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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**Military Recruiting and Retention Strategies and the Challenges
Associated with Young Recruits**

LCol Daniel Vermeersch

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Abstract

CF recruiting is affected by new societal trends and changing demographics. The CF must consider all information written about its target audience if it wants to be successful in meeting its increased personnel intake targets. The CF should consider some of the U.S. military recruiting solutions and lessons learned to improve its recruiting strategies but the most urgent and critical need is for the CF to establish a sound and coherent long-term HR plan. Until recently, the CF recruiting efforts remained uncoordinated and outdated. A promising initiative called Op CONNECTION was released in February 2006 by the CDS to deal head on with the CF HR recruiting issues. It is hoped that Op CONNECTION will end up serving the purpose for which it was intended and designed, assuming it is properly executed even if it was long overdue.

Military Recruiting And Retention Strategies And The Challenges Associated With Young Recruits

INTRODUCTION

Military human resources (HR) management, and more specifically military recruiting, has changed considerably since the end of the Second World War. For example, beginning in 1973 military manning in the U.S. has evolved from a conscripted force where people were drafted to an all-volunteer force.¹ Soldiers have been impacted by many factors over the years such as improved technology, but the HR management factors most written about lately have to do with recruiting and the demographics and attitudes of the youth population, the requisite source of new recruits. This paper will review several military recruiting issues from a Canadian Forces' (CF) perspective and look at what is being done to deal with them. The CF needs to understand the differences between the needs of the organization and the needs of its main recruit pool in order to adjust its HR recruiting policies to get the most out of the Revolution in Social Affairs.²

This paper will note that the CF needs to organize itself strategically to deal with various recruiting issues it is facing by establishing and communicating its HR plan and proposed solutions. Most of these recruiting issues are not new and have percolated within the CF over the last decade; nevertheless, very little effort has been expended to rectify this situation, other than the CF stating in some of its core documentation that its

¹ J. Faris, *"The Social Psychology of Military Service and the influence of Bureaucratic Rationalism. The Military: More than Just a Job?"* (Washington & New York: Pergason-Brassey's, 1988), 65.

² Revolution in Social Affairs (RSA) is a term coined by Maj Tasseron found in "Military Manning and the Revolution in Social Affairs," *Canadian Military Journal*, (Autumn 2001): 53. This expression is used to analyze the issues associated with the CF manning situation, generational change, and the motivational theory of young people in particular.

people are its number one priority. The problems associated with recruiting are complex and exist at several levels within the CF, which makes it difficult for the CF to have a coherent strategy. This paper will demonstrate that the CF, indeed, does not have a coherent HR recruiting strategy. In spite of this difficult context, there are steps that can be reviewed from the American experience and adapted to the CF. There are also interesting steps being developed and implemented from the Canadian experience with Op CONNECTION.³ Op CONNECTION is very late in coming although it is finally encouraging to see a proposed national strategic approach in dealing with CF recruiting issues. It is also too early to identify if success can be achieved and much work remains to be done despite this significant step taken in the right direction.

MILITARY SOCIOLOGY

Military sociology branches out into two distinct fields of studies. One field, with pioneers such as Samuel Huntington, looks at the civil-military aspects of military sociology. The other field of military sociology studies the military as a social institution and as a profession with pioneers such as Morris Janowitz.⁴ Most of the issues discussed in this paper are related to the latter field of military sociology. Janowitz argued that because the military institution is subordinate to the society it belongs to and is therefore a reflection of it, changes affecting the military must be examined concurrently with the changes in society. Therefore, changes affecting the military institution must be analyzed

³ Op CONNECTION is the latest CDS driven recruiting initiative that was communicated in February 2006 in response to the CF augmentation of 5000 Regular Force and 3000 Reserve Force personnel previously announced by the government.

⁴ Eric Ouellet, *New directions in military sociology* (Whitby, ON: de Sitter Publications, 2005), 2.

concurrently with changes in Western societies at large, such as the increased number of women and of non-Caucasians in Western armed forces, including the CF, which has generated recruiting issues and challenges over the last two decades.⁵

Many well-known sociologists have written that the profession of arms is being challenged on many accounts. Charles C. Moskos for example suggested in the late 1970s that the U.S. military was starting to be viewed and perceived more as an occupation than as an institution by soldiers. This came to be known as Moskos' Institution/Occupation thesis (I/O thesis).⁶ The I/O thesis stipulated that, in essence, the military used to be viewed as an institution with soldiers who followed their calling as members of an institution as defined by themselves and by others who regarded them as different. This description of institution was at odds with the developing trend of viewing military service as an occupation, where monetary rewards for equivalent competencies prevail in the marketplace.⁷ Moskos' IO thesis is applicable to the CF because the CF as a profession has failed to adequately adapt to the new social trends reflected in today's evolving society.⁸ Diversity, multiculturalism, gender integration, cultural change, professionalism, and leadership have been redefined in their inclusion of

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ Charles Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation: Trends in military organization," *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no.1 (November 1977): 42.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ C. Franklin Pinch, L. William Bentley and Phyllis P. Browne. *Research Program on the Military Profession: Background Considerations* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI), 2003).

the overall socialization and cultural dimensions that define the profession itself.⁹ All of these factors impact CF recruiting and must be understood by those involved with the recruiting process.

NEW SOCIETAL TRENDS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Moskos hinted that the evolution of society and its changing norms and values were affecting the population at large from which Western militaries get their manpower. Similarly, Charles A. Cotton used Moskos' thesis and applied it to the Canadian military, identifying three roles identity types.¹⁰ Those three roles are Soldier, Ambivalent, and Employee. In simple terms, Soldier and Employee are the two role types equivalent to Moskos' I/O thesis (institution and occupation), while the third type, called Ambivalent, describes the individual who falls between the two extreme models advanced by Moskos. It is necessary that our CF HR staff understand these theories when considering recruiting solutions because most of today's potential recruits come from the Employee or Ambivalent categories as a social construct. Therefore it will be the responsibility of the institution (the CF) to make new recruits less individualistic or ambivalent through training and a process of secondary socialization, a process by which the institution inculcates its values to new recruits in order to transform them towards the Soldier category.

⁹ Phyllis P. Browne. *The Socialization of Cadets at the Royal Military College of Canada: A Conceptual Overview* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI), 1. <http://www.cda-acd.forces.gc.ca/cfli/engraph/research/pdf/84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 05 December 2005.

¹⁰ Charles A. Cotton, "Institutional and Occupational Values in Canada's Army." *Armed Forces and Society* 8, no.1 (Fall 1981): 99-110.

Most Western nations are having difficulties trying to balance the needs of the individual with the requirements of the military.¹¹ There is a clear distinction between what is valued in civil society and what is valued in the military. The allegiance to the country appears to have been replaced by a “what is in it for me” value statement. Historically, Western armies have been able to change the value systems of their recruits and inculcate military values after recruitment.¹² However, in recent years societal norms appear to be drifting too far from traditional military values to permit conventional socialization. It must be remembered that the very nature of violence associated with military acts, i.e. killing people, is not congruent with Canadian societal values while most other critical values espoused by the military are accepted as being congruent with those of the general Canadian society.¹³ This situation maybe overcome by a new recruit, but only after a certain period of socialisation within the CF. A civilian thinking of joining the CF would not initially understand or appreciate this recruiting consideration. Therefore the CF is faced with significant difficulty in trying to deal with these socialisation challenges as part of its recruiting strategy.

While it is clearly understood from an operational standpoint why the military subordinates the individual to the group, military values are perceived as being eroded by three main factors. These factors are the rise of the business ethic within civil society (or

¹¹ Christopher Ankersen, “Civil Society and the Military: The Tension between Individual and Collective Rights,” (4th Annual Conference of Defence Associations Graduate Symposium, 2-3 November 2001), 2.

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

military trend to equate leadership with management and combat with business), a change in the recruiting pool where different demographic groups such as women and visible minorities are on the increase (even people with physical limitations have considered the military as a career option), and lastly the increased specialization of military forces preventing everyone from becoming a generic soldier able to fulfill any soldier's job.¹⁴ These societal changes have been most challenging for the recruiting efforts of Western military organizations, which generally tend to be more conservative than are their societies at large.

Much has been written in the last few decades about the growing trend of social values in favour of individual values. Today's recruit pool consists of many youths who wish to maintain their individuality or are strongly encouraged by the pervasive media and consumerism to do so. Therefore they are understandably sceptical of an institution, like the military, that is attempting to mould their behaviours and attitudes. Moreover, the CF is trying to draw heavily from a cohort of youths who have either recently come from countries where the military is often part of an oppressive regime or have parents who have lived under these circumstances, which perhaps explains why it is difficult for the CF to recruit visible minorities representative of the increasing diverse Canadian population.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

In the mid-1990s, Maj Tasseron of the CF wrote the article called “*Military Manning and the Revolution in Social Affairs*” and it highlighted the difficulties of Western militaries in dealing with military manning, as governments were trying to capitalize on the “peace dividend” following the end of the Cold War.¹⁵ The public-private divide was being experienced at a time where both sectors were competing for precious and limited high-quality human resources. The article by Maj Tasseron argued that the Department of National Defence (DND) was faced with major budget reductions imposed by the government to fight its national deficit, forcing DND to reduce its manpower below mandated requirements. It could be argued that very little forward thinking by NDHQ occurred regarding the future negative impact on the force itself that resulted from this decision. The Force Reduction Plan (FRP) offer was aimed to quickly reduce the number of CF soldiers without sufficient consideration to the downstream effects on military operations and sustainment of troop strength. Due to FRP, the CF lost most of its HR expertise all at once, at the same time that it was imposing new change management initiatives and an increasing operational tempo on its soldiers.

It can be deduced from this militarily undesirable loss of HR expertise that the CF did not have a strategic HR plan to deal with long-term HR challenges. It is understood that the CF was merely and desperately trying to respond to these massive imposed federal government reductions, albeit in a very ad hoc manner. Had the CF had a strategic HR plan at the time, it would have been better prepared to deal with the CF’s personnel attrition rate becoming much higher than recruiting intake over the five-year

¹⁵ Maj Jeff Tasseron, “Military Manning and the revolution in social affairs,” *Canadian Military Journal*, (Autumn 2001): 53.

period leading to the new millennium. One of the outcomes of these reductions was that critical shortages were created in several occupations.¹⁶

Demographic studies associated with the youth population of 17 to 24 years old show that this group is expected to become more ethnically diverse by 2016, primarily due to immigration. This change in the traditional CF recruiting base means that visible minorities will grow to 24% of the CF's target population of recruits by 2016. This is more than double current recruiting goals.¹⁷ The deduction is that the CF must adapt its recruiting policies to the changes affecting its recruiting pool, otherwise current practices of recruiting mainly white Caucasian recruits has the potential to become a liability for the CF. Similarly, research related to "Baby Boomer/Generation X/Generation Y" relationships must be examined by the CF if it is to be successful in understanding the overall complexity of its military HR management situation. Much literature has been written on these topics over the last few years, but the more important questions are: What is the CF doing about it? How is the CF formulating its HR plan to deal with HR recruiting issues? Is the CF looking at other Western militaries such as the U.S. military to see if they are facing similar trends and examined what actions are being contemplated as part of their military HR plan?

¹⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁷ Department of National Defence, "Youth in Canada, population projection to 2026," (Ottawa: DSHR Research Note 2/01, January 2001), 8.

There is much valid information from surveys available to the CF to be considered as part of creating a valid HR recruiting plan. For example, GPC Public Affairs conducted a telephone survey with 3,761 Canadian aged 16 to 34 years old (further broken down into three age categories: 16 and 17, 18 to 24, and 25 to 34) that was deemed to be a large enough group of young people to analyze the findings by demographic sub population (e.g. geographic region, age, income, education).¹⁸ The aim of the survey was to provide valuable and detailed information on the attitudes, values, interests, life and career aspirations of adolescents and young adults toward the CF as a recruiting pool, as well as to establish the psychographic¹⁹ and demographic profile of the target audience. This survey was done in response to the current CF recruiting needs that include the government's announced increase of 5000 Regular Force and 3000 Reserve Force members. This survey provided much more useful detailed information about individuals most interested in joining the CF. This information needs to be reviewed, analyzed, and studied by those involved in the recruiting process in order to maximize the outcomes of possible recruiting solutions.

This survey confirmed that DND will be affected by a number of factors to fulfill its recruiting mandate. The first factor is the shrinking base for CF recruitment for the 16 to 34 recruiting age group, a trend expected to last until at least 2020. The second factor is that DND's recent research demonstrates that the target group responds to shifting

¹⁸ Department of National Defence, "Young Adults and the Canadian Forces: Results from the Survey of Canadians Aged 16 through 34 on Recruitment into the Canadian Forces and public Opinion regarding the Canadian Forces Reserve," (Ottawa: DND, 31 March 2005) 1.

¹⁹ Psychographic is a term that describes a person's lifestyle as opposed to his or her demographic characteristics.

career drives such as competitive salary, flexible hours, a balance between work and family time, a better quality of life (QOL), etc. It was also observed that the concept of loyalty toward one employer for life would not be as predominant as it was in previous generations.²⁰

All of these factors are not new and have been observed in recent years. What should the CF be doing to establish an HR plan? The survey included other important information that must be considered by DND as part of its recruiting strategies. For example, when asked about communication and advertising about a future career, those surveyed responded that almost two thirds of them get their information from the Internet.²¹ The CF appears to be exploiting this medium successfully.²² A review of recent CF literature suggests that while the CF has recognized having recruiting problems in recent years, it has failed to deal with them adequately in a sound and coordinated manner. Unfocused individual HR initiatives are ongoing. Therefore priorities must be set and investments made where the greatest potential gains are identified. These would be the foundation of a properly focused HR plan, for which the U.S. experience is worth reviewing.

²⁰ Department of National Defence, "Young Adults and the Canadian Forces: Results from the Survey of Canadians Aged 16 through 34 on Recruitment into the Canadian Forces and public Opinion regarding the Canadian Forces Reserve," (Ottawa: DND, 31 March 2005), 5.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² Pete Brown, "Recruiting in the 21st Century: Is DND Succeeding?" (MBA course 573, RMC, 2004), 4.

HR RECRUITING LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE U.S. MILITARY

By examining some of the societal trends associated with the military in the new millennium, the RAND Corporation concluded that the U.S. military failed to meet its recruiting target in 1999 for the first time since 1980.²³ Traditionally, the four U.S. services had targeted to recruit youths who were not planning to attend college. Youth attending college was deemed to be the first reason negatively affecting recruiting while an overall declining youth population was the second reason. Faced with these recruiting issues, the U.S. began to understand that an opportunity existed to target young college graduates to offset the decline of the high school graduates as candidates. The U.S. had to adjust its military recruiting policies and targeting practices based on this analysis and the services were able to amend their military educational benefits program in order to improve military recruiting.²⁴ In the CF's case, its main response to its political direction to reduce its size was to restrict its intake of young candidates and to reduce the training schools' capacities. Fewer NCMs were enrolled and those recruits slated to become officers were directed into the ROTP military college stream and not the sponsored civilian university stream, therefore lengthening the time before a qualified officer could be employed. In addition fewer Direct Entry Officers (DEO) were enrolled, a group that would have produced qualified officers faster than the military college system. In hindsight, the CF should have continued to fully support the DEO program to hire new officers right after they completed civilian universities, gaining from the U.S. experience.

²³ M. Rebecca Kilburn and Beth J. Asch, *Recruiting Youth in the College Market: Current Practices and Future Policy Options*. . (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2003), xvii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

Other lessons learned from the U.S. military that the CF could apply pertain to retention as per a 2005 RAND study.²⁵ This RAND study examined the relationship between recruiting practices and the conditions for first-term success of U.S. Army soldiers. Recruiting expenses for one U.S. Army recruit were estimated to be an average of \$15,000 per recruit; a significant amount considering the U.S. Army must recruit up to 90,000 candidates per year. In addition, training failures and retention problems increased the demand for new recruits. Over a six year period starting in 1995, first term recruit progress was examined at various stages in terms of retention. It was determined that first term success of recruits could be affected by various factors such as their cultural background, demographic characteristics, the length of enlistment contracts, and the delay once identified as a potential recruit to formally get an offer to join the military. That is to say that when it takes too much time, a recruit either changes his/her mind or finds something else. This situation also exists in Canada with the CF and it has been going on for years. What should the CF be doing in 2006 to address recruiting deficiencies?

Military enlistment standards and a booming economy also affect recruiting. It was suggested in the same RAND study that recruiters might have to accept more “marginal” candidates that may be more ill suited to military service because they have fewer applicants to choose from.²⁶ This approach is not recommended as it is deemed to

²⁵ Richard J. Buddin, *Success of First Term Soldiers: The Effects of Recruiting Practices and Recruit Characteristics*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), xiii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv.

be more expensive from a long-term perspective because recruits who are brought in under a lower standard are more likely to fail later in the training system. Similarly, a senior military CF recruiting representative recommended against the lowering of medical standards and requisite scores on aptitude tests for the same reasons, even if it proved to bring in more recruits to meet personnel intake shortfalls.²⁷

It was recommended in 2001 by Ankersen and Tethon that the CF immediately begin to design, implement, and follow a plan that would lead to successful recruiting both for the short and long terms. Here are some of the key recommendations: improve retention, find out what is wrong before fixing it, deal with recruiting and retention holistically from both a short and long-term perspective, and do not portray an unrealistic picture of the CF to new potential recruits.²⁸ No doubt the CF recruiting staffs were working the issues but such a proposed plan was never put together and therefore not distributed or widely communicated.

The issue of communication and how to be most successful in reaching and connecting with our recruiting target audience has been studied and somewhat successfully dealt with by the U.S. military. The U.S. came to the conclusion that it was most beneficial to establish an aggressive advertisement campaign using the National Association of Stock Car Racing (NASCAR), chat rooms, and video games on the

²⁷ Christopher Ankersen and Losel Tethong, "Birds in hand: the need for a CF retention based strategy for the CF," *Canadian military Journal* (Summer 2001): 45.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

Internet, mediums which the youth population and potential recruits could readily relate to and access on a regular basis.²⁹ Canada has learned from the U.S. in this regard and has applied this learning under the Op CONNECTION. This is discussed later.

PERSONNEL CRISIS

The CF recruiting challenges were deemed to be extreme in 2000. Intense competition for young, skilled individuals, in addition to the increased retirement of baby-boomers forced the military to admit to an unprecedented recruiting crisis, as illustrated by a quote from a CF official: “people years ago had the ambition to be a Billy Bishop. Today, they have ambition to be Bill Gates.”³⁰ The CF can no longer rely strictly on past traditional recruiting methods such as adventure, patriotism, or guaranteed employment to personnel when the economy worsens. CF recruiting is also affected by other factors such as having more married males (no longer just single teenagers), more females (reflective of society), more working spouses, and more single parents. There is evidence that these HR recruiting issues were at least identified and tracked by NDHQ, but nothing could be found about how they were handled.

People are key to military operational effectiveness and Christopher Ankersen assessed the CF in 2002 as having people under stress, a situation termed to be a personnel crisis. The implications of such a situation lead to training difficulties, human

²⁹ Col Darryl Bradley, *Maintaining a ready force will require recruitment and retention incentives coupled with an aggressive advertisement campaign*, (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Security Studies Course Paper, 2003), 4.

³⁰ Col Grant quoted in D. Pugliese, “Forces’ toughest battle: HR,” in the *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 October 2000.

resource management challenges such as recruiting and retention, a reduction in operational effectiveness, and the huge cost faced by the CF in trying to resolve these difficult HR issues.³¹ Even in 2005, the state of recruiting in the CF can be described as dismal, as reported in an interim report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. The report lists recruitment as a structural challenge where the CF is struggling to keep up with the natural rate of attrition of its personnel. The report also emphasizes that recently announced growth plans, in addition to current recruitment, are challenged by low budgets and stringent advertising rules.³² The Senate Committee is also aware that these factors are further complicated by the population demographics described earlier. Critical and stressed trades are undermanned for a variety of reasons such as commercial and private sector job competition.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE CF RECRUITING

The Standing Senate Committee report identifies advertising as a key recruiting enabler that needs fixing. The government should consider relaxing, or make an exception for DND, regarding the restrictive advertising rules it imposed on all of its departments following the Sponsorship Program and the 2003 Auditor General's report for DND.³³ Widespread advertising is critical to the CF and it directly affects the CF's ability to recruit the increased number of personnel required as it is a critical recruiting

³¹ Christopher Ankersen, "The Personnel Crisis," in *Canada Without Armed Forces*, ed. Douglas L. Bland, 55-81 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 70.

³² *Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence: Wounded, Canada's Military and the Legacy of Neglect*, The Honorable Colin Kenny, Chair (Ottawa: Parliamentary Publications Directorate, September 2005), 95.

³³ *Ibid.*, 98.

component in alerting those in search of work that the CF is actively recruiting. Without advertising, only a limited number of potential recruits already considering joining the CF would visit the various recruiting centers, thus the CF would not meet its personnel target intake.

The Standing Senate Committee heard of too many recruiting foul-ups pertaining to recruiting and retention that could be corrected and thereby improve the recruiting process. There are too many rules and regulations in this complex recruiting process. “Delays are most often caused by snags in security and medical clearances, as well as the lack of an opening in an applicant’s desired military trade and/or a lack of availability of training slots for recruits going into that trade.”³⁴ In addition, it was reported that a transfer from the Reserves to the Regular Force is longer on average than a normal recruitment. This is a situation that clearly needs improvement. OP CONNECTION recommends shortening the background checks in two ways to reduce waiting time for enrolment in order to deal with this observation.

The CF should consider putting some of its best people into the recruiting process in order to improve the situation as recruiting will no doubt be one of the most crucial jobs in the military over the next decade, as indicated by the Standing Senate Committee.³⁵ The CF should have considered this option years ago, learning from the U.S. Army, which implemented such a recommendation when it was faced with similar

³⁴ Ibid., 100.

³⁵ Ibid., 106.

recruiting challenges. The CF has only just released a CANFORGEN that directs that recruiting jobs be considered as important as a command or leadership appointment by the respective selection and merit boards and that Commanding Officers single out top notch individuals under the annual PER program so that they may be selected and then advantageously managed by their appropriate career managers.³⁶

The review of various documents associated with the problems and the difficulties faced by the CF to meet its recruiting targets in the late 1990s leads to examining the best way to improve the recruiting function. The CF must create a long-term HR plan that deals with all HR issues it is facing. But first, it must identify what the issues are and prioritize them if the CF wants to be successful because recruiting resources are limited. Once identified and prioritized, the “so what” associated with each HR issue will have to be carefully researched and possible solutions will have to be explored. A plan of attack must be developed regarding the demographic characteristics of the youth population, as there are fundamental constraints limiting recruiting.

Addressing recruiting in isolation is not enough to solve the manpower crisis facing the CF. Recruiting should be combined with retention, as both are critical HR issues. “Retention of trained men and women in the CF must become a real priority.”³⁷ Perhaps too much is expected of recruiting when the personnel numbers are down, and

³⁶ CANFORGEN 052/06 DGMC 008 270945Z Mar 06

³⁷ Christopher Ankersen and Losel Tethong, “Birds in hand: the need for a CF retention based strategy for the CF,” *Canadian military Journal* (Summer 2001): 44.

further studies on retention are recommended. The use of exit surveys is an excellent tool to keep track of major dissatisfiers and it is recommended that they continue being administered to those leaving the CF. It is recommended that the business of recruiting be done not only by recruiters, but that more CF members participate in some systematic way in the recruiting process.

Lastly, the people in charge of military recruiting (and retention) must think in terms of the future size of the military from a short to long-term perspective (both Regular and Reserve forces). They must anticipate the kind of aptitudes that will be required of future recruits, be it technology driven, as well as mental and physical, stated as "...to provide all CF members with the common knowledge and skills required to operate in the battlespace of the 21st century" under objective 6 of Strategy 2020 five-year targets.³⁸ These are the kinds of questions and assumptions that need to be asked by sharp, forward looking CF HR professionals in order for CF recruiting to be more successful.

CURRENT INITIATIVE: OP CONNECTION

After all these years of hearing about the CF having a personnel crisis, it appears that the CF finally has a strategic HR plan in Op CONNECTION that has been properly communicated. Op CONNECTION, which is CDS driven, is in response to the CF augmentation of 5000 Regular Force and 3000 Reserve Force personnel previously

³⁸ Department of National Defence, *Shaping The Future of the Canadian Forces: Strategy 2020* (Ottawa: DND, June 1999). http://www.cds.forces.gc.ca/pubs/strategy2k/intro_e.asp; Internet; accessed 05 December 2005.

announced by the government. More importantly, Op CONNECTION is the first time an HR plan in response to ongoing HR issues is formally communicated through the chain of command with their directed involvement as part of the solution. The highlights provided describe the CF's focus in the HR future plan. First, the situation is described as the CF embarking on a period of aggressive expansion to increase the size of its personnel both for the Regular and Reserve forces, with most Canadians having limited knowledge of what the CF does for them in our society, including its missions or its capabilities, and that the CF provides unacquainted Canadians with "unique opportunities, benefits, challenges and rewards of CF careers."³⁹ The mission is simple and self-explanatory: "The CF will connect with Canadians through a broad range of coordinated, community-based activities in order to attract and enroll quality recruits to meet Strategic Intake requirements."⁴⁰

Further examination of Op CONNECTION provides the following details: there are three phases (short, medium, and long term) for which the first phase is from the date of issue until March 2006 in order to meet this year's personnel Strategic Intake requirements; the CDS' intent in revitalizing the CF's recruiting culture is that recruiting is everybody's business; the CF main effort at the national level is to focus on connecting with Canadians at major events (the Big 7) such as the Calgary Stampede, the Grey Cup, and the Carnaval de Quebec; Phase One of the desired end state is identified as being achieved when the CF will have enrolled 5500 Regular Force recruits by 31 March 2006,

³⁹ CDS OP O 015/06 OP CONNECTION 6 February 06, 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

a target only achieved at 74% by 20 January 2006; and various tasks to key stakeholders such as ADM (HR Mil) as the Commander for subject recruiting operation, the Environmental Chiefs of Staff (ECS) for their direct support and involvement, the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG), and Public Affairs; and finally reporting format and considerations.⁴¹

Op CONNECTION is a huge step in the right direction, but much work remains to be done by the CF. Not to downplay the efforts finally put together for such an HR plan to come to fruition, this plan is long overdue when considering all the writings associated with the CF HR issues following the massive downsizing period of the mid 1990s. For instance, Op CONNECTION's main objective is to achieve the first objective outlined in the CF Backgrounder that dates back to 2001, to make Defence a "Career of Choice," when it was deemed that the CF was facing a significant recruiting challenge.⁴² Some five years later, the CF now has a HR plan that sounds promising, but why did it take so long to have it put in place and be promulgated? How will success be measured for all phases of the plan? The operation order (OP O) for Op CONNECTION was signed by the CDS on 6 February 2006 with major involvement by stakeholders at a time when only 74% of the Strategic Intake requirements for FY 05/06 was achieved. Annex A of the plan outlines the outreach program to be supported by the various ECS, yet all activities listed pertained to the last quarter of the fiscal year (FY) and approximately

⁴¹ Ibid., 1-10.

⁴² BG-01.007 – March 23, 2001, Backgrounder: Changes to CF recruiting, http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=275; Internet; accessed 18 February 2006.

25% of those activities are dated prior to the signing of the OP O and all remaining activities are right after in February and March 2006. The point is that coordination of all these activities could be a definite challenge for the various stakeholders.

On a more positive note, the OP O for Op CONNECTION will definitely be a cornerstone document, even if it is late in coming. It should be perceived as a one to five year recruiting roadmap addressing all ongoing issues that have been percolating over the years. For example, not only is the emphasis on reaching Canadians and how best for the CF to advertise itself to the Canadian public, but it deals head on with issues such as diversity and for once, identifies diversity as a problem that needs fixing.⁴³ Using diversity as a simple example of the success of Op CONNECTION, it is acceptable to list diversity as a problem and to direct that CF's commitment be incorporated in the process, but much like the entire plan as a whole, it is the concrete actions in response to these HR issues that will eventually dictate if the CF will be successful.

CONCLUSION

Western militaries' recruiting is affected by new societal trends and changing demographics. The CF must consider all information written about its target audience if it wants to be successful in meeting its personnel intake targets. Youth attitudes, values, and what youths want from life in general need to be understood by those who want to make them join their organizations. Recruitment leaders and public affairs staff need to spend more time and effort understanding youth, and come up with sound recruiting

⁴³ CDS OP O 015/06 OP CONNECTION 6 February 06, Annex A to OP CONNECTION 6 Feb 06.

incentives and policies that will meet their needs and attract the youth population. The CF should consider some of the U.S. military recruiting solutions and lessons learned such as advertising and having their best people as recruiters. The most urgent and critical need is to establish a sound and coherent long-term HR plan. Then, the development of policy options should be in harmony with the data and research determined to be critical for improving recruiting.

Until recently, the CF recruiting efforts remained uncoordinated and outdated. Research identified that there was an HR gap identified related to how the CF was identifying, prioritizing, and dealing with all the HR and recruiting issues it has faced over the last decade. A promising initiative called Op CONNECTION was released in February 2006 by the CDS to deal head on with these HR recruiting issues. It is important to note that this plan involves the chain of command (COC) and every single CF soldier, while colonels and above have been given a direct role. The plan is to be widely distributed with key tasks assigned to various stakeholders involved in the recruiting process. While this plan is a step in the right direction, it is too early for the CF to declare victory or success on recruiting, as much work remains to be done with the execution of its phases. It is hoped that Op CONNECTION will end up serving the purpose for which it was intended and designed, assuming it is properly executed even if it was long overdue.

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