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AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL IN THE RCAF: A SPACE FOR RESERVE FORCE GROWTH

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Exercise Solo Flight

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Maj Andrew Lunn

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AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL IN TH RCAF: A SPACE FOR RESERVE FORCE GROWTH

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is presently facing a shortage of trained and effective members, ready to carry out the tasks assigned by the Government of Canada in the Defence of the Nation. In the 2016 Auditor General's Report on CAF Recruitment and Retention, it was revealed that the size of Regular Force has fallen to 66,400 members; 1,600 short of the stated 68,000 member goal and down from 67,700 members in fiscal year 2011-12.¹ More revealing is the reported number of trained and effective members, which had dwindled to 56,255 of a needed 60,500; a delta of nearly 4,200 members and a steep decline from the 2,200 member shortage reported in 2012, resulting in the Auditor General's recommendation that the CAF initiate targeted and trade specific recruiting and retention strategies.²

With Canada's aging demographic "bubble" still working itself through the labour force coupled with the CAF's seeming inability to conduct effective recruiting reform, this pressure within the CAF personnel system is likely to remain a primary concern in the coming years and a driving factor in personnel policy evolution. It is with little surprise that the recently released defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE)* places deliberate emphasis on people.³ Attempting to address the repeated criticisms of the Auditor General in regards to recruiting and retention, the CAF is in the throes of a complete personnel management reorganization.⁴

¹ Auditor General of Canada, 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada: Report 5 – Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention – National Defence (Ottawa: Office of the Auditor General, 2016), 4. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_05_e_41834.html#p113.

² *Ibid.*, 4-5, 11.

³ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 12. <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

⁴ Auditor General of Canada, 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada..., 7,8-11.

Initiatives such as the “The Journey,” which promises to provide CAF members greater flexibility and accommodation in the workplace, and a vocal effort to revisit the principle of universality of service, are two examples of the sweeping reforms currently underway.

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Aerospace Control (AEC) trade is not immune to this institutional deficiency. In addition to an aging workforce, the trade faces challenges in the realm of recruitment and retention such as lengthy training timelines, required high technical competence, remote posting locations, shiftwork, and a skillset in high demand in the private sector.⁵ Due to these factors, the AEC occupation has experienced a relatively high rate of turnover of Air Traffic Control (ATC) officers in recent years resulting in a notable shortage of qualified operators. One striking recommendation from the Auditor General, which was accepted completely by CAF leadership, calls for occupation specific recruiting and retention policies.⁶ In order to capitalize on the large number of ATC officers approaching retirement from the Regular Force and address the unique circumstances of RCAF ATC units, the AEC occupation must increase the number of Primary Reserve ATC officers. In order to be successful, this increase in Reserve positions must be accompanied by fundamental changes to the policies that govern the Reserve Force.

In an effort to demonstrate the efficacy of a reserve-based solution to the ATC retention issue, a brief introduction to the RCAF Reserve Force structure and the AEC occupation, including the present status of retention, will first be presented. Next, several personnel management policy options available to address the personnel shortages including transition to

⁵ Vasile Sminchise, “Military Retention: A Comparative Outlook,” *Journal of Defense Resources Management* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 87-88. These elements are not unique to the AEC trade as the present factors are all typically variables accepted as affecting retention. Sminchise notes that financial attributes and pay, higher private sector wages, social and psychological factors, misinformation during recruiting, quality of life, operational tempo, and geographic location are primary factors affecting retention within NATO’s armed forces.

⁶ Auditor General of Canada, 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada..., 11.

civilian contractors, a fully reserve occupation, or units comprised of both Regular and Reserve Force members will be explored. Finally, a detailed examination of policy considerations and recommendations aimed at increasing the AEC Reserve footprint will follow.

BACKGROUND

RCAF Reserve Force

In 1987, the Mulroney Government released its White Paper on Defence titled *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada*.⁷ Although only two years prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the document's approach was rooted in a belief that continued mutual deterrence between superpowers would be fundamental to Canada's security in the years to follow.⁸ Although well aware that "Canada alone [could not] assure its own security" in the face of an existential threat due to its relative size and resources, the framers of the document concluded that Canadian national security was inextricably tied to "the maintenance of [the current] peaceful international order," and that "deterrence [required] standing and reserve forces equipped, trained and positioned to meet any likely threat" capable of integration with Allied forces.⁹

With regard to the Reserve Force, the document signified a drastic shift in policy regarding the roles and composition of the force. During the height of the Cold War, the Canadian Reserves were drastically reduced as it was believed that any future conflict would be short in duration due to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, therefore reducing the "relative

⁷ Department of National Defence, *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1987), 1. http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/dn-nd/D2-73-1987-eng.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3, 17.

value of reserves, which would take...time to mobilize.”¹⁰ By 1987, the fundamental basis of this assumption was being questioned, as Canada had become one of only few North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries to have less reserve than regular military forces.¹¹ This was seen by the Mulroney Government as “both impractical and undesirable,” as all military tasks and commitments were taken on by a full-time military force at increased expense and reduced capacity for operations.¹² The result was the creation of the “Total Force Concept,” which aimed to greatly grow the Reserve Force and reduce the distinction between Regular and Reserve personnel.¹³ The key outcome of “Total Force” for the RCAF was the restructuring of the Reserves from many, large standing units to a model of “integrated Regular-Reserve units,” based on the existing Regular Force structure and capabilities.¹⁴

The present mix of Regular and Reserve Forces within RCAF have developed based on this premise and of the three services, the RCAF is the most integrated “Total Force” organization; though the other services are presently migrating in this direction.¹⁵ “Air Reservists are almost all former Regulars who have been trained in the Regular Force and have completed component transfers to the Air Reserve.”¹⁶ As a result, specific Reserve career paths and training have been deemed unnecessary.¹⁷

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁵ Éric Tremblay and Howard Coombs, “Canadian Armed Forces Reserves – Quo Vadis?” *Canadian Military Journal* 16, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 19-20.

<http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol16/no3/PDF/CMJ163Ep16.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Current policy classifies the Reserve Force as a component of the CAF who are “enrolled for other than continuing full-time military service except when placed on active service.”¹⁸ All CAF units may include Reserve Force positions within their establishments, and all Reservists must be assigned to those authorized positions.¹⁹ Furthermore, Reserve Force service is subject to three classes of employment: Class A refers to short periods of service no more than 12 consecutive days, typically served during the evenings and weekends; Class B refers to periods of service of 13 or more consecutive days and is referred to as temporary “full time;” and Class C refers to periods of service when a member is on full-time service in a Regular Force establishment position, or employed on operational duties such as deployment.²⁰

Employment under Class A and Class B contracts are subject to a unique daily pay scale that is generally 80 percent of equivalent Regular Force rates. Class C employment follows the same pay scale as the Regular Force.²¹ In 2012, amendments to the CAF Superannuation Act disallowed former Regular Force members employed under Class A, B or C contracts to receive their Regular Force pension in addition to their Reservist pay if employed for more than one year.²² According to Lieutenant-General Chuck Lamarre, Chief of Military Personnel Command, this change in policy had a significant impact on the Reserve Force’s ability to retain its “top

¹⁸ Department of National Defence, DAOD 2020-0, *Reserve Force* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2015), <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-defence-admin-orders-directives-2000/2020-0.page>.

¹⁹ Department of National Defence, DAOD 2020-1, *Primary Reserve* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2015), <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-defence-admin-orders-directives-2000/2020-1.page>.

²⁰ National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, “The Reserve Force,” last modified 21 February 2018, <http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/en/ombudsman-questions-complaints-helpful-information/primary-reserve.page>.

²¹ Department of National Defence, *Compensation and Benefit Instruction Chapter 204: Pay of Officers and Non-Commissioned Members* (Ottawa: DND, 2017), 76-77 http://www.forces.gc.ca/assets/FORCES_Internet/docs/en/about-policies-standards-benefits/204.pdf.

²² Commander Military Personnel Command, *Changes to the Administration Under CFSA Part 1 of Employment of Annuitants in Continuous Reserve Service*, National Defence Headquarters: CANFORGEN 070/12 CMP 033/12, 101602Z Apr 12.

talent,” and realize the full potential of previously invested resources used to train these highly experienced members.²³

Presently, the CAF Reserve is in decline having fallen to 19,369 members in 2016, from an average 26,000 in 2012, “with recruiting and retention not matching attrition and component transfers,” despite current efforts to strengthen the force.²⁴ In their recent review of the Canadian Reserves, Major-General Éric Tremblay, then Commander of Military Personnel Generation, and Dr. Howard Coombs, a Reservist and Assistant Professor at the Royal Military College, concluded that this downward trend is related to the overall structure of the Reserves and the training time required to achieve operational qualification that often “exceeds the capacity of a part-time Reservist.”

For the RCAF, this situation is exacerbated by the extensive training requirements and time associated with qualification in technical trades such as pilot, aerospace control, and aerospace technicians, to name a few. Potential Reservists with civilian employment or other commitments cannot afford to be tied up in the military training system for the requisite time required to achieve qualification, specifically when that sacrifice is viewed through the lens of the current benefits structure of the Primary Reserve. These factors combine to rationalize the current model employed within the RCAF that sees Reserve positions filled from retirees of the Regular Force and subsequently employed in training and evaluation roles where their experience can be leveraged.

²³ Murray Brewster, “National Defence Reviewing Limits on ‘Double Dipping’ for Retired Soldiers,” *CBC News*, 4 August 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/military-reserves-double-dipping-1.4234285>.

²⁴ Tremblay and Coombs, “Canadian Armed Forces Reserves...,” 20.

Air Traffic Control in the RCAF

The Aerospace Control Officer occupation is responsible for the command and control of air assets within the RCAF in both domestic and expeditionary environments. The trade is subdivided into streams: Air Weapons Controllers (AWC), charged with the tactical command and control of air assets; and Air Traffic Controllers, responsible for the control of aircraft at military airfields.²⁵ This study will focus on the ATC stream as it has been subject to higher levels of attrition relative to its AWC counterpart.

There are seven ATC units within the RCAF that provide air traffic control services located at 14 Wing Greenwood, 12 Wing Shearwater, 3 Wing Bagotville, 8 Wing Trenton, 15 Wing Moose Jaw, 4 Wing Cold Lake and 19 Wing Comox, respectively. In addition, 8 Air Communications and Control Squadron, located at 8 Wing Trenton, is a high-readiness deployable airfield control unit. On average, each unit consists of approximately twenty ATC officers split between the control tower and terminal control facility. Although there is no standing establishment for Primary Reserve positions within these units, each employ between 1 and 3 reservists in an “ad hoc” manner through coordination with their respective Wing Air Reserve Flights to develop and fill such positions.²⁶ These hires are unanimously prior Regular Force ATC officers that are employed in senior control or training positions.²⁷

Over the past five years, the AEC trade has suffered above average losses in qualified personnel, with attrition spiking in fiscal year (FYs) 2013/2014 and FY 2014/2015 to seven and

²⁵ ATC officers can be employed in either Control Towers or Terminal Control Facilities and is synonymous with control under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and Instrument Flight Rules (IFR), respectively. Although separate qualifications, operators are often qualified in both positions within military units to increase human resource management flexibility.

²⁶ RCAF Wing Air Traffic Control Officers, email correspondence, 19 April 2018.

²⁷ Ibid.

eight percent respectively; nearly double the historic average.²⁸ By 2016, AEC manning had reached a deficient of 64 personnel, or 13.5 percent of its established effective strength.²⁹ A recent Unit Morale Profile Survey conducted by Defence Research and Development Canada sought to clarify the dominant factors impacting AEC retention and shed light on this recent negative trend.³⁰

Of the multitude of elements assessed, the most significant factors impacting AEC well-being were found to be work-family conflict, workload, job stress and recognition, noting that work-family conflict and lack of recognition were the dominant factors trade wide.³¹ With regards to job satisfaction, the study determined that compensation, the promotion process, work equipment and scheduling flexibility were all areas of significant or moderate concern by AEC members, with compensation and work equipment being the most dominant.³² When asked about turnover intentions a relatively staggering result was presented with 35 percent and 48 percent intending to leave the CAF in the next three or five years respectively.³³ Of this group, the motives for departure registered as most important by respondents were retirement or eligibility for a pension benefits at 61 percent, opportunities for a similar job with better pay at 31 percent, dissatisfaction with current promotion and career progression at 37 percent, and lack of geographic stability at 23 percent.³⁴

It is important to note that there was significant deviation within the study when respondents were sorted by AEC stream. When reasons influencing intentions to leave the CAF

²⁸ Aerospace Control Career Manager, *AEC APS 2017 Career Manager Briefing* (Military Personnel Command, Ottawa: D Mil C 4-7, 16 October 2017), slide 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, slide 61.

³⁰ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Unit Morale Profile Survey Results Summary for the Aerospace Control (AEC) Occupation* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*,

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

were organised in this manner a clear divergence in motivations becomes evident. Within the ATC stream, opportunities for similar jobs with better pay and benefits outside of the CAF was the dominate influence, with high workload, dissatisfaction with current pay and benefits and retirement eligibility following.³⁵ Within the AWC stream dissatisfaction with promotion, retirement eligibility and opportunities for similar jobs outside of the CAF rounded out the top three.³⁶ It is also important to note that the AEC trade distribution of age and years of service contributed significantly to these findings. The study concluded that nearly half of AEC respondents, or 47 percent, report 21 years of service or greater, with another 15 percent having between 16 and 20 years of service.³⁷ As the report notes, overcoming this demographic reality and addressing these primary concerns will be fundamental to the overall health and continued operational effectiveness of the trade.³⁸

OPTIONS FOR ATC RESTRUCTURING

In an effort to resolve the current and probable future personnel shortages within the AEC trade, three options for restructuring will be explored: transition to the civilian sector, transition to a completely reserve force, and the continuation of the current Regular Force structure with additional Reserve Force positions. To assess the suitability of these options each will be evaluated with respect to location sensitivity, technical competency, monetary incentives and cost, deployment capability, and recruiting and retention.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14. Aerospace Control Career Manager, *AEC APS 2017 Career Manager Briefing...*, slide 64.

³⁸ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Unit Morale Profile Survey Results Summary...*, 14, 20-22.

Transition to the Civilian Sector

With the primary impetus reported by ATC officers for leaving the CAF being related to the potential for equivalent higher paying civilian employment, the transition to civilian contracted air traffic control services on RCAF Wings is worth investigation. This alternative is not new territory for the CAF, as in 1991 all flying operations and initial military pilot training programs at CFB Portage la Prairie were transitioned to private contracts as the costs associated with the operation of the single-service base were deemed unsustainable.³⁹ Southport Aerospace assumed responsibility for all airfield operations, including aerospace control functions, upon the closure of the base and continues to fill that role today.

Since then, the outsourcing of military functions previously the responsibility of uniformed members has become widespread. In an effort to minimize costs and achieve greater financial efficiency this trend has already impacted a wide array of domains within the RCAF. The conduct of combat aviation training by Discovery Air pilots and aircraft; contracts with CAE, L-3 and other corporations to maintain and operate flight simulators across RCAF fleets; and numerous contracts related to the maintenance of RCAF aircraft including L-3's assumption of CC-150 Polaris maintenance and PAL Aerospace's contracted maintenance for the new fixed-wing Search and Rescue platform, are just a few of the many examples that elucidate this contemporary shift.

There are several advantages that would come with the outsourcing of RCAF ATC services to a private entity. First, it would transfer the risk associated with continued cyclical personnel shortages to a third party, thus reducing strain on the overall RCAF personnel system.

³⁹ Geoffrey York, "Ottawa Cushions Shutdown of Base with \$165-Million: Private Companies get Contract to Create Training Program for Military Pilots at Portage la Prairie," *Globe and Mail*, 21 September 1991.

Numerous technical contracts at 4 Wing Cold Lake and 3 Wing Bagotville, two of the bases with the highest rates of ATC attrition due to their rural setting, in support of the CF188 Hornet fleet have shown that private companies are capable of attracting and maintaining skilled labour in these remote areas.⁴⁰ Related to stability and a reduced turnover rate, privatization would likely foster a cadre of competent, highly skilled and experienced ATC operators capable of providing safe and effective ATC services at RCAF Wings.

However, the benefits of privatization would come at certain costs to the RCAF that must be considered. First and foremost, a deployable ATC capability is a fundamental enabler for expeditionary operations in the RCAF and must be retained. Although recent trends in global security have seen civilian contractors deployed by their Governments into “harm’s way,” and Canadian contracting policy maturing in this domain during the protracted operations in Afghanistan, the practice comes with increased risk and complexity.⁴¹ Negotiating contracts in the midst of a crisis, considering the varied circumstances and locations in which CAF personnel may be deployed, can greatly reduce the operational flexibility and ascendancy presently held by RCAF commanders. As author Jocelyn Willis concludes in her recent study regarding military contracts for satellite surveillance and systems integration in Canada and the United States after the attacks of September 11th, 2001:

[the profits of aerospace firms soared with the increased demand and the realization of industry] that they could capitalize on surveillance and the technologies they created...by fastening themselves to public funding streams,

⁴⁰ Air Traffic Control Functional Management Team Member, telephone conversation with author, 9 April 2018.

⁴¹ Christopher Spearin, “Canada and Contracted War: Afghanistan and Beyond,” *International Journal* 69, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 536-537.

government grants, procurement contracts, and the largesse of political operatives anxious to protect Canadian interests.⁴²

This shift in power and reliance on profit-focused private companies muddies the water with regard to operational capability and, as a recent Department of National Defence review of contracted aerospace equipment maintenance noted, proves difficult to determine the net cost and associated value for money of such programs.⁴³ Similarly, the addition personnel serving in theatre outside of the established chain of command can create additional tensions and challenges for deployed commanders.⁴⁴ Finally, with respect to domestic routine operations it stands to reason that a similar additional layer of complexity would be inherent in coordination with civilian entities to meet the operational needs of the RCAF.

Transition ATC Capability to the Reserve Force

Equally radical as a shift to the public sector and sharing similar advantages, reorganisation of the ATC capability under the Reserve Force umbrella is worth further exploration. Although the RCAF has fully adopted the “Total Force Concept,” blending Reserve Forces into Regular Force units, other environments have maintained the responsibility for certain enabling capabilities to the Reserve force. Trembley and Coombs conclude that the future of the Reserves should be to “provide those capacities currently *not imbued within or residing in*

⁴² Jocelyn Willis, *Tug of War: Surveillance Capitalism, Military Contracting, and the Rise of the Security State*, Carleton Library Series 242 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 309, 356, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE1NjQ2NjNfX0FO0?sid=0f93d886-108d-429c-a943-335abb96c371@sessionmgr120&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

⁴³ Chief Review Services, *Evaluation of Aerospace Equipment Maintenance* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2013), v/vii.

⁴⁴ P. W. Singer, “The Contract the Military Needs to Break,” *Washington Post*, 12 September 2004.

an effective manner in the Regular Force.”⁴⁵ This is most prevalent today in the Army Reserves, which holds responsibilities for Artic Response, and Influence Activities such as Civil-Military Cooperation and Psychological Operations.⁴⁶

Advantages to this solution for the ATC trade include the potential to capitalize on the large quantity of Regular Force ATC officers approaching retirement eligibility and thus maintain experience and proficiency across the service. Principal to this outcome is the increased stability to the member that Reserve service provides, which would not only allow greater local area expertise to develop but also potentially ease some of the work-family life balance and scheduling flexibility stressors present in the current Regular Force model; one step in aligning service as a CAF ATC operator with the conditions found in private sector. Importantly, this solution would also retain a deployable ATC operator cadre, as evidenced by the significant contributions of the Reserve Force during recent conflicts in the Balkans and Afghanistan.⁴⁷

Inherent to the success of this model is the delegation of authority for manning decisions to the unit command level. This delegation of authority would provide greater flexibility by enabling leadership to organize human resources in accordance with the unique requirements and circumstances presented by the local workforce. Specifically, the authority to manage their own unit establishments would provide Reserve Unit Commanders an ability to balance the availability of employees with operational imperatives through unit-specific allocations of full-time and part-time Reservists. To this end, changes to present pay structures and employment policies would be needed, which will be discussed in further detail below.

⁴⁵ Tremblay and Coombs, “Canadian Armed Forces Reserves...,” 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

In addition to required changes in policy, this solution would necessitate Reserve units to overcome the challenge of recruiting skilled labour in rural areas; an implicit element in the success of this structure and, if not achieved, one that would have a catastrophic impact on operational capability. In that light, this solution merely shifts the challenges of recruitment and retention from the Regular Force to the Reserve Force and recruiting from the national to the local level, while increasing the level of associated risk of operational failure.

Blended Units with Increased Reserve Force Positions

With solutions to many of the primary factors influencing ATC retention resident in the Reserve Force solution, its inclusion in any future restructuring of the ATC trade is worth consideration. Specifically, the attributes inherent in Reserve Service provide better alignment with the conditions found in employment outside of the CAF, an increased ability for flexible work schedules, an avenue to retain the large number of operators approaching pension eligibility, and opportunities for greater pay through adjustments to present pay policies.

However, the reliance on the Reserve Force to consistently source a skilled workforce from local areas presents a significant risk to operational effectiveness. The present Regular Force structure overcomes this risk through the management of a national, trade-wide pool of operators deliberately allocated to maintain a minimum threshold of operational capability at all RCAF ATC units. This immutable foundation is key to the continued operational success of the ATC occupation. It is in this light that a blended solution incorporating the present Regular Force organization with an increased footprint of Reservists at each unit is proposed.

In combining the operational assurance of the Regular Force with the flexibility offered by the Reserves, this arrangement best balances the needs of CAF members with the needs of the institution. In addition to addressing ATC trade specific concerns, this solution is aligned with key initiatives found in *SSE* such as the mandate to develop of retention strategies “to keep our talented people in uniform with a welcoming and healthy work environment”, and the conduct of “comprehensive [reviews] of conditions of service and career paths to allow much more personalized career choices and flexibility.”⁴⁸ This initiative would also capitalize on the pledge of the Current Government to grow the Reserve Force and offer greater flexibility to all members through an agile human resources model that “supports the transition between full- and part-time service that meets the needs of the member and the institution.”⁴⁹

Although there is presently support for a more flexible, blended solution to CAF, and by extension ATC Officer, retention there are still significant gaps in policy to be addressed for this model to meet the needs of the institution and the mandates expressed by the Government. The following section is a collection of policy recommendations aimed at implementing a greater role for the Reserve Force in the ATC occupation.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of these recommendations will pertain to three Reserve Force policy domains: pay and benefits, employment structure and recruiting. In addition to addressing the concerns of ATC Officers outlined above, consideration will be given to the rural geographic setting of numerous ATC units. Although not clearly identified in the AEC Unit Morale Survey results, the

⁴⁸ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged...*, 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

correlation of location and retention of ATC officers became evident during the recent peak in ATC officer separation. It was observed that 15 Wing Moose Jaw, 4 Wing Cold Lake and 3 Wing Bagotville had higher rates of attrition relative other units that enjoyed more urban settings.⁵⁰ As there exists limited empirical data with respect to recruiting and retention of Canadian military members in rural areas, studies from the fields of education and health care will be consulted.

Pay and Benefits

Common sense would dictate that compensation and benefits are critical factors to the recruitment and retention within any profession. Although certainly not the only consideration in employment decisions, one only need consider how many employees would show up to work tomorrow if employers deemed pay and benefits unnecessary to understand the practical importance of remuneration in such assessments. In their umbrella study of nurse retention in rural and remote areas, Mbemba et al. “found substantial evidence of the effectiveness of financial-incentive programs for return of service as a health policy intervention to attract human health resources in underserved areas.”⁵¹

Anecdotal evidence provided by Air Reserve Commanders and ATC unit leadership across the CAF support this notion.⁵² Specific to the Reserve Force, the contentious removal of the ability for Reservists with a Regular Force pension to draw both pension and Reservist pay

⁵⁰ Air Traffic Control Functional Management Team Member, telephone conversation with author, 9 April 2018. This increase in attrition was attributed to the rural setting of all three locations and its impact on the morale and happiness of RCAF members and their families. Specifically, when trade-wide personnel shortages disallowed members to be posted out of more remote locations in accordance with previously agreed upon timelines releases in these locations spiked.

⁵¹ Mbemba et al, “Interventions for Supporting Nurse Retention in Rural and Remote Areas: An Umbrella Review.” *Human Resources for Health* 11, no. 1 (2013): 5.

⁵² RCAF Wing Air Traffic Control Officers, email correspondence, 19 April 2018.

simultaneously, colloquially known as “double dipping,” by the Conservative Government has drastically impacted the Reserve Force’s ability to recruit retiring members.⁵³ With the large number of Regular Force ATC Officers approaching their retirement, reversing this policy will be fundamental to retaining an experienced and competent labour pool within the occupation.

This is especially relevant when considered against the already higher compensation rates available in similar positions external to the CAF, such as at NAV Canada, that do not interfere with the collection of a federal pension. For the Government and the CAF writ large, this is a case of optics taking priority over practicality. The Reserve Force is required to employ personnel to fill its positions just as the Government is required to provide a retired member their earned pension. “It defies logic that the CAF should care whether these two individuals are the same person except for the fact [that if they were,] the CAF would be better off.”⁵⁴

With regard to compensation, Reservists are paid 80 percent of equivalent rank Regular Force counterparts when occupying a Class B position.⁵⁵ In order to for the Reserves to attract and retain both ab initio and former Regular Force personnel this discrepancy must be rectified, giving due consideration to the skilled nature of employment. Similarly, the CAF must consider additional financial incentives for both Regular and Reserve Force service in semi-isolated areas. Although location specific benefits exist in current CAF policy, such as Post Living Differential, they are tied to the cost of goods and services, not specifically to the nature of employment and associated hardships presented by rural locations. Linking this to the AEC Unit Morale Survey, ensuring pay and benefits to be proximate to what is available outside of the CAF will address the two leading reasons ATC Officers are considering employment outside of the RCAF.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ David Forbes, “The Full Time Future of the Air Reserve,” (Joint Command and Staff Programme, Canadian Forces College, 2016), 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Full-Time Reservists

In conjunction with more equitable pay and benefits, Reserve Force employment policies must also be amended in support of this effort. With respect to Air Reserve ATC Officer recruiting, unit and Reserve Force leadership have found it difficult to entice potential reservists to fill needed positions when employment under Class B contract is limited to 180 days per year.⁵⁶ For retiring members, this cut in pay via reduced salary rates and less available working hours per annum equate to less potential income relative to equivalent employment outside of the CAF. For those prospective Reservists without prior Regular Force service, this policy presents an often-unassailable obstacle to employment as completion of initial occupational qualification can routinely span 18 months. As presented by Tremblay and Coombs, prospective hires cannot justify or orchestrate this time commitment when their future CAF income will still require supplemental civilian employment.⁵⁷

A potential solution to this dilemma is the addition of full time, or Class C, Reserve Force positions at ATC units. These positions would be significantly more attractive, and practical, for retiring Reserve Force Members and ab initio Reservists alike, as it offers stable, full time employment equitable to what is available outside of the CAF. Combined with a delegation of authority to Unit Commanders to regulate the ratio of Reserve Force to Regular Force Officers, unit manning would be based on both operational requirements and the human resources available in the local area to fill Reserve positions. This mix would also include part-time positions, or Class A and Class B contracts, which when combined, would offer unit and Reserve

⁵⁶ RCAF Wing Air Traffic Control Officers, email correspondence, 19 April 2018.

⁵⁷ Tremblay and Coombs, "Canadian Armed Forces Reserves...", 20.

Force leadership maximum flexibility in aligning members needs and schedule with operational imperatives.

Similarly, as suggested by Maj Daniel Doran, “[decoupling the Reserve career progression from the Regular Force,” with regards to pay and career progression should be considered.⁵⁸ This model would allow salaries for Reservists to better correspond with their experience, level of proficiency and value brought to the unit. Presently, the “working-rank” for ATC officers is that of Captain, and therefore, it is presumable that if Class C positions were established, they would be of this rank. In accordance with the Captain pay scale, wage increases would cease for these members after ten years. The suggested model would introduce a separate pay scale that increased annually by a modest amount for the duration of their employment. In accordance with the Auditor General’s overall recommendation that the CAF implement trade specific programs to aid in retention, the aim of this program would be to more closely model ATC Reservists wages with what is available external to the CAF, further addressing the primary stimulus for departure expressed by ATC Officers.⁵⁹

Full-time Reservists is not a new concept, as it is the model employed successfully by the United States Air National Guard (ANG) in their North American Air Defence Air Defence (NORAD) Sector human resource policies. The ANG capitalizes on former Active Duty members, members who have retired from Active Duty, and the local population to source personnel that fill both full and part time positions. The outcome is a balanced personnel profile

⁵⁸ Daniel A. Doran, “Reports of the Auditor General of Canada – Canadian Army Reserve: The Missing Link,” *Canadian Military Journal* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 2017): 70. <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/Vol17/no4/PDF/CMJ174Ep67.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Auditor General of Canada, 2016 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada..., 11. The aim of this policy would not be a match cent for cent the hourly or annual rates paid by external agencies, such as NAV Canada. The total benefits package, including, but not limited to, health benefits, salary and pension would be included in this calculation.

that shares the burden of recruitment across numerous domains. Importantly, with its deep connection to the Active Duty Air Force, the program ensures a significant number highly proficient, experienced hires looking to depart demanding Active Duty positions are “scooped up” by the Reserve Force.

Tailored Reserve Recruiting

Similar to the employment model of the ANG, increasing Reserve Force positions within ATC units rests on the implicit assumption that the CAF, and specifically the ATC occupation, would be capable of recruiting personnel to fill them. With units currently experiencing difficulty in this endeavour, adjustments are likely necessary to meet any increased demand. First and foremost, the two preceding regulatory amendments will help remove some reported barriers to Reserve recruiting through offering increased pay and greater employment flexibility. Furthermore, and in line with the Auditor General’s recommendations, the recruiting of Reservists must be trade and location tailored to ensure the right people with proper attributes are attracted and selected.⁶⁰

In this vein, the characteristics of reserve service themselves are an avenue for success in recruiting. Unique from recruiting in the Regular Force, the Reserve Force can offer much more clarity to potential applicants throughout the enrollment process. First, the Reserves can guarantee a fixed place of service and a flexible work schedule once enrolled and trained. Second, Reservist applicants can be guaranteed to be employed in the occupation of which they were hired, removing the trepidation for applicants of being placed in another undesirable trade

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

upon any qualification or training failures. Third, the Reserve Force recruiters can, with relative ease, allow potential applicants to conduct “on the job training” or “job shadowing” leading up to enrollment. Thus, allowing potential applicants to better understand aspects of their employment before committing to the CAF. The inclusion of these three factors in tailored recruiting campaigns would allow the Reserve Force to appeal to segments of the Canadian population that, due to personal or situational factors, would be unable or unwilling to enroll in the Regular Force. Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Chantal Fraser provided similar recommendations, including tailored recruiting messages and realistic job previews, in her proposal to increase the success of CAF diversity recruiting programs; seeing them as essential mechanisms to recruiting outside of typical military recruiting demographics.⁶¹

Local recruiting is especially important in regards to the recruiting and retention of personnel at the three more rural ATC units; those most affected during the recent period of high attrition. As David Monk concluded with regards to teacher retention in rural areas, it is often easier to solve the problem through a “grow-your-own” strategy where aspiring teachers are sourced from hard to fill regions and trained to fill vacant positions, vice the recruiting or placement of qualified teachers from abroad; a finding seconded by Wood et al.⁶² As each unit would only need to fill a handful of Reserve positions, it stands to reason the local populations could provide the human resources required if adequately incentivised and attracted.

⁶¹ Chantal Fraser, “Diversity Recruiting: It’s Time to Tip the Balance,” *Canadian Military Journal* 13, no. 4 (Autumn 2013): 30.

⁶² David H. Monk, “Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Rural Areas,” *The Future of Children* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 169. Wood, Jo N., Kim Finch, and Rachel Mirecki, “If we Get You, How Can We Keep You? Problems with Recruiting and Retaining Rural Administrators.” *The Rural Educator* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 11, <http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/issue/view/10>.

CONCLUSION

With nearly 50 percent of the ATC workforce signaling an intent to release or approaching pension eligibility in the next five years, structural changes to the occupation will be required to prevent another manning crisis as was recently experienced during the first wave of the baby-boomer retirement phenomenon.⁶³ In order to buck this cyclical employment trend resident from previous CAF restructuring initiatives, such as the Force Reduction Program, the ATC occupation must position itself to successfully compete with equivalent civilian employers.⁶⁴ This will not only require reform to pay and benefits policy, but also to aspects of employment affecting the quality of life of service members in an effort to retain its much-needed and highly skilled workforce, and establish itself as an employer of choice with potential new hires. An increased Reserve Force presence in ATC units, with adequate changes to Reserve Force employment policies, can specifically address the primary factors influencing ATC Officer retention in both the short and the long term.

A transition in the ATC trade to include more reservists will not be unique in future employment structures envisioned by the CAF. As outlined in *SSE*, the virtue of employment flexibility and its relationship to recruiting and retention is being acknowledged by CAF leadership, resulting in a focused effort to increase both full- and part-time employment opportunities in the CAF.⁶⁵ Principal to this effort is the Chief of Military Personnel program

⁶³ Defence Research and Development Canada, *Unit Morale Profile Survey Results Summary...*, 14.

⁶⁴ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, "Backgrounder: Recruiting and Retention in the Canadian Forces," last modified 11 July 2013, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=recruiting-and-retention-in-the-canadian-forces/hnps1uwf>. The Force Reduction Plan was a program offering early retirement incentives to CAF members in an effort to reduce the overall size of the Force due to reduced defence spending. During the 1990s, 14,000 members took early retirement causing an imbalance in the demographic distribution of CAF manning that is still present today. The result is a large number of members approaching retirement simultaneously vice a more gradual flow with the potential to leave a personnel shortage the recruiting and training systems cannot overcome.

⁶⁵ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged...*, 22.

known as “The Journey,” whose mandate is to “enhance the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the CAF... [through improvements] to the career experience of CAF members and their [families].”⁶⁶ A primary element of “The Journey” is a flexible career path that affords CAF members seamless transition between part-time and full-time employment, and similar control over restrictions regarding postings and deployments.⁶⁷

In leveraging the existing Reserve Force structure to establish an effective mix of full- and part-time positions at ATC units, the AEC trade will position itself well for the structural changes and reformed terms of service “The Journey” promises to deliver. In doing so, it will provide Unit Commanders and the AEC trade with large more tools to deliver flexible and tailored employment opportunities to its workforce, combating existing barriers to member well-being and, ultimately, to recruiting and retention.

⁶⁶ Chief of Military Personnel Programs, *The Journey: Briefing to NSP* (Military Personnel Command, Ottawa, 16 February 2017), slide 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

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