.

Significant increase in the average age of mobilized people, as well as the formality of the selection at the MMC stage, create all the conditions for people whose health condition would otherwise make it impossible to join the army. It is unrealistic to expect an adequate level of physical fitness from service members who already had health issues in civilian life due to age or pre-existing medical conditions.

The moral and psychological state of the newcomers is also important, as it affects their ability to adapt to combat conditions and perform tasks. As Zoran Komar notes, psychological combat readiness is based on individual endurance, which is strengthened by trust and support in the combat group. That is, the cohesion and morale of the unit are formed not only through interaction in the team - an important factor is also the personal resilience of each soldier²⁸.

Representatives of combat units emphasize that high-quality training of personnel is one of the key factors in reducing combat losses. Therefore, improving the training process at the training centre is of critical importance not only for the survival of individual soldiers, but also for reducing the time for retraining and increasing the combat capability of units as a whole. The level of preparedness of personnel is one of the main factors influencing the survivability of soldiers, quality of combat mission performance, effectiveness of enemy destruction, and overall effectiveness of operations.

²⁸ Textbook for military psychologists "Psychological Resilience of a Warrior", p. 68: https://sprotyvg7.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Psykholohichna_stiikist_voina.pdf

Purpose of the BCT curriculum

According to representatives of the combat brigades, **the curriculum does not need to be expanded, but, to begin with, it should at least ensure proper teaching of basic subjects.** Therefore, it should retain only the most essential elements and focus on core priority disciplines, which respondents identified as tactical training, firearms training, engineering training, topography, communications, and others. Notably, each of these subjects was already included in the curriculum in effect at the time of data collection for this study (third edition, from February 2024).

Therefore, **the problem is not so much in the BCT course curriculum, but in the quality of teaching and efficiency of processes at the training centers.**

At the same time, the curriculum itself states that it is necessary to **"teach a soldier what is necessary at war."** Representatives of instructors and teaching staff with experience of participating in combat operations after 2022 voiced the same opinion to the authors.

"If it's not relevant to the battlefield, fuck it !" — instructor of one of the TCs, with combat experience

It is worth noting separately that the program does not take into account the actual physical strain, which affects the real endurance of service members — particularly due to chronic sleep deprivation caused by frequent air raid alerts, guard duties, and long marches on foot. In the current fourth edition of the Basic General Military Training (BGMT) program, only four hours are allocated to physical training as a standalone subject throughout the entire course.

Determining the priority of particular subjects and the appropriate distribution of hours for their instruction was not the goal of this study and requires further examination. However, as noted in previous sections, **the actual aim of the BCT course currently tends to boil down primarily to the formal assignment of VOS 100 to the soldier.**

It should be noted that there are different approaches to defining the main goals of BCT. Some emphasize that the primary objective is to develop the ability to inflict combat losses on the enemy, with survival aspects given less attention. However, there are also other, more comprehensive approaches, in which BCT is seen as preparation for performing combat tasks in a broader sense — where marksmanship is just one of several necessary components.

An important statement made by respondents was that **the task of the BCT curriculum cannot be to train a "universal soldier".** Minimum requirement should be the normal mastery of at least basic disciplines.

Preparation after arrival in combat brigades

The training of yesterday's recruits on the basis of brigades is becoming increasingly important due to the need to "close" the skills gap in a very short period of time.

Brigades continue training newly arrived personnel using their own, often improvised and informal, resources. This mostly takes place directly in the combat zone. Deputy brigade commanders for combat training and their instructors generally stated that during this additional training they focus more on practical skills and cited, as an example, the level of weapons proficiency among the newly arrived personnel:

"[At the training center] there is little time for shooting. They shoot once, then the next time is after three days. But during the first day in the brigade [during the additional training], they shoot more than in one and a half months of training," — Deputy Brigade Commander for Combat Training

"There needs to be much more shooting. 560 rounds is too few. When we trained [after arrival in the brigade], it was 10 magazines per person per day," — Deputy Brigade Commander for Combat Training

It should be noted that the deputy brigade commanders for combat training mostly spoke about the number of rounds fired, rather than other basic weapon handling skills, such **as the ability to independently bring the weapon to proper functioning²⁹**.

However, extensive live-fire experience with personal (standard issue) weapons does indeed help servicemembers get accustomed to shooting, reduce fear of using weapons, and use them more confidently.

As seen from respondents' answers, the most focused and concrete training mostly takes place at the level of military units, often directly in the area of operations. This situation has its drawbacks, especially when units are positioned in sectors with intense combat activity. At the same time, there are advantages: combat brigades regularly adapt their additional training to the current situation along the line of contact, meaning they teach what, in their opinion, is truly necessary "here and now."

Moreover, all interviewed representatives of combat brigades support the idea that **some brigades should have the capability to conduct the Basic Combat Training course at their own bases**. However, not all brigades should be required to do this — it should only be a task for those brigades that have the capacity to provide the necessary training facilities, qualified instructors, and so on. Respondents mostly saw this role as fitting for military units among the "old brigades" with experience, rather than newly formed units.

²⁹ Manual of the Small Arms Shooting Skills. Combat inspection, bringing small arms to normal combat readiness, arming combat vehicles and aligning their sights: <https://surl.li/ikkaav>

The need to diversify the locations for conducting the Basic Combat Training course is also supported by the fact that the current capacities of training centers to prepare personnel are insufficient. Organizing BCT courses at brigade bases could reduce the burden on the training center system. Additionally, this would help establish a connection with future comrades-in-arms.

At the same time, it should be noted that **this approach carries significant risks and drawbacks**. In particular, not many brigades are capable of conducting training independently—both due to insufficient resources and equipment, and due to an inability to properly organize the training process itself. Another major drawback, especially from the perspective of higher military command, is the inability to assess and control the training process of new recruits. **Another fundamental shortcoming for the high military command is the inability to evaluate and control the process of training new recruits.**

4.2. Experts in the field of education and teaching

To assess the effectiveness of the BCT course and its alignment with the actual needs of the units, the research team also involved experts in the field of education and teaching. We discussed with them the systemic issues raised by the recruits and instructors, and also paid special attention to exploring ways to improve the BCT, taking into account the challenges facing the military training system in current conditions.

Focus of the BCT course

According to respondents in this group, BCT training should focus on core (priority) subjects rather than continually diversifying the curriculum, which consumes valuable time and scatters recruits' attention. Absorbing excessive amounts of information in a short period overloads cognitive capacities and reduces training effectiveness. Furthermore, the same barriers that already hinder new recruits from properly mastering existing subjects will likely obstruct the acquisition of new disciplines. Therefore, the focus should be on providing recruits with a foundation of the most essential knowledge — creating a solid base that can later be refined and directed toward specific specializations. Thus, **the BCT course should be concise and focused:**

"The more you squeeze in, the lower the quality. As a result, you will get nothing. It is better to give less, but with better quality." — instructor

"Not everyone should be a 'Rex'. We need to train professional soldiers." — instructor

Moreover, some recruits (depending on the capabilities of the training centers) undergo specialized training after basic training. This allows for the BCT

program to be streamlined by transferring its specific elements to specialized training programs. At the same time, for some servicemembers, the BCT may be their only formal training.

Time efficiency

Despite the limited time available for training new soldiers, simply increasing the duration of the BCT course is unlikely to positively impact the effectiveness of training. It will only be beneficial if the additional time is used to improve the quality of all relevant educational and organizational processes related to the course. Moreover, additional time requires additional resources—such as instructors, materials, and training aids—which are wasted if the extra time is used just as inefficiently:

"You can make the training course 60 days long, and for 60 days they'll be doing anything but learning," — education and teaching specialist.

"Resources invested in chaos only multiply the chaos," — education and teaching specialist.

Feedback and proper communication with recruits

Collecting feedback from recruits throughout the BCT course is essential for increasing their motivation, improving the quality of training, and ensuring the effective use of resources. If anonymity is guaranteed, respondents are likely to give honest assessments of the training quality and conditions. The initial feedback may be negative, but it will allow leadership to see the actual situation — or at least understand how the recruits themselves perceive the training process. Regularly obtaining such feedback will help identify local problems and respond to them promptly:

"The simplest thing to start with is collecting feedback from recruits. It is very easy to do. It will be terrible at first—and it is important to communicate that. Like, 'Friends, we are starting, we are opening the program, there is a hotline or, I do not know, an anonymous form where we will collect feedback on what is happening.' Then we will relay this feedback to the center leadership and give them time to address the shortcomings," — education and teaching specialist.

"Evaluation can be conducted through anonymous forms, allowing individuals to provide independent assessments of the course's quality and conditions. This feedback mechanism may operate in real time, for instance, after each module or training session." — education and teaching specialist.

Uncertainty is one of the main stress factors for recruits. Not knowing what will happen in a day, a week, or a month significantly decreases a re-

cruit's motivation and, as a result, the overall effectiveness of the training process. Trainees must have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, what procedures exist, and what is allowed or prohibited. According to experts, **informing and properly communicating with recruits is essential:**

"We can do something about the fact that there is a big problem that people do not understand what they will need to take with themselves for BCT [...] When a person moves from the registry to a new status as a conscript or mobilized individual, they should receive a notification: 'Congratulations, you are a future defender.' Here is a short guide to what awaits you in the coming months. Here is a hotline number, a number to call if you are being abused – some kind of basic information like that. What to bring with you for service, what not to bring under any circumstances, what your rights and responsibilities are," – instructor

Professional development of instructors and teaching staff

According to instructors, **high-quality training of instructors and officers in leadership positions within training centers (or units) is one of the key tools for improving the overall effectiveness of Basic Combat Training.** However, in order to ensure professional development, it is necessary to create favorable conditions (including adequate living conditions), as well as to develop a system of motivational factors:

"Being a teacher, being an instructor, being a coach is also a profession, and any profession requires training." – instructor

"Our experience will be in demand all over the world, there will be a high demand for it. Especially if some global crisis or conflict begins. You will not need to learn several foreign languages - English is enough. And when you decide to retire, you will still remain in demand until old age as an instructor from Ukraine." – instructor

At the same time, the instructors and management staff of the training centers are overloaded with bureaucratic work and are unable to effectively perform their main duties. The main tasks of the instructors and managers of the training centre should be to train recruits, establish processes and ensure their implementation. Currently, their involvement in non-core, unrelated activities prevents them from dedicating their full effort to these essential tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE



There are many ways to formulate recommendations, each deserving separate attention. However, in this case, the authors of the study chose to approach the concluding section not from a purely methodological perspective, but through the lens of the experience of "Come Back Alive" in implementing projects in the field of military education and training.

The experience of the "Come Back Alive" team in launching, deploying and supporting such projects as "Captains' Training" (a command course for tactical level L-1C officers), UAV School "Yatagan", "Sniper School", etc., shows that success of quality training consists of four key components:

- **staff** (team);
- **processes and procedures** (planning, organization of the educational process, etc.);
- **material base and support** (educational material and technical base, living conditions, infrastructure, etc.);
- **training program** (tasks, content, duration).

With the presence and effectiveness of each of these four components, recruits acquire knowledge and skills qualitatively, and, more importantly, **gain a sense of preparedness for combat operations.**

Staff (team)

Since the research did not analyze the entire training hierarchy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the section on personnel refers specifically to the command, instructor, and instructor-teaching staff of the training centers (units)³⁰.

Instructors and training center leadership trained according to current requirements are a key component of an effective training system³¹.

Moreover, high-quality team and staff at the training centre can eliminate most of the negative factors and "barriers" listed in Section 3 of this research (including lack of material support). Well-prepared and professional instructors, through their expertise, healthy communication, and sincere interaction, not only effectively teach the material and

³⁰ To describe the complete vision of the training vertical, there is a need for additional research that would include an analysis of the work of the training departments of the operational commands of the Land Forces and/or the commands of individual branches (types) of troops (forces), since planning and organization of work at their level are of critical importance for the high-quality functioning of training centers.

³¹ If we are talking about changes at the level of the training centres. At the same time, for example, qualitative selection of conscripts at the mobilization stage is an equally important step, but it does not depend on the vertical of training, therefore it is not mentioned in the recommendations.

implement the training program but also care for the health of the cadets and explain the purpose of the tasks, even when those tasks may initially seem meaningless. Therefore, **most of the factors** that recruits respondents identified as obstacles to quality training **will disappear through straightforward, healthy communication from the representatives of the training center.**

Similarly, if the management of a training center can ensure quality planning and respects its instructors, the training centre is more likely to implement efficient processes and procedures (which will also be discussed below).

Together, all of this **provides predictability to the training process**, which was one of the greatest demands expressed by recruits and instructors during the Basic Combat Training course. Combined with genuine care and concern for the recruits' health, this will directly influence an **increase in their motivation levels, which in turn directly affects the quality of learning.**

Therefore, to achieve the aforementioned goals, the following steps should be considered:

- **Establishing a new type of Instructors' School** — an entity with a newly, rigorously selected and trained cadre of instructors and teachers (including those trained abroad), with a new teaching culture and teaching approaches. The primary task of this School will be the training of new instructors and the retraining of existing ones who will then teach the Basic Combat Training course. It is important that graduates of this new Instructors' School, upon completion, are not dispersed randomly across various training centers but are assigned to pre-designated training units (subunits), where they can form a new core of the instructor team and influence changes in culture, communication, and training quality.

- **Creating specialized educational courses for the command staff of training units (centers).**

The main objective of these courses is to provide relevant knowledge and skills to officers who often assume leadership positions in training centers immediately after serving in combat brigades. This is important because training centers involve different processes and procedures: a greater emphasis on organizing and supporting training, and a need to establish cooperation with government bodies, enterprises, communities, contractors, etc.

- **Organization of civilian educational courses for the command staff of training units (centers).**

These are courses in various disciplines at civilian universities that should be useful to officers at training centers. For example, courses or educational

programs in strategic planning, personnel management, fundraising, project management, etc.

- **The search, selection and promotion of soldiers with combat experience to instructor positions at training centers (units) should become one of the priorities of personnel policy in the Defense Forces.**

In this case, the practice of replenishing combat units by transferring permanent military personnel from the training centre (in particular, instructors) along with their training equipment should be abandoned, because then investing resources in the development of the instructor staff and training centers in general will not bring the desired results.

- **Formation of the perception of the instructor service as prestigious and promising.**

Currently, if we consider the criteria of living conditions, provision and attitude, in the military hierarchy the instructors of the training centers are positioned some place next to the recruits. This should not be the case. Going from a combat unit to the position of an instructor at the training center, a person immediately loses a significant part of the financial support, in the society and similarly faces difficulties seeing their family.

In the medium and long term, positive steps listed above and a change in attitude towards instructors should close their shortage in the army and normalize their workload.

Processes and procedures

As noted above, the effectiveness of processes and procedures depends largely on the leadership of training centers (units) as well as on the instructors. For the reform of the training system, it is crucial to understand what processes exist within the training center, whether they are necessary, and how they can be optimized. However, establishing effective processes is only possible through quality interaction between the training centers and the training management departments of the service branches (forces) commands, as well as the Main Directorate of Doctrine and Training (J7) of the General Staff, since the General Staff and individual commands have direct influence over the functioning of training centers and planning.

Since processes and procedures directly affect not only teaching effectiveness, but also the motivation level of recruits and instructors, it is important that they are as simple and understandable as possible.

This part of the recommendations can be briefly stated as follows: during training, the recruit should focus solely on training (especially considering how limited the time for it is).³²

³² As of the end of 2024, the BCT course lasted only 49 days where 42 were training days.

At the same time, both recruits and instructors at training centers are **regularly involved in non-core tasks** (such as guard duties, demonstration exercises, maintenance work, etc.). It should be noted that this occurs partly due to objective circumstances (for example, poor staffing levels at training centers and the absence of dedicated support units). Nevertheless, it remains a significant obstacle to achieving high-quality training.

A separate type of inefficient and purely formal procedures at the training centers is the bureaucratic burden placed on the instructor staff. This can be eliminated by optimizing procedures and/or digitalization.

To improve processes and procedures at the training centre, the following steps should be considered:

- **Determining the actual efficiency of time use in training centers.**

This will help test the authors' hypothesis that the core issue lies not in the program itself, but rather in the fact that, for various reasons—some of which are objective—the program cannot be fully implemented.

- **Conducting an audit of typical processes and procedures in training units (subunits), as well as at the level of training directorates within the branches of the Armed Forces.**

This will not only provide a "process and procedure map" but will also help identify which of them are ineffective or unnecessary. At the same time, it may reveal that some processes are actually missing.

For example, according to the authors of this research, one of the fictitious processes may be giving recruits grades for standards and knowledge. This is an absolute formality, because during a full-scale war it is impossible not to pass BCT due to "low grades".

- **Digitalization of most of the instructors' document flow.**

Several training centers are already implementing projects designed to digitize the document flow related to the training process that instructors must maintain. The experience should be studied, generalized, and disseminated to key training centers.

- **Involvement of civilian contractors to avoid the non-core workload of recruits.**

This is a proven model for providing military units with services (e.g., cooking, garbage collection, etc.). This solution has both positive and negative consequences. However, **recruits must be focused on training.**

Also, the training centre comes across soldiers who, due to the formality of selection, were mobilized into the army despite having health issues or other contraindications. Training centers cannot dismiss such personnel, but they also cannot assign them to combat brigades. In these situations, it is in the best interest of the training center to involve these individuals in

supporting the daily operations of the unit, thereby reducing the workload on recruits who are preparing to be deployed to combat brigades.

- **Assessment of the possibility of separating educational and administrative activity.**

Household issues and the training process should be handled by different people (who are specialists in the relevant fields). The training process must remain the primary focus of training centers.

- **Implementation of a feedback collection system in training centers.**

Feedback should ideally be collected from recruits, instructors, and from the brigades that receive new personnel trained at a specific center. Some training centers have already begun implementing such feedback systems, but these require further refinement and scaling.

Training Program

Despite the hypothesis of the research³³, the training program (its objectives, content, and duration) remains one of the key elements of successful training (in our case—BCT).

The training program should pursue a clear and specific well-formulated goal, as well as define the criteria for achieving it.

It should be noted that as of the end of 2024, the objective of the BCT course program was still phrased in fairly formal terms³⁴.

An important aspect is that extension of the duration of the training program in 2024 (from 35 to 49 days) has also led to the expansion of its content. However, conceptual discussions on this issue are still ongoing within the professional community. Some experts argue that **extending the duration of the program should not necessarily result in changing its content.**

Another feature is that although the BCT curriculum is the same for all, each training center teaches it in its own way. This depends on many objective factors: whether instructors have combat experience, whether they rely on already developed methodological materials they are accustomed to and reluctant to change, and so on. Therefore, unifying and simultaneously updating the methodological materials could significantly simplify instructors' work.

At the same time, lack of control over the quality of program implementation

³³ That the main problem with BCT is not the training program, but that this program cannot be performed as such.

³⁴ The BCT program is intended for the training of persons called up for military service by conscription during mobilization for a special period and accepted for military service under a contract who have not completed military service or/and have a break in military service of more than ten years. The purpose of the training is to provide them with the primary knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform their duties and obtain the military registration specialty (VOS-100) "Shooter", December 2024.

makes it impossible to assess the real quality of training and implement changes that would meet battlefield requirements.

To improve the content and delivery of the training program, it is recommended to:

- **Adopt an approach where increasing the duration of the training program does not necessarily lead to expanding its content.**

Perhaps an increased amount of time should be used to better master the already existing core disciplines (such as firearms training, tactical training, communication basics, etc.).

- **Maintain flexibility in the program when justified (based on battlefield experience).**

The program should remain "alive" and responsive to the actual demands of the battlefield. However, frequent changes to the program can also be detrimental, as training centers may not have enough time to adapt.

- **Develop a unified, detailed methodological guide for the BCT course and digitize it.**

This can be a step toward unifying the BCT course and simplifying instructor training (and retraining). If this unified methodological material is available in digital format (potentially online) to all training centers, it will be easier to update and adapt the content simultaneously across all centers.

- **Develop a list of criteria for a successfully trained BCT graduate.**

It's not just about knowledge, but also about other criteria. For example, to complete BCT, a recruit must be in at least no worse health than before the course began.

Material Base and Provision

On one hand, solving the issue of insufficient material base in training centers (units) is one of the simplest aspects, as it primarily depends on the availability of resources (money, time, etc.). On the other hand, in order to determine the priority needs for training equipment, living conditions, and infrastructure, these needs must first be thoroughly assessed to avoid wasting resources.

According to the respondents of the study, the issue of material base and provision is not about demanding comfort similar to civilian life, but rather about meeting basic needs. These include, for example: 24-hour access to drinking water, the ability to take a shower, facilities to wash clothes and dry footwear, access to basic medicines at the training center, etc. At the same time, compliance with the basic requirements for places where classes are held will help recruits better process information, and for instructors to teach it better. A training platoon with wet, frozen feet is unlikely to successfully grasp the material.

This means that the material base and provision are primarily about ensuring that recruits and instructors feel treated with dignity, as well as about improving the effectiveness of training.

Better (or different from the existing) material support can indeed directly affect a recruit's motivation and his sense of preparedness for combat operations. Respondents repeatedly mentioned rather typical situations in training centers (units) during firearms training, such as:

- several recruits shoot at the same paper target at the same time (because there are not enough targets or the shooting range is not properly equipped);
- a recruit fires at a paper target, but due to lack of time (due to logistical problems, poor planning, or other reasons) there is no way to approach the target for assessment.

In both cases, the recruits have no idea whether they are hitting the target, and accordingly, they **do not develop a sense of confidence in their own training.** This problem can be addressed by equipping training centers with gongs (targets made from special metal), which provide immediate visual and audible feedback upon impact, making it instantly clear whether a shot has hit the target. This would help both recruits and instructors assess in real time whether the shooting is being conducted correctly and effectively. Such an approach would contribute to increasing the recruits' subjective sense of preparedness. And this is just one example.

Regarding instructors, due to inadequate provision by the training centers, many of them are forced to replenish the training material base at their own expense: purchasing consumables, simulation tools (pyrotechnics), stationery, etc. This situation does not help foster a sense of proper respect toward instructors from the military and does not increase the prestige of the profession.

Similarly, by improving the database and provision, **it is possible to at least partially solve the issue of problematic logistics.** For example, purchasing or receiving buses or trucks for the training centers from partners can significantly reduce the duration of the recruits' movement to the training sites, which will directly affect the efficiency of using the available time and implementing the training program. That is, for example, instead of a five-kilometer walk to the shooting range, which can take about an hour (at the expense of the time allocated for preparation), the recruits can be delivered there in 10 minutes.

To improve the situation with the infrastructure of the training centres and their material base, it is recommended to:

- **Conduct an assessment of the priority needs of the material base of training units (subunits), taking into account the current situation on the battlefield.**

Only by researching and confirming the real needs in everyday life, infrastructure, and training material and technical base³⁵, can resources be spent effectively.

- **Create a new standard for the content of the material base for typical training units (subunits) in accordance with current requirements and circumstances.**

Based on the results of the needs assessment (see the previous paragraph), it is worth creating and approving an up-to-date list of property required at the training centers (units), or making changes to the existing Capabilities Catalog.

- **Launch a pilot project where the training center will be provided with all the necessary materials and household items, and measure the impact of improved conditions on changing the quality of recruit training and their level of motivation.**

This is a comprehensive project where the key goal is full analytical support and measurement of various metrics at all stages.

Other systemic recommendations

In addition to the recommendations described above, articulated based on the results of the research and through the lens of the implementing the "Come Back Alive" projects, it is worth giving a few more systematic suggestions:

- **Summarizing the experience of more successful training centers.**

Within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, there are several training centers (units) that adapt more quickly than others to the current specifics of combat operations. Their experience should be studied, summarized, and, if possible, scaled to other training centers.

- **Forming realistic expectations among reservists about the training process and service overall.**

This is a task for state strategic communications, because the level of motivation directly depends on what expectations a person has when he or she joins the army (and how close they are to reality). Currently, recruits often have unjustified and sometimes inflated expectations of how their training will go.

³⁵ Training material and technical base is divided into command and field

- **Key communicator of the military training process is the recruit.**

Given constant access to the Internet, recruits (once civilians) have a habit of broadcasting their impressions of their new experience of interacting with the military. This experience begins, in particular, with training centers. Also, privately, it is the recruits who spread information about their experience among their family members, friends, and former colleagues.

That is why it is worth putting the recruit at the center of the communication strategy as the main communicator. The Canadian Army, for example, does the same in its communication strategy³⁶.

Metrics that can be measured at training centers

To monitor the quality of training, we suggest relying on the following metrics:

- **Effectiveness of spending time allocated for training.**

Minimum expectation: The number of training hours per day specified in the program should coincide with the duration of the actual classes (even without taking into account their quality). At the same time, this will mean that the time allocated for preparation is not wasted on queuing, non-core employment, lengthy logistics, etc.

- **Assessment of recruits' motivation level** (difference between entry and exit evaluations)

Minimum expectation: upon completion of the BCT course, the recruit's motivation level should be at least no lower than at the beginning of the course.

- **Health assessment** (difference between entry and exit evaluations).

Minimum expectation: upon completion of the BCT course, the recruit's health should be at least no worse than at the beginning of the course.

- **How recruits assess their own preparedness upon completion of the BCT course.**

³⁶ At the core of CA mission lies the integral role of CA soldiers as vital communicators: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/army-armee/migration/assets/army_internet/docs/en/comm-strat/CACommStratPlan_Book_2024-2026_EN.pdf