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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
CSC 31 / CCEM 31

EXERCISE/EXERCICE

**NEW HORIZONS**

**INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE CANADIAN FORCES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Canadian public does not totally understand the roles and essential functions conducted by the Canadian Forces. As a result, they tend to have an apathetic view toward Canada's defence, which has made the defence budget an easy target for federal government spending cuts. This paper asserts that more needs to be done to inform the Canadian public about defence issues. More specifically, it focuses on increasing the Canadian public's understanding of the roles and purpose of Canada's military by initiating an information strategy designed to inform and educate the public on defence issues. Public opinion in Canada is what often generates government action, as politicians generally act on issues that hold public support. Increased federal spending on defence, therefore, will be provided only through increased public understanding and support for defence issues. This paper thus concludes that if the Canadian Forces hopes to receive the budgetary increases required for it to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then its public affairs efforts should focus on increasing the Canadian public's sense of the importance of the Canadian Forces to them.

It is apparent to me that the more informed Canadians are about defence issues, the more supportive they are about the needs of the Canadian Forces.<sup>1</sup>

David Pratt, Former Minister of National Defence

Since the Second World War, the percentage of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dedicated to defence has been in a steady state of decline. 17.8 percent of GDP was spent on defence in 1945. 7.8 percent of GDP went to defence at the height of the Korean war, with a continuing decline to as little as 1.1 percent of GDP in 2002.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this period, however, the cost of military equipment has soared, leaving the Canadian Forces (CF) under funded to meet its ever-increasing commitments. In fact, "Canada's defence budget decreased by 23 percent (from \$12 billion to \$9.4 billion) between 1993 and 1999,"<sup>3</sup> leaving the defence budget "woefully inadequate for funding the numerous deployments of the Canadian Forces during the later half of the 1990s."<sup>4</sup> Yet, this continued decrease in military spending has gone virtually unnoticed, or has raised little concern, by the majority of the Canadian public.

If we "take as a given that Canada, as a sovereign nation, will continue to need a professional armed force to ensure its security,"<sup>5</sup> then that force must be adequately

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<sup>1</sup> CDA Conference Speech by David Pratt, 22 February 2001, "The Attitudes of the Canadian Public to the Canadian Forces," <http://www.cda-cdai.ca/seminars/2001/pratt.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2005.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed The Canadian Military?* (Toronto: Phyllis Bruce Books and Harper Flamingo Canada, 2004), 242.

<sup>3</sup> Major Yu Han Wong, "Canada And Multilateral Security Operations: Commitment and Realism," (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course MDS Research Project, 2003), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Somalia Commission of Inquiry, "The Military In Canadian Society," <http://www.dnd.ca/somalia/vol5/v5c43e.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 January 2005.

financed. Canadian society, however, “is often considered to be largely innocent of military thought or consideration,”<sup>6</sup> hence, “defence has traditionally been rated by Canadians as their lowest spending priority.”<sup>7</sup> The indifference of the Canadian public toward Canada’s defence has made the defence budget an easy target for federal government spending cuts.

Public support is the key to ‘nudging’ the federal government into action with regards to increased spending on the military. The Canadian public must be continually kept aware of the significant roles the CF performs on their behalf, both domestically and abroad, if it hopes to gain their support for increased government spending on defence. If not, public attention will continue to focus on other issues deemed worthy of increased federal funding, which in turn will provide the impetus for politicians to portion out precious tax revenue on only those issues. A CF that is kept out of sight and out of mind of the Canadian public will deteriorate to the point of ineffectiveness due to a limited budget that cannot support a modern military force.

This paper will address the importance of keeping Canadians conversant on issues regarding their military and it asserts that more must be done to inform the Canadian public about defence issues. It will examine what is currently being done by the CF in an attempt to keep the public informed, and further, it will consider the ethical question of using public funds to inform the public about the activities of a government department. It will illustrate that increased public awareness of the role of the CF will increase public support for the military which, in turn, will influence the federal government to ensure

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<sup>6</sup> W.C.E. Nethercote, “National Defence Or National (Economic) Development” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Security Studies Course Paper, 2000), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Hannaford, “The Military and the Media in Canada since 1992,” *Security and Defense Studies Review*, Vol. 1 (Winter 2001): 211.

the CF remains adequately funded to meet new challenges. This paper concludes that CF public affairs efforts should focus on increasing the Canadian public's sense of the importance of the CF to them, if the CF hopes to receive the budgetary increases required for it to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, “military spending was rarely on the radar screen of Canadian public opinion.”<sup>8</sup> That was largely due to the fact that:

[t]he military scarcely interested us, and we paid it no attention. We assumed that we were safe, our territory inviolable, and we believed ultimately that the Americans would protect us. So, you and I elected our politicians, and we told them in opinion polls that we wanted health care, culture, better pensions, and a thousand other programs from the government.<sup>9</sup>

Those other programs, however, did not include defence. The reason for this is a significant lack of understanding of what the CF does for the benefit of Canadians. After all, the Canadian military has always fought wars or conducted peacekeeping operations on foreign soil.

The assumption that Canada is inherently secure yields a certain indifference to questions of military efficiency and readiness. This natural sense of security tempts Canadians to divorce themselves from the details of national defence policy and to treat the strategic direction and the control of the CF as a less pressing concern.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, as indicated by former Defence Minister David Pratt, when competing for an appropriate share of the federal budget, the CF must ensure that Canadians understand

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<sup>8</sup> Chris Cobb, “Canadians bullish on defence spending,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 April 2002, <http://www.canada.com/components/printstory/printstory4.aspx?id=2D90833C-2B24-4EC...>; Internet; accessed 24 January 2005.

<sup>9</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed The Canadian Military?* (Toronto: Phyllis Bruce Books and Harper Flamingo Canada, 2004), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Somalia Commission of Inquiry, “The Military In Canadian Society,” <http://www.dnd.ca/somalia/vol5/v5c43e.htm>

what it does so that it can be properly judged on its performance.<sup>11</sup> He added that the Canadian public, “displays a somewhat incomplete understanding of Canada’s defence policy.”<sup>12</sup> Canadians will naturally concentrate on, and give their support to, issues that affect their daily lives. Statistics have shown, however, that when informed, public approval of Canadian military endeavours has traditionally been high, which has often been the catalyst for increased government attention and financial support in the past. Hence, there is a requirement for the Department of National Defence to take a more proactive stance on keeping Canadians better informed of its actions and its purpose.

Today, less than 22 percent of all Canadians were born prior to 1945.<sup>13</sup> As a result, for those who were born in Canada, the majority are unlikely to have experienced any consequences related to armed conflict. Public support is gained through knowledge, understanding and approval of an issue. This explains the lack of public outcry when defence budgets are cut or defence capabilities reduced, as it is indicative of a general lack of awareness or appreciation of the CF among the Canadian public. Put simply, “[m]ore and more, Canadians know less and less about their military, despite the fact that the CF has earned an enviable reputation for its work.”<sup>14</sup> The CF goes unnoticed because the public knows little about what its military does on its behalf outside of peacekeeping operations. “Canadians do not see much of their armed forces. For one thing, most

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<sup>11</sup> CDA Conference Speech by David Pratt, 22 February 2001, “The Attitudes of the Canadian Public to the Canadian Forces,” <http://www.cda-cdai.ca/seminars/2001/pratt.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2005.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> W.C.E. Nethercote, “National Defence Or National (Economic) Development” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Security Studies Course Paper, 2000), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Somalia Commission of Inquiry, “The Military In Canadian Society,” <http://www.dnd.ca/somalia/vol5/v5c43e.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 January 2005.

Canadian soldiering these days is done overseas, either as part of the NATO contribution or U.N. peacekeeping deployments.”<sup>15</sup> In fact prior to September 11, 2001 (9/11), most media coverage concerning CF operations and activities was focused mainly on peacekeeping operations. As a result, Canadians have developed a stereo typical view of their military as lightly armed peacekeepers. Indeed, Canadians “have become proud of their contributions to peacekeeping. Peacekeeping felt good for the Canadian public, and betrayed no weakness in Canadian Forces capabilities.”<sup>16</sup> The drawback, however, is that:

Canadians do not appear to comprehend that a military exists to fight wars and, ultimately, to protect the national interests. Instead, they somehow came to think of the Canadian Forces as the embodiment of their values, as peacekeeping social workers at home and abroad.<sup>17</sup>

Shockingly, an opinion poll conducted in the fall of 2000, showed that the public’s preoccupation with peacekeeping has even overshadowed the fundamental role of protecting Canadians and Canadian sovereignty. The poll showed that:

54 percent of respondents identified peacekeeping as the role most closely associated with the Canadian Forces. That was followed by the protection and defence of Canadian sovereignty at 24 percent and disaster relief at 13 percent. This is no doubt a result of the amount of attention the media has given our peacekeepers. . . . Sovereignty protection for three quarters of the population is largely out of sight and thus out of mind.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Nigel Hannaford, “The Military and the Media in Canada since 1992,” *Security and Defense Studies Review*, Vol. 1 (Winter 2001): 201.

<sup>16</sup> W.C.E. Nethercote, “National Defence Or National (Economic) Development” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Security Studies Course Paper, 2000), 29.

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed The Canadian Military?* (Toronto: Phyllis Bruce Books and Harper Flamingo Canada, 2004), 204.

<sup>18</sup> CDA Conference Speech by David Pratt, 22 February 2001, “The Attitudes of the Canadian Public to the Canadian Forces,” <http://www.cda-cdai.ca/seminars/2001/pratt.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2005.



However, despite the support of peacekeeping operations, Canadians still have a fairly limited knowledge on the CF's contribution in peacekeeping missions. In an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted in 2003;

Canadians were asked to name two international peace-keeping missions in which Canada had participated since 1990. There had been missions in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, the Congo, Ethiopia, Angola, Sierra Leone, the Central African Republic, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia, East Timor, and more, but only 41 percent of Canadians could name two.<sup>19</sup>

The public also held a perception that those missions were relatively safe policing operations. In true peacekeeping operations both sides of the conflict must have agreed to a ceasefire prior to the deployment of peacekeepers, as “[t]he chief object of peacekeeping is to keep two potential combatants separated while diplomatic efforts are mounted to resolve their conflict.”<sup>20</sup> The operations that the CF has found itself in lately, however, would be better classified as peace-making or peace enforcement operations, which are imposed on warring factions, resulting in conditions where combatants do not necessarily welcome the presence of foreign ‘peacekeepers’.

The problem with the word ‘peacekeeping’ is that it perpetuates the myth that the CF do not get in harm’s way, need ‘guns’ or ‘do combat.’ In reality, ‘peacekeeping’ operations since the 1990’s have been carried out in failed or failing states characterized by chaotic and unsafe environments.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, peace enforcement operations tend to be much more dangerous and often involve ‘peacekeepers’ in combat situations. For instance, most Canadians do not know of the events surrounding the Medak Pocket incident that occurred during ‘peacekeeping’

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<sup>19</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed The Canadian Military?* (Toronto: Phyllis Bruce Books and Harper Flamingo Canada, 2004), 204.

<sup>20</sup> Granetstein, J.L. and Bercuson, David Jay, *War and Peacekeeping, from South Africa to the Gulf – Canada’s Limited Wars*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1991), 188.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Noble, “Talking To Canadians About Defence: Giving To Whom You Trust,” in *Understanding the Crisis in Canadian Security and Defence*, Conference of Defence Associations Institute, March 2005.

operations in the former republic of Yugoslavia. “Not since the Korean War have CF members seen such intense combat, yet the little-known operation in September 1993 went virtually unnoticed.”<sup>22</sup> The Canadian public are not kept informed of issues of this nature, therefore, they know little about their military, its purpose, what it stands for, or its contribution to secure Canada’s wider interests. That would help explain the lack of public outcry when defence budgets are cut, and why defence was rarely tabled as a needy recipient of federal budget surplus spending.

Recent history, however, has shown that when informed of defence issues the Canadian public’s support for the CF usually increases. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States drastically increased public attention to defence related topics. The massive amount of media coverage regarding military activities post 9/11 initiated a flurry of public discussions on defence related issues and as a result, put the CF in the media limelight in Canada. That coverage made Canadians recognize that Canada cannot shirk its military responsibilities, or rest on the comforts of its borders, and it drove home the fact that the world is a dangerous place.<sup>23</sup> As stated in *Maclean’s* magazine just three months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, “September 11 awoke us to realities that we might not have recognized before then. Among them is the notion that, as a sovereign nation, we must have the military capacity to shoulder our share of responsibility to the world community.”<sup>24</sup> Hence, it was the tragic events of 9/11 that had the effect of arousing the

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<sup>22</sup> Kristina Davis, “The Medak Pocket: “Secret” no more,” *The Maple Leaf*, 1 December 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Allan R. Gregg, “Scary new world,” Year-end Poll, *Maclean’s Magazine*, 31 December, 2001, 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Canadian public's awareness that Canada is vulnerable to attack and, as a consequence, that peace and security cannot be taken for granted.

After the 9/11 attacks, numerous opinion polls began to put military spending on the list of high priority issues for the Canadian public. One such poll concluded that:

[f]or decades, Canadians have placed a very low priority on our defence capabilities and military spending. Our self-image as peacekeepers, and not warriors, has been documented thoroughly since the time of Lester Pearson. Now, upwards of two out of three Canadians agree we must substantially increase the amount of money we spend on the Armed Forces.<sup>25</sup>

A separate Department of National Defence (DND) poll, conducted a year after the 9/11 attacks, showed that the Canadian public at large kept defence as a top priority as their sense of security remained shaken.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, another poll showed that "Canadians are getting a sense of why the military is important."<sup>27</sup> It is not at all surprising, therefore, to see those same polls demonstrating a rise in public support for more government spending on defence.<sup>28</sup>

In Canada, public opinion is what often spurs government action. Public opinion "[p]olling today is to the politician and policymaker what the stock market is to the financial analyst."<sup>29</sup> Public opinion polls inform politicians about the general mood of

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<sup>25</sup> Allan R. Gregg, "Scary new world," Year-end Poll, *Maclean's Magazine*, 31 December, 2001, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Department of National Defence, A Pollara Report, *Canadian Opinions on the Canadian Forces (CF) and Related Military Issues*, December 13, 2002, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Cobb, "Canadians bullish on defence spending," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 April 2002, <http://www.canada.com/components/printstory/printstory4.aspx?id=2D90833C-2B24-4EC...>; Internet; accessed 24 January 2005.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Claude Emery, "Public Opinion Polling In Canada," Library of Parliament, January 1994, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/bp371-e.htm>; Internet; accessed 30 March 2005. 2.

the public and in a democracy, “[p]oliticians react to the polls.”<sup>30</sup> In short, politicians generally act on issues that hold public support, therefore, increased public support usually equates to increased government support. This was evident from the recent Liberal government budget that aimed “to quiet critics and please Canadians,”<sup>31</sup> by, among other things, significantly increasing military spending. In fact, Finance Minister Ralph Goodale responded to Canadian public opinion and paid significant attention to the CF, “with a \$12.8 billion promise that Goodale says amounts to the biggest boost in military spending in 20 years.”<sup>32</sup>

So, given the importance of public support for government funded priorities, what is the CF currently doing to ensure that the Canadian public remains informed about what the CF is doing on their behalf? The CF Public Affairs Policy Direction states that:

The role of Public Affairs (PA) is to promote understanding and awareness among Canadians of the role, mandate and activities of the CF and DND, and the contributions that the CF and DND make to Canadian society and the international community.<sup>33</sup>

Public Affairs officials attempt to achieve that by maintaining “open and positive relations with the media as a way of reaching out to Canadians,”<sup>34</sup> through public

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<sup>30</sup> Robert MacNeil, “Modern Media And International Affairs,” O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 27 November 1993), 9.

<sup>31</sup> CTV.ca, “Goodale presents election-style budget,” [http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/mini/CTVNews/1109185410970\\_14?s\\_name=budget2005&no\\_ads=](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/mini/CTVNews/1109185410970_14?s_name=budget2005&no_ads=); Internet; accessed 31 March 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Department of National Defence, DAOD 2008-0 *Public Affairs Policy* [http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/0\\_e.asp](http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/0_e.asp); Internet; accessed 7 February 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Department of National Defence, DAOD 2008-2 *Media Relations and Public Announcements* [http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/2\\_e.asp](http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/2_e.asp); Internet; accessed 7 February 2005.

announcements, press releases, and providing media interviews. Historically, however, public affairs in the CF have lacked a proactive public information strategy,<sup>35</sup> and have tended instead to be more reactionary in nature and often in response to negative media coverage. They do not tell the CF story but rather simply provide information to the media. As a consequence, public affairs officials cannot ensure national distribution of their information, as they do not have the ability to control what the media decides to write. Hence, their ability to promote awareness among Canadians of the role of the CF is dependent on the news worthiness of the material and the willingness of the Canadian media.

Admittedly, the recent embedding of media reporters with Canadian troops on deployed operations has proven to be quite successful as a means of raising the profile of the CF. For instance, eight reporters joined CF personnel at Camp Julien in Afghanistan as the “first journalists to be formally embedded with a Canadian Forces (CF) unit in the field.”<sup>36</sup> As the mission gained in popularity:

[m]ore than 20 newspapers, television networks and wire services eventually participated in the embedding experiment, including reporters from *The Canadian Press*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Sun* chain, *Global television*, the *CBC* and *CanWest* newspapers.<sup>37</sup>

As a result, “[n]ational newspapers, radio stations and television newscasts were filled with almost daily stories from Kabul, from descriptions of night patrols . . . to critical

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<sup>35</sup> Major R.B. McKenzie, “Public And Media Relations A New Marketing Strategy For The Canadian Forces,” (Toronto: Canadian Forces Command and Staff Course New Horizons Paper, 1996), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Chris Wattie, “CF on the PR Offensive: ‘warts and all’ coverage?,” *Frontline Magazine*, August 2004, 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

reports on the state of some of the battle group's equipment."<sup>38</sup> The stories kept Canadians informed, showed the public that Canada was doing its part in the war against terrorism, and instilled "new-found pride among Canadians in their military."<sup>39</sup> As a result of those stories, Canadians understood what it was the CF was doing in Afghanistan and they supported it despite the fact that it was not a peacekeeping operation. Indeed a Maclean's poll showed that seventy-nine percent of Canadians supported the CF's involvement in the Afghan mission.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the fact that media embedding has proven beneficial to the CF, it should be kept in mind that it only occurs when the media decides to participate. The Afghan mission was a story with global implications that interested Canadians as it closely related to the war against terrorism, and at a time when the public's security concerns were still very high. There is no guarantee, however, that the media will continue to embed reporters in other CF operations; that will most likely be determined by the media's perception of the public's interest in the 'story'. As the event fades in the public's conscious over time, the media will notice the declining interest and shift their attention to other newsworthy stories.

Indeed, the passage of time does seem to erode public awareness on issues of defence if left unapprised of them. Canadian troops are still in Afghanistan but little has been mentioned about it in the media lately, as other stories have taken over the media's attention and thus the public's interest. In a survey that was taken just months after the

9/11 attacks, Canadians were asked what the most important issue was facing Canada. Health and education topped the list of responses with unemployment in second and the 9/11 attacks or concern over security issues as the third most important issue.<sup>41</sup> One year later that strong concern for defence related issues was not as apparent,<sup>42</sup> and three years later, when precisely the same question was asked, health, education and unemployment maintained their top positions, but social issues followed and security or defence was not even listed.<sup>43</sup> It would seem, therefore, that the relative indifference that the public has had towards the CF in the past seems to have been “interrupted only occasionally when some significant event captures headlines or when insecurity grips the nation,”<sup>44</sup> as it did after the 9/11 attacks. The strength of the public’s perception, therefore, “depends on the level of public awareness, which in turn is affected by the role played by the media.”<sup>45</sup>

The CF currently relies heavily on the initiative of the national news media for the delivery of information related to the CF. When that coverage is negative however, the effect, on the CF and the public, can be devastating. For example:

For many Canadians, the Somalia Affair became a symbol of their armed forces in the 1990’s. Intense media coverage of a Somali teen’s murder by Canadian paratroopers, . . . shook public confidence in the nation’s military institutions. Negative coverage particularly in the first half of the 1990’s created an image of

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<sup>41</sup> Allan R. Gregg, “Scary new world,” Year-end Poll, *Maclean’s Magazine*, December 31, 2001, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Department of National Defence, A Pollara Report, *Canadian Opinions on the Canadian Forces (CF) and Related Military Issues*, December 13, 2002, 14.

<sup>43</sup> 2004 In Review, “The Nation’s Mood,” Year-end Poll, *Maclean’s Magazine*, December 27, 2004, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Report of the Somalia Commission of Inquiry, “The Military In Canadian Society,” <http://www.dnd.ca/somalia/vol5/v5c43e.htm>; Internet; accessed 25 January 2005.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

military incompetence and unprofessionalism, vividly captured in letters to the editor to major newspapers across the country.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from the discreditable events surrounding the Somalia mission, however, the CF was involved in a myriad of other noteworthy activities in the 1990s, such as the Medak Pocket incident, which went largely unnoticed due to the fact that they went largely unreported.

Given the importance of public support for the CF and the fact that the CF has “learned that it cannot afford to ignore public opinion,”<sup>47</sup> it seems clear, then, that it ought to find ways to stay on the public’s conscious without having to rely on the media networks to keep the public informed of defence issues. After all, much of what the CF does on behalf of Canadian citizens occurs everyday and, as the media does not usually cover those topics, those activities tend to go largely unnoticed. As stated by Lieutenant-General DeQuetteville, when he was Commander of Air Command, the CF has;

not been doing enough to inform . . . the Canadian public about what it is we are doing every day. After all, the majority of work is done far from Canada’s major population centres – a daring rescue at sea, the delivery of humanitarian supplies in a war-torn part of the world, to name some.<sup>48</sup>

It is time, therefore, for the CF to take the initiative and commence a public information strategy, which would serve to educate and explain to Canadians what the CF does on their behalf.

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<sup>46</sup> Lee Windsor, “Professionalism Under Fire: Canadian Implementation of the Medak Pocket Agreement, Croatia 1993,” <http://www.cda-cdai.ca/library/medakpocket2.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 March 2005. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Nigel Hannaford, “The Military and the Media in Canada since 1992,” *Security and Defense Studies Review*, Vol. 1 (Winter 2001): 202.

<sup>48</sup> Lieutenant-General Al DeQuetteville, “The Air Force and The Public,” *Airforce Magazine*, Guest Editorial, Vol 20, No 3, Fall 1996.



An information campaign designed to inform and educate the general Canadian public should focus on utilizing methods which reach the general public, and not on increasing the number of articles in current military related magazines, papers, and journals. Those sources, although informative, are not widely read by the general public. Rather, in order to cast a wider net and reach the Canadian public en-masse, television and national newspapers should be utilized as the medium to getting the information out. In fact, television visualizations “can influence the perceptions and judgement of audiences, and thus of the mass public.”<sup>49</sup> So, given that “most media studies accept in principle the importance of television in shaping perceptions,”<sup>50</sup> it is clear “then, that television is an important factor in shaping support of the Canadian public for the CF.”<sup>51</sup>

CF sponsored televised information messages should endeavour to promote an understanding of the CF through the visualization of its roles, functions, and duties, thereby highlighting the broad spectrum of operations the CF conducts. For example, the visual depiction of a CF search and rescue helicopter rescuing the crew of a fishing vessel in distress, with a short caption stating that the CF conducts all search and rescue functions in Canada, or one that states the number of search and rescue operations conducted by the CF annually. Another could depict a Canadian soldier providing protection for civilians in a war-torn nation with an associated caption indicating the CF’s role in maintaining world peace and security. Yet another could show a domestic air defence scramble with a caption indicating the CF’s role in maintaining Canadian air

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<sup>49</sup> Lydia Miljan, PhD and Barry Cooper, PhD, “Benchmark: Media Coverage of the Canadian Forces 1994-2000,” Report prepared for the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, December, 2001, 22.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

sovereignty. These are, of course, only a few examples of the type of message that could be used to raise public's awareness of CF roles. Those messages would not only serve to inform Canadians about the many responsibilities of the CF, but they would serve to increase their understanding of the purpose of CF acquisition needs. Then, perhaps, when the media reported on CF requirements to replace old search and rescue helicopters, for example, the public would understand their utility and thus, better understand the requirement to replace them. It should be noted that such messages should focus only on raising public awareness about current CF roles and commitments and should not be used as a means to contradict government policies or decisions.

TV spots would be an effective way of informing the public at large, but is it ethical for a government department to utilize public funds to advertise what it does? It would seem logical that, as taxpayers, Canadians have the right to be informed about what the CF is doing on their behalf. In fact, current government directives issued under the authority of the Deputy Minister of Defence support such initiatives by stating that “[t]he overriding objective of Public Affairs is to ensure that Canadians are well-informed and aware of the role, mandate, operations and contributions of the DND and the CF.”<sup>52</sup> More specifically, the policy states that:

Canadians expect and deserve to know what the DND and the CF do on their behalf, whether it is saving lives through search and rescue, providing humanitarian assistance, maintaining combat-capable forces in defence of Canada and Canadian interests and values or contribution to international peace and security.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Department of National Defence, DAOD 2008-2 *Media Relations and Public Announcements* [http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/2\\_e.asp](http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/admfincs/subjects/daod/2008/2_e.asp); Internet; accessed 7 February 2005, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

It seems apparent, therefore, that not only would an information strategy of this nature be ethical, but it is also in accordance with government direction.

The only television advertising currently used by the CF, however, is aimed at recruiting, which incidentally, is controlled by Public Affairs in the CF.<sup>54</sup> Those advertisements are, understandably, designed to encourage young Canadians to consider the CF as a career. Consequently, they tend to depict “a way of life that offers new recruits exciting challenges, teaches new skills and provides unlimited career opportunities.”<sup>55</sup> When recruiting, career opportunities should be covered, but most of these messages say little of the roles of the CF. Additionally, recruiting advertisements in newspapers and magazines present slogans which describe the CF as a proud, proven and professional organization, but again say little about what the CF actually does for Canadians.

What then should be done? Recruiting advertisements and public relations information initiatives should be combined and designed to reach out to Canadians by showing the CF’s role in Canadian foreign policy, by projecting CF roles and commitments in Canada, and by showing what a deployable combat ready force achieves for Canada and Canadians. Canadians should understand what the CF does on their behalf. They should know, for example, that the CF conducts counter drug operations in cooperation with the RCMP, and that its vast maritime approaches are regularly patrolled by the Navy for the protection of Canadian interests in its territorial waters. They should

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<sup>54</sup> The responsibility for recruiting advertising was transferred in September 2000 from the Human Resources Group to the Public Affairs Division, as indicated in the Department of National Defence sponsored “Audit of Contracting for Advertising and Related Services,” March 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Department of National Defence, News Release, “Canadian Forces Launches New Recruiting Ad Campaign,” [http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=258](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=258); Internet; accessed 12 April 2005.

know that on the international stage, the CF helps to maintain peace and security in war ravaged areas, and that its efforts have helped to bring good order and governance to areas of the globe that had been terrorized by corrupt and brutal governments.

Television, newspaper and magazine ads, which depict and explain different CF roles, would not only serve to educate and inform but in doing so, would also serve to impress, intrigue and thus, recruit. It would seem, therefore, that much more could be achieved with recruiting messages than is currently the case. The Public Affairs Branch, therefore, should focus both public relations efforts and recruiting advertisements at increasing the public's awareness of the CF. This would not only achieve the Public Affairs mandate, but would be of significant benefit to the CF's public image.

### Conclusion

The CF cannot expect the people of Canada to support their military if they are not kept informed about what it is the CF does on their behalf. Without knowing what the CF does for Canada and Canadians, the public is unlikely to pressure the government into increasing funding for the CF. To slip back into the days of being out of the public's sight and mind, will simply equate to further government neglect.

One of the critical paths to increasing government spending on the CF is to inform and garner support from the Canadian public at large. Statistics have shown that when kept informed, the majority of Canadians not only support their military and the roles they perform, but they are proud of those activities. Public support for the CF will follow from greater public understanding of how the CF makes a difference domestically and abroad. Keeping Canadians informed, therefore, can only help the CF in its ongoing

quest for badly needed government funding. Military newspapers, articles in military Journals, press releases and media interviews are good public relations information mediums but their messages do not often reach the average Canadian. Initiatives such as media embedding within CF operations have been extremely successful in raising public awareness of the CF but they are limited in duration and rely on media network participation to succeed. Hence, the need exists for an effective information strategy designed to continually remind Canadians of the critical roles played by the CF. The mandate to inform the Canadian public of the roles and activities of the CF currently exists within the Public Affairs Branch. Therefore, CF Public Affairs efforts should focus on increasing the Canadian public's sense of the importance of the CF to them, if the CF hopes to receive the budgetary increases required for it to remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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