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MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES

**THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN AIRBORNE FORCES**

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## ABSTRACT

Modern airborne forces were borne in the aftermath of World War I as Russia and Germany abandoned the methods of warfare that had failed to gain them victory. Russia employed the first airborne troops in combat in 1927 and by 1939 the Germans had formed a full division. Western powers were slower to recognize the potential of airborne forces but German assaults at Eben Emael and Crete convinced the British and Americans of the utility of this new capability.

Canada developed an airborne capability in step with its allies but the reasons had more to do with 'politics' than military capability. Indeed, throughout the Canadian experience with airborne forces, there has always been a conflict between political expediency and military requirement. From the establishment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion for homeland defence through to the disbandment of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in 1995, the lack of a clear role has invited political machinations to positively and negatively affect Canadian airborne forces. Today, only a small measure of airborne capability remains within the Canadian Forces but it appears as if new political motives and military lobbying are at play to renew Canadian airborne capability. The Conservative Government has promised to create a new parachute battalion of 650 troops with the necessary transport in Trenton, Ontario.

The historical question that has always been at the center of the debate over Canadian airborne forces remains relevant today: Does Canada actually require an airborne capability? An exploration of the political motives, doctrinal foundations and military requirements of airborne forces throughout the Canadian experience will demonstrate that Canada has never required airborne forces. This hard truth sets the stage for the future that Canadian airborne forces might have within the context of the future security environment and the foreseeable political future. The future is not encouraging. Canada does not require an airborne capability and creating one without a clear role is destined to repeat the fate of its predecessors and unfair to the soldiers who would serve in it.

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## CHAPTER 1 – CANADA AND AIRBORNE FORCES

### INTRODUCTION

Almost as long as men have fantasized of soaring through the skies with the gods and the birds, they have dreamed of being carried to adventure on flying carpets or of defeating their enemies from the sky. The heroic exploits of Bellerophon mounted on the winged horse Pegasus prophesized the tactical advantages that such mobility can provide.<sup>1</sup> This myth of Pegasus and the aspirations of man continued to drive innovation throughout history. The advent of ballooning in the 1700s inspired Benjamin Franklin to envision balloons as a means of dropping troops in enemy territory but the dreams of men would have to wait until modern technology could be applied to the problem.

Modern airborne forces were borne in the aftermath of World War I. Russia and Germany had been defeated and new ideas encountered less resistance as they abandoned the traditional methods of warfare that had failed to gain them victory. Russia employed the first airborne troops in combat in 1927, while fighting an insurgency in Central Asia. The Germans saw potential in this new capability and learned much from the Russian experiments. By 1939, Germany had formed a full airborne division. Western powers were slower to recognize the potential of airborne forces but two actions would play a

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<sup>1</sup> Bellerophon was tasked with a series of heroic but, normally deadly tasks. His first task was to kill the terrible Chimaera, his second to conquer a neighboring tribe, his third to fight the Amazons and finally he was ambushed by an entire army. This army was killed to the last man. His courage, honor and skill as an archer combined with Pegasus as a mount allowed him to prevail bringing him the favor of the gods. He gained a kingdom where his subjects loved and honored him. It appeared that Bellerophon would live happily ever after. His glorious deeds were widely sung and he was happily married with two sons and two daughters. But, all this was not enough for Bellerophon. In his arrogance he decided that he could ride Pegasus to Mount Olympus and visit the gods. Zeus quickly put an end to his trip by sending the Gadfly to sting Pegasus and throw Bellerophon. He survived his fall but was crippled. He spent the rest of his life wandering the earth. No man would help him because of his offense to the gods. He died alone with no one to record his fate. John M. Hunt, "Greek Mythology: Hero Bellerophon." <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/scaffold/GG/bellerophon.html>; Internet; accessed 8 December 2006.

large role in changing western perceptions. On May 10, 1940 a small German force quickly captured a critical feature of the Belgian defences at Eben Emael<sup>2</sup> opening the way for the German advance into Belgium. Then, one year later, the German seizure of Crete by airborne forces convinced the British and Americans of the utility of this new capability precipitating a massive development of western airborne forces.<sup>3</sup>

Canada developed an airborne capability in step with its allies but the reasons had more to do with 'politics' than military capability. Indeed, throughout the Canadian experience with airborne forces, there has always been a conflict between political expediency and military requirement. As the former paratrooper and Professor Bernd Horn described it:

... the Canadian attitude to airborne forces has always been schizophrenic and driven by political purpose rather than by doctrine and operational necessity. The failure to properly identify a consistent and pervasive role for airborne forces led to a roller coaster existence, dependent on the personalities in power and political expedients of the day.<sup>4</sup>

Canada initially established the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn) for homeland defence and then sent it to fight with the British Airborne forces during World War II. Following the war, the Battalion was disbanded and only a small kernel of the capability remained in the Special Air Service (SAS) Company. This company evolved into the Mobile Striking Force (MSF) and then the Defence of Canada Force

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<sup>2</sup> Fort Eben Emael was reputed to be the most impregnable military stronghold in the world and was defended by 800 troops. It guarded key crossings as part of Belgium's Eastern defences. Although immune to conventional attack, it was proven vulnerable to attack from the air. A small glider force of 78 soldiers and 300 follow-on paratroopers was successful in neutralizing the Fort ahead of the German advance into Belgium. James E. Mrazek, *The Fall of Eben Emael* (USA: Presidio Press, 1970), 13-14, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Horn and Michel Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus* (St. Catharine's, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2001), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Bernd Horn, *Bastard Sons: An examination of Canada's Airborne Experience 1942-1995* (St. Catharine's, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2001), 15.

(DCF) before the Canadian Airborne Regiment (Cdn AB Regt) was established in the 1960's. The Cdn AB Regt was eventually disbanded for political reasons in 1995 following the tragic murder of a Somali prisoner. Today, only a small measure of parachute (as opposed to airborne<sup>5</sup>) capability remains smattered throughout the Canadian Forces. It now appears as if political motives and military lobbying are at play to renew Canadian airborne capability. The Conservative Government promised to create a new airborne battalion of 650 troops with the necessary transport in Trenton, Ontario. Prime Minister Harper clearly stated during the election campaign that "The government of the day disbanded the Airborne Regiment to avoid getting to the bottom of a particular incident."<sup>6</sup>

Political manoeuvring and military desire taken into account, the historical question at the center of the debate over Canadian airborne forces remains relevant today: Does Canada actually require an airborne capability? This paper will explore the political motives, doctrinal foundations and military requirements of airborne forces throughout the Canadian experience, from their beginnings in 1942 until the present. This analysis will set the stage for an examination of the role future Canadian airborne forces might have within the context of the future security environment and the foreseeable political future. In the end, however, the conclusion that Canada does not require an airborne capability is inescapable.

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed explanation of differences between parachute and airborne capability will be provided later. The former is a basic ability to deliver troops by parachute in a permissive environment while the latter involves the complete capability of protecting, transporting, sustaining and supporting forces delivered from the air against a capable enemy.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Tories would bring back airborne regiment," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/story/2005/12/13/elxn-harper-military.html>; Internet; accessed 8 December 2006.

## BACKGROUND

Before engaging in a discussion on airborne capability, it is first necessary to understand exactly what the modern term “airborne” implies. The most recent Canadian doctrine, published in 1990, defines an airborne operation as, “... a joint operation involving the air movement of forces into an objective area. Troops and equipment may be delivered by parachute, by helicopter, or airlanded [sic].”<sup>7</sup> At the time, this definition seemed to be inclusive of airmobile operations and yet, despite this inclusive definition, a separate Canadian Forces publication exists for airmobile operations.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the current airborne operations manual only attempts to cover what it considers the most complex delivery method – a parachute drop.

More modern Canadian definitions clearly make a distinction between airborne and airmobile forces. Canadian Land Force Tactical Doctrine makes this distinction by stating that, “... the term “airborne” refers to parachute or (fixed wing) air transported delivery as opposed to tactical (heliborne) mobility.”<sup>9</sup> This understanding of airborne is consistent with the NATO and American definitions<sup>10</sup> and, therefore, it will be used throughout this paper.

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<sup>7</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-322-004/FP-004 *Airborne Operations*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1990), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-302-011/FT-001 *Airmobile Operations*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1989). Although this publication still exists, it is not clear whether or not it has been superseded.

<sup>9</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-002/FP-000 *Land Force Tactical Doctrine*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1997), 7-3. In addition, a recent CF Study defined airborne as, “the ability to conduct combat operations once delivered by parachute.” Department of National Defence, *The Canadian Forces Parachute Capability Study Report*, (Chief of Land Staff: file 1901-2 (DLFS 2-4), 18 May 2000), 2.

<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization Standardization Agency, AAP-6 *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions*. (2006): 2-A-4; <http://www.nato.int/docu/stanag/aap006/AAP-6-2006.pdf>; Internet; accessed 8 December 2006; and United States, Department of the Army, FM 90-26 *Airborne Operations*. (Washington, DC; December 1990), 1-4.

From an American perspective, airborne forces are elite<sup>11</sup> units that are specially trained and equipped to conduct ‘forced-entry’ or to lead assaults into enemy territory and then hold an area open until reinforcements arrive to continue operations.<sup>12</sup> This broad perspective translates into the ability of airborne forces to conduct a range of missions at the strategic, operational and tactical levels that American and Canadian doctrine both recognize. These missions fall into the general categories of: seizing and holding operations; conducting airborne interdiction operations; and conducting airborne raids.<sup>13</sup> These missions, and the capabilities inherent in air delivery, demonstrate the greatest strength of airborne forces – a capability to rapidly project strategic power over great distances.<sup>14</sup> In conjunction with this strength, Canada also recognizes that airborne forces have additional characteristics that separate them from conventional forces. These characteristics include flexibility, lightness and shock effect.<sup>15</sup>

The flexibility of airborne forces resides in their range of tactical employment. They can be used in a wide variety of specific areas (urban, jungle, mountain) and can also be delivered by helicopter, vehicle or on foot (despite the previous definition of airborne). The lightness of equipment (in weight and quantity) make accurate intelligence and detailed planning key factors for success but this creates a spirit of

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<sup>11</sup> Elite forces are units that are: assigned special or unusual missions; conduct missions that require only a few highly trained men; and that have a reputation for bravery and success. Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians – Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies* (USA: Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1978), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Clancy, *Airborne: A Guided Tour of an Airborne Task Force* (New York: Berkley Books, 1997), 2.

<sup>13</sup> DND, B-GL-302-011/FT-001 *Airmobile Operations...*, 13-14; and United States, Department of the Army, FM 90-26 *Airborne Operations* (Washington, DC: December 1990), 1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> DND, B-GL-322-004/FP-004 *Airborne Operations...*, 12.

resilience and adaptability focused on the soldier vice the equipment. The employment of airborne forces with audacity is risky; however, it can create a shock effect out of proportion to the size or capabilities of the force.

Airborne forces are not without their limitations which, placed in a modern Canadian context, are considerable. They require large numbers of transport aircraft for delivery and sustainment. Limited numbers of costly air transport resources and the need to protect them create the need to gain air superiority, at least for the insertion and sustainment air corridors, and to suppress enemy air defence assets. Airborne forces are susceptible to the weather; high winds and low visibility can contribute to widely dispersed troops and high landing casualties. The risk of heavy losses from ground fire and enemy air defence systems means that extensive and accurate intelligence of the area of operations is vital to success. The ability to gain this type of intelligence requires considerable strategic resources and specialized capabilities to produce. Finally, special training and equipment are needed to properly train and equip airborne forces.<sup>16</sup>

The full range of enabling capabilities required to possess an airborne capability is vast and can be prohibitively expensive for most countries to acquire. Unfortunately, they are essential to overcome the inherent limitations discussed. As a result, many middle and major powers retain some sort of airborne force but it is only the U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division that retains the full range of capabilities to jump a divisional force into hostile territory.<sup>17</sup> American airborne doctrine describes the capabilities required in terms of the battlefield operating systems that must be considered. They are: intelligence;

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Clancy, *Airborne: A Guided Tour...*, 3.

manoeuvre; fire support; mobility, counter-mobility and survivability; air defence; combat service support; and command and control.<sup>18</sup>

Given the range of capabilities needed to successfully prosecute airborne operations and the costs associated with maintaining them, it is not surprising that only the U.S. maintains a complete airborne capability today. Instead of a full airborne capability like the U.S., most countries, including Canada, maintain certain portions of an airborne capability, the most basic being a parachute capability. A parachute capability is simply the ability to train soldiers to safely jump out of an aircraft as a means of transportation to an unopposed or relatively lightly opposed location.<sup>19</sup> The absence of a capable enemy removes the necessity for many of the enablers that are associated with an airborne capability such as intelligence, fire support, and air defence as well as aspects of mobility, counter-mobility, survivability, and command and control. As a result, the cost of maintaining a parachute capability is considerably less than the cost of an airborne capability but the range of employment is also similarly constrained.

Despite the seeming flexibility and utility of an airborne force, the numbers of situations in which they have been employed doctrinally have been decreasing dramatically.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. experience shows that airborne forces were inserted into

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<sup>18</sup> USA, DoD, *FM 90-26: Airborne Operations...*, 1-7 – 1-10.

<sup>19</sup> Department of National Defence, *The Canadian Forces Parachute Capability Study...*, 2. A parachute capability is defined as the ability to personnel, equipment and/or materiel by parachute into permissive and limited non-permissive environments.

<sup>20</sup> Although there have been large numbers of airborne operations during the post World War II period, they have decreased dramatically over the intervening years. For example, Professor Bernd Horn and Michel Wyczynski list over 110 airborne operations during the war years. This large number is surpassed in the five years following the war (dominated by French units) but it then takes from 1951 until 2003 to again reach 100 international airborne operations. Indeed, in the last 20 years, there are only four listed, all American, of which one was aborted (1994 in Haiti) and one was into a secure airfield (173<sup>rd</sup> AB Bde at Mosul). Bernd Horn and Michel Wyczynski, *Hook-Up! The Canadian Airborne Compendium: A*

operations using parachute only six times from the end of World War II until 2001. These instances include Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> This is a surprisingly small number considering that the U.S. was involved in six major engagements and they employed force for political aims 219 times during that period.<sup>22</sup>

Even though airborne forces were employed in these conflicts they were not all under the same circumstances and it is necessary to place them in context. In Korea, the 187<sup>th</sup> US Regimental Combat Team made two successful daylight drops against light opposition. They were able to secure their objectives relatively easily and link up with friendly forces.<sup>23</sup> In Vietnam, the nature of the battles and political limitations ruled out traditional massed airborne forces but there was at least one example. In 1967, 780 soldiers of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade and 100 tons of equipment and supplies were dropped in daylight against light opposition in advance of airmobile forces to target the supreme headquarters of the Viet Cong. Lt. Gen. Tolson, Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, summarized the role of airborne forces versus heliborne assault forces at the time. He said:

Although parachute delivery of troops and equipment is a relatively inefficient means of introducing troops into combat, the very existence of

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*Summary of Major Airborne Activities, Exercises and Operations, 1940-2000* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2003), 197-218.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-218.

<sup>22</sup> Although other countries such as France, Belgium and the United Kingdom have used airborne forces during the post war period, the American experience provides the best measure of the overall employment of airborne capability. In terms of western powers, the United States has maintained the largest airborne forces following World War II and been the internationally active in terms of using military power for political means. Edward M. Flanagan Jr., Lt. Gen. USA (Ret.), *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, (New York, Ballantine Publishing Group, 2002), 389-394.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Quarrie, *Airborne Assault: Parachute Forces in Action, 1940-1991*, (Great Britain, J.H. Haynes & co. Ltd., 1991), 153-155.

this capability complicates the enemies planning and offers the friendly commander one more option of surprise.<sup>24</sup>

In October 1980, two Ranger Battalions secured an airfield in Grenada for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to land and stabilize the situation. The Rangers encountered some resistance but overall the operation was a success.<sup>25</sup> Similarly in Panama in 1989, various Battalion sized drops were conducted to seize strategic points in one of the largest and most sophisticated airborne and ground contingency operations in modern history. This operation required various conventional, special and joint force capabilities.<sup>26</sup> In all of these instances, the strategic airlift assets, air power and joint capabilities of the U.S. forces were necessary to execute the operation.

The U.S. experience with airborne forces is important to understand because, as the pre-eminent military power on the planet, the trends that they set and the capabilities that they develop or divest have and will continue to have a tremendous impact on Canada. It is clear from the examples given that airborne forces can provide viable options for political and military decision-makers but it is also clear that the range of conventional, special and joint capabilities required to successfully employ airborne forces are costly and only available to a very small group of nations. It is also clear that the instances where these nations have decided to employ airborne forces have dramatically decreased since World War II.

Airborne advocates within the Canadian military have, since the outset of World War II wanted to belong to the airborne 'club'. This desire has been hampered because

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<sup>24</sup> Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History...*, 383-386.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 392-393.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

the Canadian government and military leaders have continually been less than forthcoming with the resources or the foreign defence policy to justify building or maintaining an airborne capability. The struggle between these competing interests in Canada has resulted in very little success in gaining an airborne force. In fact, the lack of a convincing role for Canadian airborne forces has meant that any success achieved by military proponents of airborne forces was due to political expediency vice any real requirement for the capability. A historical analysis will demonstrate that this unfortunate reality has hampered the development and maintenance of airborne forces in Canada since the beginning of World War II and, as will be discussed later, this reality will continue to persist well into the future.

## CHAPTER 2 – EARLY CANADIAN AIRBORNE CAPABILITY

### WORLD WAR II

As already mentioned, the German airborne operations at the outset of World War II at Fort Eben Emael and Crete convinced the British and the Americans that airborne forces were a viable method of warfare. The British started to develop a force after Winston Churchill strongly suggested the idea to the War Cabinet in June 1940. The Americans were also developing the capability throughout the later part of 1940 and 1941 as they studied the details of the operation in Crete. In Canada, as early as August 1940, Colonel E.L.M Burns was the first to suggest that Canada establish a unit of paratroopers. Colonel Burns was accustomed to thinking outside the box. As a Captain in the Royal Canadian Engineers, he had written an article in 1924 proposing that cavalry units be mounted on mechanized vehicles with machine guns; a preposterous idea at the time to say the least.<sup>27</sup> His initial proposal for Canadian paratroops received a negative response. The Director of Military Operations in National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ), Colonel J.C. Murchie, considered that the expenditure of time, money and equipment would have doubtful value to the war effort. Additionally, he reasoned that any Canadian parachute troops would be part of a British formation and therefore difficult to administer and largely out of Canadian control; an important issue for Canada during the Second World War.<sup>28</sup>

Canadian decision makers held the perception that there was no pervasive role for Canadian parachute troops. Burns continued his attempts to convince commanders using

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 28; and Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 17.

the arguments that paratrooper training would boost morale, that a mobile, offensive capability would be required to turn the offensive on Germany, and that they were useful for homeland defence but these arguments met with little success.<sup>29</sup>

General McNaughton, the Canadian Overseas Commander, believed that creating specialized forces without a credible role was a waste of valuable resources that Canada could not afford. Despite the initial setbacks, the idea was taking root in Britain and the U.S. and consequently, attracting attention in Canada. By early 1942, the Minister of National Defence (MND) was advocating training paratroopers but not forming a unit and the Director of Military Training was investigating training in the U.S. and gathering information about the 6<sup>th</sup> British Airborne Division (6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div). Finally, a proposal that was tabled to the MND in June 1942, for the formation of a parachute battalion, was approved by the Cabinet War Committee on 1 July 1942.<sup>30</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion (1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn) was born with a stated role of home defence; they were to provide a means of recapturing airports or reinforcing remote locations by airborne troops. This role, however, was never fulfilled by the newly formed unit. The unit sought aggressive recruits who were required to join the Canadian Active Service Force (enabling them to serve overseas) before they could join 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn. There was no doubt from the outset that these soldiers were being prepared to fight overseas. Before the unit had been fully trained it was offered to the British and alerted for overseas duty.<sup>31</sup> The inconsistency between the publicly stated role of Canadian parachute troops and the eventual employment of the unit with the British

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<sup>29</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 29-30.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-34.

highlights the first example in a long history of inconsistent roles and conflicting military and political motives associated with airborne forces in Canada.

The real motive of the Canadian military supporters of parachute capability was to be part of the British and American efforts to use modern airborne forces for large scale offensive actions in Europe. Opponents argued that paratroopers were not required for homeland defence; valuable resources should be used to further contributions to the war effort that could be nationally controlled. Professor Horn described this inconsistency as follows:

[T]he ultimate aim was never to develop the airborne capability for use in the country's defence. That was merely a sop to sidetrack opponents and gain supporters. The advocates wanted to use the paratroops in the active theatres of Europe. Indeed, airborne forces had become a symbol of modern warfare.<sup>32</sup>

Canadian supporters of airborne had wanted to become part of the group of nations that possessed this modern fighting capability and although they used questionable rationale to achieve that goal, the results were impressive. The recruiting standards and physical demands of the training ensured that the paratroopers were the best conditioned troops in the Canadian Army.<sup>33</sup> In late July 1943, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn was heading for England to join the 6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div, and the war.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Brigade of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was unique as it was the only mixed brigade of Canadian and British troops during the War due to the Canadian desire to retain command of national

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

<sup>33</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 24; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 13-15.

troops.<sup>34</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn continued training in England for ten months before moving to their assigned transit camp for the Normandy invasion. In late May 1944, they had little idea of the impact that they were about to make on the war and the impact that their heroic service and proud legacy would have on maintaining a strong desire for an airborne capability in Canada.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div played an important role in the Normandy invasion, securing the left flank of SWORD Beach. During this, and subsequent actions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn acquitted itself well but the cost was great. When they arrived back in England on 6 September 1944, 357 of the original 443 who jumped on D-Day had either been killed, wounded, taken prisoner, or were listed as missing.<sup>35</sup> A period of reconstitution and training was then started to rebuild the battalion and correct short-comings observed in Normandy. By the end of 1944 the battalion was again ready to fight and filled with a sense of accomplishment and pride.<sup>36</sup>

The Battalion was looking forward to Christmas when three German Armies launched their counter offensive in the Ardennes. The attack on 16 December was in danger of breaking through the Allied line and part of the reinforcements ordered forward was the 6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn. As the only Canadian unit to fight in the ‘Battle of the Bulge’, they fought through towns and defended the line,

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<sup>34</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 29-30.; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 48. The desire to retain national control was a result of the struggle during World War I to create a force with a distinct national identity to enhance national pride and a collective sense of accomplishment.

<sup>35</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 24; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 117-118.

<sup>36</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 30; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 124-126.

enduring terrible winter conditions.<sup>37</sup> In late January 1945 the unit was moved from the Ardennes to Holland. They dug in along the Maas River and conducted patrols and exchanged fire with the Germans throughout the month of February until they received word that they were returning to England to prepare for another parachute operation. They had less than a month to prepare for their role in the vanguard of the assault across the Rhine and into Germany.<sup>38</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn trained hard for Operation VARSITY – the airborne phase of the successful Rhine crossing that seized the Diersforder Forest and several small bridges over the Issel River. This operation was a marked departure from the deep airborne insertions of D-Day and Operation MARKET GARDEN. Instead of dropping troops well to the rear in advance of the crossing, a force of over twenty-one thousand were inserted on the enemy side of the Rhine within range of Allied artillery support. The crossing was started at night with the airborne operations being conducted the next day.<sup>39</sup> This change in tactic produced remarkable success<sup>40</sup> but afterward, the airborne troops in Europe were confined to the ground acting as line infantry.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn was not exception. Although they continued to fight in the dash to the Baltic, they were never to jump into action again. When victory in Europe was achieved, the Battalion returned to England and reverted to Canadian control. They left England on 5 June 1945 and were greeted in Halifax 16 days later by a personal

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<sup>37</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 35; Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 30; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 128, 130-31.

<sup>38</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 33; and Brian Nolan, *Airborne...*, 138-39.

<sup>39</sup> Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History...*, 288, 290.

<sup>40</sup> Quarrie, *Airborne Assault...*, 139-40.

message from Mackenzie King and presented the key to the city of Halifax.<sup>41</sup> With their exploits now famous, and as the first intact unit returned home from the war, they were greeted by wildly cheering crowds and tremendous accolades; however, the war was over. Canada was demobilizing, so as the men reported back from leave on 27 July 1945 they lined up for discharge. The last Commanding Officer, Fraser Eadie, signed the papers to disband the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn on 30 September 1945, and then arranged for his own discharge.<sup>42</sup>

The uncertain birth of Canadian airborne troops led to a short but glorious existence that many described as ‘lost’ amidst the accounts of the triumphs of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brit AB Div.<sup>43</sup> This existence, however, was not lost on the survivors and proponents of a Canadian airborne capability in the years that followed. Airborne operations reached their pinnacle in World War II but even as they reached their peak, they were already starting to decline. Airborne insertions were risky operations and the lessons learned from D-Day and MARKET GARDEN forced changes during VARSITY that were designed to mitigate some of the risks. Following the war there were examples of smaller airborne operations but it was World War II that really defined what it meant to be an airborne soldier. It was this period that saw the only massive employment of airborne forces and the heroic successes of airborne forces created a lasting image of soldiers who were the epitome of combat readiness, courage, and physical fitness. This image of paratroopers was defined during the crucible of war and it would continue to be a persistent icon for soldiers to strive to achieve.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-96.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

## THE FIGHT TO STAY ALIVE

Following World War II, Canadian defence policy was influenced by a number of factors. These factors included geography, economic constraints, government spending priorities, perceived threats and collective security arrangements. These factors, combined with the Cold War, focussed Canadian defence planning on the defence of Canada on two fronts; North America and Europe.<sup>44</sup> The 1946 Canada/U.S. Basic Security Plan (BSP) required Canada to provide an airborne or air-transportable brigade group and its associated airlift to counter the threat of potential Soviet attacks in the North.<sup>45</sup> Despite this stated requirement, Canada struggled to regain an airborne capability following the disbandment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn.

Immediately after the war, there was no public or political appetite for unnecessary military expenditures nor was there a threat to Canada that would require airborne troops. Therefore, the post war army design did not include airborne forces.<sup>46</sup> Training had ceased at the Canadian Parachute Training Centre (CPTC) in Shilo by May 1945, but the school continued to recruit former members of 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn and the First Special Service Force, in order to retain wartime experience and to maintain close links with their American and British counterparts. This initiative coincided with an NDHQ study that recognized the postwar importance that the Americans and British were placing on air transportability. The study indicated that Canada could play a role in air

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<sup>44</sup> David A. Charters, "Armed Forces and Political Purpose: Airborne Forces and the Canadian Army in the 1980s" (dissertation University of New Brunswick, 1984), 51.

<sup>45</sup> Sean M. Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force and Continental Defence 1948-1955," *Canadian Military History* Vol. 2, no. 2 (1993), 77-78.

<sup>46</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 69-70; and Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 69-70.

transportability standardization and experimentation, especially in cold climates.<sup>47</sup> This, and the BSP, led to the establishment of the Joint Air School (JAS), on 15 April 1947, from the amalgamation of the CPTC and the Airborne Research and Development Centre. The JAS had a mandate to: research air-portability, conduct user trials, conduct limited development, train volunteer paratroopers, and exercise of glider pilots. This mandate, combined with the internal impetus to retain airborne skills, soon produced results with the establishment of a Canadian Special Air Service (SAS) Company.<sup>48</sup>

The Army proposed a role for the SAS Company that masked the true intentions for the unit. Its stated purpose was to perform research and development, demonstrations to assist training, airborne firefighting, search and rescue, and aid to the civil power.<sup>49</sup> As the SAS Company proposal worked through NDHQ, two more items were added to the unit's role; assistance in the event of a natural disaster, and provision of a nucleus for an expansion into parachute battalions. As soon as the unit was approved, in January 1948, the façade fell away and the priority of tasks was clearly oriented towards the expansion into airborne battalions as well as training, preserving and advancing SAS techniques from World War II.<sup>50</sup> The domestic tasks were grouped together into, what today would be referred to as, a 'be prepared' task. Perhaps prophetically of what was to come, the SAS Coy consisted of a platoon from each of the three Active Force infantry regiments.

By 1948, Americans and Canadians alike were getting concerned about the defence of the continent from Soviet attack and, as a result, the potential Soviet avenue of

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<sup>47</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>49</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

advance through northern Canada needed to be blocked.<sup>51</sup> There was increasing U.S. pressure on Canada to fulfil its commitments for continental defence, in accordance with the BSP, sparking a renewed emphasis on airborne forces. The political reluctance to expend scarce resources on this military capability still existed but the government was faced with the necessity to fulfil bilateral defence commitments and to maintain Canadian sovereignty in the North.<sup>52</sup> A plan was developed and adopted by the military in the summer of 1948 to sequentially convert the bulk of the Army into the Mobile Striking Force (MSF). The MSF was to consist of a headquarters, the three existing regular infantry battalions, an engineer squadron and some service support elements capable of rapidly deploying to Canada's North to carry out the defence role stated in the BSP.<sup>53</sup>

The conversion to the MSF was problematic and it never did reach its intended end state or function. The force was created as a politically expedient method of meeting bilateral defence commitments without any changes to the wider view that military or political leaders held of airborne forces.<sup>54</sup> Canadian defence obligations can be very expensive and, as Colin Gray concluded, "Strategic theoretical rationales and policy declaration mean nothing if suitable men and machines are not available, trained and in working order."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force...", 77; and David A. Charters, "Five Lost Years: The Mobile Striking Force 1946-1951," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* Vol. 7, no. 1 (1978): 44.

<sup>52</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force...", 77-79.

<sup>54</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Canadian Defence Priorities: A Question of Relevance* (Toronto, Ontario: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1972), 27.

Firstly, The MSF was never provided with sufficient airlift assets to accomplish its role. The entire RCAF fleet of 30 Dakota aircraft and 8 Hadrian gliders were available to lift most of one battalion but planners relied on the RCAF North Star aircraft to provide the remaining lift. Theoretically, sufficient North Stars could be available within one month after a conflict started but these aircraft were limited in number and heavily tasked.<sup>56</sup>

Secondly, the MSF was never fully trained and equipped. The initial battalion-sized test of the MSF, Exercise EAGLE, was unsuccessful. The airborne force was to seize an airport and support the landing of the main force. The drop went poorly and air superiority was not maintained. This dealt a serious blow to the credibility of the force. Another exercise was conducted successfully to prove the concept but international events were about to change Canadian defence policy and any existing commitment to support, train, and equip the MSF was about to disappear.<sup>57</sup>

Support for the MSF concept became more difficult in the early to mid 1950's as the threat to Canada's North started to evolve. The Soviet development of long range jet bombers capable of delivering nuclear payloads to North America posed a greater and more immediate threat than Soviet airborne incursions. By 1957, the successful Soviet test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) essentially removed the threat of a northern flank attack.<sup>58</sup> As well, Canada became involved with the United Nations action in Korea and with the NATO defence of Europe during the early 1950s. Both these commitments provided a new focus for political and military leaders.

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<sup>56</sup> Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force...", 82.

<sup>57</sup> Charters, "Five Lost Years...", 46.

<sup>58</sup> Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force...", 86.

As the military expanded to provide troops for Korea and Europe, American and Canadian priorities in the North switched to joint air defence measures designed to counter incursions from the new Soviet bomber and ICBM threat.<sup>59</sup> The MSF had become a side issue as NATO and Korea placed greater pressures on available soldiers, equipment, and resources. Only one company from each battalion were ever jump qualified and tenuously maintained throughout the mid 1950's; a far cry from the brigade that was envisioned. The MSF did, however, fulfil its purpose as a politically expedient force of the day.<sup>60</sup> Canada maintained northern sovereignty while mollifying American concerns over northern defence with a minimal commitment of resources.

In January 1958, the MSF was reorganized and renamed the Defence of Canada Force (DCF). Pragmatically, this new organization closely resembled the reality of the airborne capability that remained by that time. It called for decentralized parachute companies within each of the infantry regiments with the mandate to respond to enemy lodgements in the North.<sup>61</sup> Over the next few years, the government and military focus on the European theatre and the United Nations continually hampered efforts to keep even this limited capability alive. The new focus for the Army was on the brigade group in Germany. In the late 1950's, Canada was increasing armoured and artillery capabilities and fielding modern equipment. For the officers and men of the Army, this

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<sup>59</sup> Charters, "Five Lost Years...", 46.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 100.

was playing with the ‘big boys’.<sup>62</sup> The defence of the North continued, as Professor Horn described, to be both a boon and a bane for airborne forces:

Paradoxically, arguments about the defence of the North not only ensured the airborne’s survival, as ethereal as it was, but it also perpetuated their continued marginalization. The lack of a credible and pervasive role consistently supported by the military and political chain of command assured a tenuous existence for Canada’s parachute troops.<sup>63</sup>

#### THE REBIRTH OF A CAPABILITY

Overall, the focus of the military on United Nations and NATO commitments overseas did not bode particularly well for the airborne in the 1950’s but this focus also played a role in the rebirth of the capability. The large defence budgets of the early 1960’s and political concerns over poor military judgement and management practices set the military up as a target for spending review and change.<sup>64</sup> In 1963, a secret report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy concluded that Canada needed an air-transportable brigade group, including a parachute element, to counter small lodgements on Canadian territory. It went on to explore the possibility of earmarking these forces as part of ‘Mobile Forces’ designated for use by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The report also concluded that Canada would be able to withdraw troops from Europe and maintain its NATO commitments if an air-transportable brigade were available in Canada. Although recommended as a long term goal only, the report stated

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<sup>62</sup> David Bercuson, *Significant Incident: Canada’s Army, the Airborne, and the Murder in Somalia* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1996), 55.

<sup>63</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Douglas L. Bland, *Chiefs of Defence: Government and the Unified Command of the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto, Brown Book Company Limited, 1995), 58.

that Canada could best contribute to NATO with a strategically mobile force.<sup>65</sup> Political expediency was again set to play a role in Canadian airborne capability.

The 1964 White Paper echoed many of the themes and conclusions from the 1963 report. The White Paper proposed to make more effective use of manpower by gradually converting a brigade into a special service force that was smaller, with air-portable and air-droppable equipment.<sup>66</sup> The MND, Paul Hellyer, wanted the Canadian military to be restructured into a globally mobile force that was possible of deterring war by rapidly responding to a wide range of situations.<sup>67</sup> This proposal attempted to rationalize defence commitments with the minimum number of forces and therefore, costs. This proposal had the benefit of appealing to a large number of people while minimizing the costs of defence commitments. Globally deployable troops could fulfill alliance tasks and be available to defend Canadian sovereignty. An Army analysis of defence commitments included requirements for heavy forces (armoured and mechanized) for NATO in Europe and light forces (airborne/air-transportable) for the defence of Canada, peacekeeping, the SACEUR Mobile Force, and small limited wars.<sup>68</sup>

The formation of an airborne capability in Canada was again more a function of political expediency that the existence of a clear and defined role and if any political dissention or concern over the formation of airborne forces existed at the time, it was

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<sup>65</sup> *Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy*, R.J. Sutherland, Chairman (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 30 Sep 63), 80, 89, and 173.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Hellyer, *White Paper on Defence* (Ottawa: Queen' Printer, Canada, 1964), 22.

<sup>67</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 103-104.

overshadowed by the issues of unification of the services.<sup>69</sup> The stage had been set for a rebirth of a Canadian airborne capability and, in December 1966, Hellyer stated that, "... [Force Mobile] Command is also forming the Canadian Airborne Regiment whose personnel and equipment can be rapidly sent to danger zones."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Hellyer, *Damn the Torpedos: My Fight to Unify Canada's Armed Forces* (Canada: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990), 43-46.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Hellyer, *Address on The Canadian Forces Reorganization Act*, 7 December 1966, 19.

## CHAPTER 3 - THE CANADIAN AIRBORNE REGIMENT

### THE INITIAL UNCERTAINTY

The rebirth, the life and the dramatic demise of Canadian airborne capability in the form of the Canadian Airborne Regiment (Cdn AB Regt) was marked by three things - uncertainty, anticipation, and political influence. First, there was uncertainty over the role that the unit was to fulfil in Canadian defence policy from its formation in 1968 until its disbandment 27 years later. Second, there was anticipation by the unit that they would be required to fulfil a role they interpreted as their own. Third, political expediency influenced many aspects of the unit's existence from formation and operational deployment, to disbandment. This chapter will examine the life of the Cdn AB Regt to determine what role it played within the Canadian military and national defence policy and whether or not this role was justified.

Even prior to formation, some senior leaders in Force Mobile Command were not convinced that an airborne capability was required to fill a role in the Canadian Military. While this could be attributed to a natural aversion to change,<sup>71</sup> it has also been argued that the concept was not well thought out. Dr. Bercuson, a well respected expert on politics, defence policy, and military history, believes that:

There was and is a real argument that although a modern, all-round military ought to retain some airborne capability, a unit such as the Canadian Airborne Regiment was operationally obsolete from the day it was formed.<sup>72</sup>

Paul Hellyer and General Allard, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), believed that their ideas for a strategic response capability in the form of the Cdn AB Regt were innovative

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<sup>71</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 107.

<sup>72</sup> Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 171.

but, in fact, the U.S. had been developing these ideas throughout the 1950's.<sup>73</sup> The problem with this misconception was unfortunately more than simple hubris; it led Canada to create a capability that had been overcome by the advent and perfection of the helicopter. Helicopters allowed troops to be more quickly, effectively and accurately delivered to the drop zone with more supplies and equipment than a parachute drop. The helicopters were vulnerable to ground fire approaching the target but the same was true for parachute drops at 300 to 500 meters. Finally, helicopters were also capable of evacuating wounded and providing close fire support to troops on the ground.<sup>74</sup>

So, at a time when airborne forces were becoming obsolete and pressures existed to reduce defence spending, the question remains - Did Canada create the Cdn AB Regt to fulfil a perceived role, or were other factors at play? The answer is, quite simply, that other factors were at play and these factors were to lay the foundation for much of the uncertainty, anticipation and political influence that was to occur throughout the existence of the Cdn AB Regt. Dr. Bercuson described five factors that influenced the creation of the Cdn AB Regt; low morale, the Army's fixation on parachuting, the belief that paratroopers were the essence of combat-ready soldiers, the perceived need for some sort of anti-terrorist or anti-guerrilla force, and finally cost.

The first factor – low morale – was a result of organizational changes to the Canadian Forces as a result of the plans Paul Hellyer was introducing that struck units from the order of battle and reduced available resources. The next two factors are certainly understandable given the Canadian experience with paratroopers during World

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<sup>73</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 171-173.

War II. Military leaders thought that a parachute unit would improve morale and provide a core of combat-ready soldiers. The fourth factor was a function of Canadian military leaders wanting a force comparable to the Special Forces that the U.S. and Britain were developing<sup>75</sup> - to be part of the club. Cost was, however, the driving factor. Airborne forces were not cheap, especially when the cost of transport aircraft and their associated infrastructure were considered, but they were less expensive than an investment in helicopters dedicated to airmobile forces.<sup>76</sup> The airlift required by airborne forces could be used for multiple purposes when not dropping paratroopers whereas helicopters dedicated to airmobile forces would serve a specific purpose. Therefore, Canada outwardly decided to create the Cdn AB Regt to provide a strategic response capability but, in reality, the decision was politically expedient as it satisfied the widest range of diverse requirements with the least possible cost.

The major problem arising from creating a politically expedient unit is that the role that it was to fulfil was not clearly defined at the outset. As a result, Colonel Rochester was given command of this new unit and was then directed to develop an operating concept for the Regiment from guidance that was too general and far reaching in nature. This guidance, issued by the Army Commander, directed that the Regiment conduct tasks ranging from the defence of Canada, peacekeeping, and disaster relief to special force missions and *coup de main* in general war. As a result, the operational concept for the unit encompassed a broad spectrum and included global operational environments and a full range of potential adversaries.<sup>77</sup> The uncertainty over the role

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-174.

<sup>77</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 120-122; and Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 197.

the Regiment was to play made it difficult to focus training, to justify expenditures within the organization as satisfying the national interest, and to adequately fulfil tasks across a broad spectrum when required.

#### THE EARLY SUCCESSES AND THE ROAD TO DECLINE

The early years of the Cdn AB Regt were exceptional but it was to reach the height of its existence in the early 1970's.<sup>78</sup> The unit consisted of the highest quality volunteers from across the Army and they conducted challenging training that further honed the skills of these motivated individuals. The unit travelled extensively to train and was even considered as favoured within the Army. This was in part due the quality of the soldiers, the status of a formation that the regiment retained, direct access to the Army Commander, and once again, to political expediency.

A renewed emphasis on Arctic sovereignty emerged within Canada that inevitably became tied to the Cdn AB Regt. While the unit initially focussed on tasks across many environments, the political focus on Arctic sovereignty forced a change in focus of the formation. This was a problem because the role of protecting Canada's sovereignty in the North might have been a high priority but it was also in response to a minimal threat that did not warrant a robust and capable airborne force.<sup>79</sup> Political opponents correctly accused the Trudeau Liberals of exploiting the Arctic for political purposes. The opponents were to be proven correct over time because once the political emphasis to defend the north abated, so too diminished the Liberal Government emphasis on the Arctic. Consequently the importance of the primary role of Cdn AB Regt was

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<sup>78</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 108.

<sup>79</sup> David A. Charters, "Armed Forces and Political Purpose: Airborne Forces and the Canadian Army in the 1980s" (dissertation University of New Brunswick, 1984), 71.

diminished.<sup>80</sup> Without politically expedient support for the primary role of the formation, it became harder and harder to maintain their favoured status within the Army.

The Regiment was not without purpose and it was employed operationally numerous times throughout its life but never in a role that required either the airborne or the special force capabilities that it anticipated. The first operational employment was during the 1970 crisis in Quebec. The unit deployed within an hour from Edmonton and participated alongside of thousands of other Canadian Forces members in Operation ESSAY.<sup>81</sup> The speed of the deployment was impressive but the duties required in this aid to civil power were not specifically suited to airborne forces. The second operational opportunity came in 1974 as part of a United Nations force in Cyprus. Part of the Regiment was in theatre as part of a normal rotation when the crisis escalated to the point that the remainder of the Cdn AB Regt was sent to reinforce the mission. The reinforced contingent performed very well and the rapid reaction of the Regiment was again impressive but, as before, the unit had proven rapidly deployable but it had not performed a uniquely airborne role. The same is true of the subsequent operational task as a rapid reaction force during the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.<sup>82</sup>

The focus of the unit started changing in the late 1970's as it was moved from Edmonton, under fierce opposition, to Petawawa as part of the Special Service Force (SSF) designed to create a rapid reaction formation in central Canada. This move added

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<sup>80</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 126-127.

<sup>81</sup> Charters, "Armed Forces and Political Purpose...", 73.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

two more tasks to the list maintained by the Regiment, response to a major air disaster (MAJAID) in the North and filling slots in the Cyprus rotation plan.<sup>83</sup>

The CDS, General Dextraze, denied that politics played any part in the move but the decision did ensure that the Army was well represented in Ontario and it found a new reason to justify an expensive formation at a time when the military was under considerable financial strain.<sup>84</sup> Dextraze admitted to the Commons committee in 1977 that the move was made to save money and that the Regiment would be less effective in its new location.<sup>85</sup> And so throughout the 1980's the Regiment completed two more normal rotations to Cyprus and while it maintained an anticipation that it would be required to operationally employ its specialized skills and training, the reality was far less exciting.

The reality of the situation facing the Cdn AB Regt started with their politically expedient move to Petawawa. This move had far reaching consequences that were not foreseen at the time. The unit's direct contact with the Army Commander was now interrupted by a Brigade Commander and the unit was now subject to the same level of normal tasks that every other Army unit faced. There were no airheads or drop zones in Petawawa and the unit was now separated from the aircraft that it needed to conduct airborne training. The troops now needed to drive four hours to an airfield that was too far away from the Arctic to make most trips in one leg. All these factors tended to reduce the units training and, thus, its combat effectiveness but perhaps more importantly, it denied the high strung soldiers of the unit adequate avenues to maintain morale and

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<sup>83</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 113.

<sup>84</sup> Bland, *Chiefs of Defence...*, 238-239; and Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 200-201.

<sup>85</sup> Charters, "Armed Forces and Political Purpose..." 76.

discipline through intense training.<sup>86</sup> By 1985, the situation came to a head when a civilian was killed by a machete wielding paratrooper. Major-General Hewson, chief of intelligence and security, investigated the problems in the Cdn AB Regt but despite identifying many structural and leadership issues, no action was taken. No special instructions were given to the Regimental Commander to solve the problems that Hewson discovered and overall, the SSF Commander did not expect that the chain of command had any reason to worry about the Regiment in the future.<sup>87</sup>

The trends that were established throughout the 1980's were allowed to continue. The Cdn AB Regt was increasingly viewed as no more special or different than any other infantry unit. This loss of status kept the question of relevance at the forefront of a political military situation where every cost was being closely scrutinized.<sup>88</sup> Why did Canada need to retain specialized forces to complete tasks that general purpose forces were equally suited to carry out?

The lack of a credible and distinct role relegated the Regiment to the whims of politically expedient purposes. When defending Northern sovereignty was politically important, the Regiment was held up as an example of success. When other commitments (international or domestic) were at the fore, the Regiment was seen as just another unit in the tasking brique. In fact, the lack of a credible threat or role in the North meant that neither resources nor action were considered necessary to maintain Canada's airborne capability. The result was an organization that was in constant uncertainty about

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<sup>86</sup> Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 202-203; and Charters, "Armed Forces and Political Purpose..." 74-76.

<sup>87</sup> Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 210.

<sup>88</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 167.

the future. While they were convinced that they were a vital asset and they anticipated that airborne forces would some day be required to play a unique role in the defence of the Canada, this anticipation was unfounded.

#### THE UNFORTUNATE END

As the 1990's began, the Cdn AB Regt was very much disillusioned about its role and place in the Canadian Forces.<sup>89</sup> Despite filling the role as the nation's rapid reaction force, the 1980's had produced nothing but normal rotations to Cyprus. Rather than deploying to defend Canadian interests abroad, the Regiment was viewed as just another infantry unit and even used to train others for international deployment. Adding to the frustration felt by the unit in the early 1990's, was the fact that they were warned to be prepared to deploy to Oka and subsequently to conduct a United Nations mission in Western Sahara but neither materialized. Significant preparation was conducted for each deployment, only for naught. In the end, all that preparation was seen to be wasted by the frustrated unit. In addition, budgetary pressures again impacted the Regiment in 1992 as it was officially reduced to Battalion status.<sup>90</sup>

The appearance of another potential United Nations mission in Somalia was yet another opportunity for the Cdn AB Regt but the choice of the Regiment to fulfil the task was not universally accepted within the Canadian Forces or the Army. The Regimental 'extended family' lobbied the military leadership hard to assign the mission to the Regiment in order to reverse recent disappointments but the nature of the mission was not

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<sup>89</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 122.

<sup>90</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *Hook-Up! ...*, 176; and Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 122.

well suited to the airborne unit.<sup>91</sup> The mission required a mechanized force and therefore the decision to send the Cdn AB Regt necessitated that vehicles be taken from another unit and then given to the Regiment along with the appropriate training. This was particularly surprising given the limited time (21 days) that was initially available for pre-deployment training.<sup>92</sup> But, the Army assigned the task to the Regiment and preparations began in earnest.

If the overall suitability of the unit had been the only issue in 1992, the mission to Somalia might now be viewed as a tremendous success. Unfortunately, the state of affairs in the unit was not good. The unit was rife with disciplinary problems, leadership was not consistent at all levels, degrading hazing rituals were in place for new recruits and instances of racism and anti-social behaviour were evident. The eventual culmination of this situation and the failures to correct them was the tragic murder of Shidane Arone by two members of the Cdn AB Regt.<sup>93</sup> The political situation that erupted as a result of the murder and the subsequent fallout was to prove disastrous for the unit.

The final politically expedient decision concerning the Cdn AB Regt was to be its end. The Regiment was disbanded in 1995 in the aftermath of the very public and very political scandal surrounding what is now known as the ‘Somalia Affair’. Measures were taken immediately to correct the deficiencies in the unit and it was even preparing for another United Nations mission at the time of disbandment but it was too late. The alleged cover-up by senior military leaders, civilian officials, and politicians coupled with

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<sup>91</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus...*, 122.

<sup>92</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 192.

<sup>93</sup> Bercuson, *Significant Incident...*, 215.

the exposure of the now infamous hazing tapes had created an impossible situation. The MND, David Collenette, believed that there had been too many embarrassments caused by members of the regiment; it had to be disbanded.<sup>94</sup>

However, the last decision regarding the Regiment was not based on the root causes of the problems but rather the ways in which these problems manifested themselves in the early 1990's. The lack of leadership and discipline in the unit did contribute to the tragic death of Arone, but ultimately it is sad and ironic that it was a series of politically expedient decisions that created the conditions within Canada and the military that allowed the Cdn AB Regt to reach the state that it did. The unit was created for political reasons to satisfy Northern sovereignty and defence commitment concerns. When these concerns faded, so too did the support for the airborne, denying them the best soldiers and leaders and the resources to train effectively. It was the lack of a clear role for airborne forces in Canada and that was at the heart of the problem.<sup>95</sup>

The Cdn AB Regt ended as it had begun – a politically expedient solution. Although it was possible for political decisions to decide the fates of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn and the Cdn AB Regt, as demonstrated in 1945, it was not so easy to kill airborne capability and desire within Canada. A kernel of capability survived like a desert flower waiting for the drought to end - ready to instantly bloom when sufficient water was next available.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-241.

<sup>95</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 228.

## CHAPTER 4 – CURRENT CANADIAN AIRBORNE CAPABILITY

### FIGHTING TO SURVIVE: AGAIN

The disbandment of the Cdn AB Regt in 1995 left the residual airborne capability in the Canadian Forces in a sad state of affairs with little traction for sympathetic intervention by military leaders or politicians. Airborne advocates and former unit members felt betrayed by the military leadership and the government. The vanguard unit of the Canadian Forces had been lost by the disbandment and therefore something challenging and intangible for soldiers to aspire to (the airborne esprit de corps) had been lost.<sup>96</sup> This was unacceptable and unforgivable for many airborne proponents both inside and outside of the military. The decision to dismantle the unit rather than continuing the process that was underway to fix the problems was unfathomable to some – but it had been done. So, with the troops getting ready to return to their parent units, army planners were working on ways to retain an airborne capability.<sup>97</sup>

The unfortunate truth was that, in Canada, an airborne capability was obsolete. Many military leaders and critics pointed out that airborne forces were a thing of the past. Surface to air missiles and reliance on scarce airlift limited the usefulness of this capability. This may not have been entirely true for all countries but for Canada it did not matter. The tragic end of the Regiment was simply the balancing of an unequal equation that had been artificially sustained since the end of World War II. The problem was never one of finding a clear and pervasive role for the airborne – the problem was that there was no clear and pervasive role to find within the Canadian context. This subjected

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>97</sup> Luke Fisher, "Ottawa Kills the Airborne," *Maclean's Magazine*, February 6, 1995, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=M1ARTM0010382>; Internet; accessed 25 February 2007.

Canadian airborne forces to uncertainty and politically expedient solutions from the very start. The exact same situation again doomed them to a minimal existence following the disbandment of the Cdn AB Regt until the present day. Even this minimal existence was not immune to the effects of not having a clear role. The small seed of capability that remained would also be subjected to political expediency.

Many plans were put forward to retain some airborne capability following the disbandment of the Regiment. These included a smaller Commando Group, the retention of a company group within the Canadian Airborne Holding Unit, and even the re-establishment of 1 Cdn Para Bn.<sup>98</sup> The scandal that surrounded the Cdn AB Regt in the mid 1990's had framed a situation in which any plan that was implemented would be subject to political pressures and influences. The decision that was finally made bore a striking resemblance to many previous decisions regarding airborne capability in Canada. It was described by Professor Horn as, "blatantly political."<sup>99</sup> The plan called for a return to the MSF model of decentralized parachute companies. Anything more would have been politically unacceptable but this again left Canadian airborne capability in an extremely difficult situation.

The *1994 White Paper* made no direct reference to the requirement for either an airborne or a parachute capability.<sup>100</sup> Without a clear role and a centralized organization, parachute training became a lower priority within the Canadian Forces. The Air Force was less inclined to provide aircraft to support training and the Light Infantry Battalions

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<sup>98</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 252-255.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>100</sup> A thorough search of this document revealed no direct references to airborne or parachute capability. Department of National Defence, *1994 Defence White Paper* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1994).

who possessed the parachute companies also had difficulty conducting training.<sup>101</sup> The struggle to maintain even a minimal capability had started once again. The remainder of the 1990's and the first years of the new millennium would not significantly change this situation. There would continue to be proponents of airborne forces advocating plans for increased capability and critics who would oppose such moves for a variety of reasons.

#### ENDURING HOPE

Proponents of airborne capability have continued to fight for what they believed to be necessary within the Canadian Forces. These promotions range from passionate arguments in the Mess over the requirement to provide challenging and demanding training for soldiers<sup>102</sup> to formal presentations to the Army Training Council on the future of mass parachute drops.<sup>103</sup> An article published in the *Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin* in 2002 argued that the Army should not debate about the validity of parachute operations but rather the scale and nature of operations.<sup>104</sup> As well, the current iteration of the Canadian Joint Task List maintained by the Chief of Force Development includes the task to conduct airborne forcible entry.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Horn, *Bastard Sons...*, 257.

<sup>102</sup> The author has had a few of these discussions over the past few months. The requirement to provide challenging training to soldiers is not at issue. The issue is whether or not an airborne capability is the best or only way to meet the aim.

<sup>103</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, "Precision Parachute Capabilities and their Potential Employment in the Canadian Forces" (master's thesis, Royal Military College, 2007), 4. LCol Ewing noted that in 2003 the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Parachute Centre, LCol Mike Blanchette, presented mass parachute drops as the future of parachute forces to the Army Training Council.

<sup>104</sup> Capt David M.G. Beatty, "The Future of Parachute Operations," *Doctrine and Training: Canada's Professional Journal on Army Issues* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 53. The article was advocating the use of smaller parachute forces to achieve strategic effects.

<sup>105</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Joint Task List*. Task 4.2.3 is to "Conduct Forcible Entry: Airborne, Amphibious & Air Assault. To conduct operations to seize and hold a military lodgement in the face of armed opposition, to strike directly at enemy operational or strategic centre(s) of gravity, or to gain access into a theatre of operations/ JOA or for introducing decisive forces into the

The inclusion of forcible entry on the Joint Task List might be used by some as justification for a capability and as the basis of a clear role for airborne forces but this argument is flawed. There are many other tasks on the list that Canada does not develop and maintain such as combat search and rescue. The task list is simply a compendium of all potential military tasks that should be considered during force development, not those that are necessarily required or essential to Canada. So, despite continued efforts to develop more capability and the enduring hopes of many supporters, the fact is that airborne capability does not exist in Canada and parachute capability struggles stay alive. LCol Bruce Ewing, the first Commander of the Canadian Forces Land Advanced Warfare Centre (CFLAWC) and an expert on Canadian parachute capability, described the current capability that was being maintained as minimal and in many cases falling below that level.<sup>106</sup>

The level of capability that currently exists is the result of a decade in limbo that was continually reinforced by the lack of a clear role for Canadian airborne forces. This situation made even the residual capability an enticing target for reductions. The last major work on parachute and airborne capability in Canada was a report tabled in 2000. This report stated that:

The CF [Canadian Forces] requires the ability to respond to an emergency, anywhere in Canada and abroad, on short notice. For the foreseeable future, the maintenance of core joint parachute capability, including parachutists, cargo and equipment drop, with the inherent airlift capabilities, is necessary.<sup>107</sup>

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region. A joint force may be tasked to do this by airborne, amphibious, and/ or air assault in conjunction with other maritime, air, and special operations forces comprising the joint force.

<sup>106</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, interview with author, 23 March 2007. The CFLAWC was formerly the Canadian Parachute Center

<sup>107</sup> Department of National Defence, *The Canadian Forces Parachute Capability Study...*, 47.

The rationale stated in the report may seem like a clear requirement yet, in reality, it remains vague and unconvincing. This was perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that the same report recommended eliminating the three parachute companies and forming a single parachute company in the Canadian Parachute Center (CPC).<sup>108</sup> This recommendation was never implemented.

In addition to not implementing changes to the parachute companies, the Army issued guidance in 2004 that light forces would not generate any airborne capability. Parachute delivery skills were to be maintained to the extent that current Canadian Forces tasks demanded and therefore the parachute companies were to be retained in the light infantry battalions.<sup>109</sup> The current tasks that guidance referred to were support to search and rescue training and support to a MAJAID; both of which were fulfilled by the CPC.<sup>110</sup> Clearly, there was a very fragile link between the parachute companies and assigned tasks.

Not only is there a weak link between existing capability and tasks, in 2005 the CPC itself was under considerable scrutiny as a method of saving money. The Government Expenditure Review Committee targeted the CPC for reductions and the Vice CDS issued direction in March 2005 to transform parachute training capability to save seven million dollars by fiscal year 2009/2010.<sup>111</sup> The Army Commander argued that this would virtually eliminate all of the CPC's wide variety of tasks and adversely

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Department of National Defence, *CLS Capability Development Planning Guidance – Light Forces* (Chief of Land Staff: file 3189-1 (CLS), 8 July 2004), 4.

<sup>110</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, *Precision Parachute Capabilities ...*, 6.

<sup>111</sup> MGen J.G.M. Lessard, *LFC Expenditure Review (ERC) – Implementation Plan and Risk Analysis* (Assistant Chief of Land Staff: file 7000-1 (DLSP 4-3), 5 November 2005), 1.

affect a number of non-Land Force Command (LFC) agencies. These tasks included support to the standing MAJAID task, the delivery of training for the full range of courses required for parachute and airborne capability, and the maintenance of the associated equipment.<sup>112</sup> The Army Commander argued that it was not prudent to carry out reductions to the CPC before the Defence Capability Plan (DCP) was complete and the impacts of Army transformation were fully appreciated. He proposed a transformation of the CPC into the CFLAWC to maintain certain niche capabilities that could be readily developed, rationalized, and adopted for the conduct of integrated, complex and unique operations.<sup>113</sup>

The proposed role of the CFLAWC was the training of Canadian Forces personnel for employment in complex terrain (arctic, desert, jungle, and mountain) and unique (airborne, air transported, airmobile and amphibious) operations.<sup>114</sup> It is interesting to note that the core of parachute and airborne training capability was maintained by creating a new role for the training establishment with wider responsibilities rather than by defining a clear and persuasive role for the capability. In order to achieve this transformation, the Army absorbed the initial directed savings of a million dollars from other sources and promising to conduct a training needs analysis based on the DCP before requesting any new funding to support the CFLAWC.<sup>115</sup> This situation has still not been resolved. Although the CPC has been renamed the CFLAWC, the DCP has still not been published and the Army has requested funding relief in excess

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

of four million dollars for fiscal year 2007/2008 in order to keep the CFLAWC operating.<sup>116</sup> The nucleus of an airborne capability in Canada has been maintained once again.

The role of the CPC was expanded to include tasks that were considered more relevant to senior leaders and that could be rationalized to government as a practical expenditure of funds. In reality, although the CFLAWC has taken on additional responsibilities as the centre of excellence for arctic, jungle and desert operations as well as the conduct of advanced winter warfare courses, the focus remains on parachuting. The new responsibilities were taken on with the addition of only nine positions from force expansion credits.<sup>117</sup> This is not to say that the parachute training conducted by the CFLAWC is not required. The training provided to search and rescue technicians and Special Forces personnel are essential to maintaining current capabilities. As well, the CFLAWC has a role in supporting the current MAJAID response. The fact that these essential capabilities would be endangered by their uninformed association with an airborne capability speaks volumes about the tenuous position of this capability in Canada.

It is not only in Canada that airborne forces are being questioned. In the U.S., the Global War on Terror and the current war in Iraq have given rise to a plethora of academic study on the new battlespace and the impact that asymmetric warfare will have on conventional military forces. Professor Barry Posen believes that the struggle against

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<sup>116</sup> LGen A.B. Leslie, Land *Forces Command Business Plan, Part 1 - SORP 2007* (Chief of Land Staff: file 7000-1 (DLSP 4-3), 12 November 2006). Three million dollars was requested to relieve Expenditure Review Committee directed savings in fiscal year 2007/2008 and a further 1.2 million dollars was requested for alternate service delivery of aircraft to support parachute training.

<sup>117</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, interview with author, 23 March 2007. The assumption of the full range of responsibilities would require additional augmentation and/or positions.

terrorism will require more special forces with enhanced capabilities. He proposes the reorientation of active units such as the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Division to the task of fighting terrorism as Special Forces rather than the conventional capabilities they now provide.<sup>118</sup> Marina Ottaway agrees that ‘nation building’ is not a task for airborne forces but argues that it has to be done by a military capability willing to use deadly force over a long term campaign.<sup>119</sup> Finally, Michael Melillo argues that, “Only by creating a force that is just as adept at conducting small wars against irregular enemies as it is at conducting big wars against conventional foes will the United States be able to ensure security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>120</sup> He goes on to reinforce the importance of Special Forces as a key player in fighting asymmetric or irregular threats. This line of reasoning is having major effects in Canada as well.

The transformation that the Canadian Forces is currently undergoing is serving to undermine the tenuous position occupied by airborne capability in Canada. The creation of Canada’s Special Operations Forces Command (SOFCOM) and the associated Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) now provides something more challenging for Canadian Forces member to strive for. The existence of a unit that draws mentally and physically robust volunteers from across the military bears striking similarity to the intangible role that the Cdn AB Regt used to fulfil. The ability of the Canadian Forces to generate sufficient volunteers that meet the demanding standards for

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<sup>118</sup> Barry R. Posen, “The Struggle Against Terrorism – Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics,” *International Security* 26, no. 3 (Winter 2001/2002): 49.

<sup>119</sup> Marina Ottaway, “Nation Building,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 132 (Sep-Oct 2002): 18.

<sup>120</sup> Michael R. Melillo, “Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities,” *Parameters* 36, no. 3 (September 21, 2006): 22.

the CSOR was in question from the outset<sup>121</sup> so the ability to generate sufficient volunteers for CSOR and an airborne capability is highly improbable. However, this fact does not deter everyone from continuing to strive for a new airborne capability.

Transformation has expanded the role of Special Forces within the Canadian Forces but it has also been the most recent cause for hope among supporters of an airborne capability. The vision of a strategically relevant and responsive force is exactly the type of thing that proponents argue airborne forces could provide for Canada. They focus on what has previously been described as the greatest strength of airborne forces – the rapid projection of power over great distances. Unfortunately, the vision that General Hillier, the CDS, has conceived does not include any mention of a new airborne capability.<sup>122</sup> The vision includes new command and control structures, an operational command for Special Forces, and a standing contingency task force based on a strategic sealift platform.<sup>123</sup> These are the elements that are designed to achieve strategic relevance and responsiveness for Canada within the contemporary operation environment. Although there is a renewed emphasis on the requirement to protect Canada, the lack a clear role for airborne forces within this transformation vision has once again opened the door to making decisions regarding airborne forces that are based on political expediency vice military requirement.

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<sup>121</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Special Operations Regiment* (UNCLAS CANFORGEN 195/05 DCDS 185 201320Z DEC 05), n.p.

<sup>122</sup> General Rick Hillier, “Setting Our Course: The Way Ahead for Our Canadian Forces,” [http://www.cds.forces.gc.ca/00native/ppt/cds-vision\\_e.ppt](http://www.cds.forces.gc.ca/00native/ppt/cds-vision_e.ppt); Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

<sup>123</sup> It should be noted that the CDS has stood down the Standing Contingency Task Force due to operational and fiscal pressures but he maintains that the integration of sea-land-air effects is important for future flexibility and relevance of the CF. Department of National Defence, *Integrated Sea-Land-Air Effects Concept Development and Experimentation* (UNCLAS CANFORGEN 059/07 CDS 013/07 051855Z APR 07), n.p.

## A NEW POLITICAL EXPEDIENT

The politically expedient decision to disband the Cdn AB Regt by the Liberal Government and their subsequent dismissal of the Somalia inquiry before it was complete was fiercely criticized by the opposition parties.<sup>124</sup> As with many political issues, the mistakes of one party are embellished by the others and promises are made to set them right when the party in question gains power. So, on the 22 December 2005, Stephen Harper announced in Trenton that the Conservative Party envisioned an airborne regiment and the associated airlift stationed at Trenton to rapidly respond to emergencies throughout the Arctic region.<sup>125</sup> This unit is proposed to consist of 650 regular force personnel co-located with the capabilities already resident in Trenton as part of the CFLAWC and some newly acquired strategic and tactical airlift assets.<sup>126</sup> The reasons behind this announcement may not be as simple as they appear on the surface. The editor of the Canadian American Strategic Review opined:

Of course, in the nearly thirty years that the Canadian Airborne Regiment was in existence, it never deployed by parachute. So why have the Conservatives singled out paratroopers for an Arctic role? It might have more to do with promises made at Trenton than with the Arctic.<sup>127</sup>

The Conservative Government was elected in January 2006 and very shortly thereafter the MND Gordon O'Connor visited the CPC and considerably raised morale by

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<sup>124</sup> John DeMont, Luke Fisher, and Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Somalia Inquiry's Damning Report," *Maclean's Magazine*, July 14, 1997, <http://www.canadianencyclopedia.ca/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=M1SEC674461>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Dianne DeMille and Stephen Preistly, "Rapid Emergency Response," *Canadian American Strategic Review*, <http://www.sfu.ca/casr/ft-harper1-7.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

<sup>126</sup> Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries, "Conservative Election Platform for Canada's Defence and Security," <http://www.defenceandsecurity.ca/public/docs/2006/march/conservative%20defence%20platform.pdf>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Dianne DeMille and Stephen Preistly, *Rapid Emergency Response*, n.p.

emphatically stating that he was committed to establishing a parachute battalion in Trenton.<sup>128</sup> Although the promise had changed from an airborne regiment to a parachute battalion, the government was continuing to provide new hope for proponents of airborne forces. Ironically, this new hope has arrived at a time when the situation within the military has already changed to the point that an airborne capability will not be universally welcomed, especially at the expense of other initiatives.

There are two large indicators of why airborne (or even parachute) forces will not be acceptable to the military in today's environment. First of all, LCol Ewing has argued that the concept of recreating mass drop airborne capability is out of step with the military, political and fiscal realities of today and that it ignores the rapid changes that have been taking place in parachuting.<sup>129</sup> He believes that the future of parachute forces in Canada lies with the precision insertion of small groups of soldiers for specific tasks that do not necessarily include an emergency response to the Arctic or traditional airborne tasks such as forced entry.<sup>130</sup> This concept is in complete concert with the increase in Special Forces in Canada that use parachutes as one means of inserting small groups of soldiers into a theatre or an operational area.

Secondly, the CDS has not yet amended his vision for the Canadian Forces to include an airborne unit in Trenton. He has continued to support the vision that he conceived before the Conservative Government came to power. There have been

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<sup>128</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, *Precision Parachute Capabilities...*, 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, and LCol R.B. Ewing, interview with author, 23 March 2007. Outside of Special Forces requirements, LCol Ewing considered the requirement for a parachute Company Group to conduct Non-combatant Evacuation Operations in either a permissive or non-permissive environment as largest organization required by the Canadian Forces. The other requirement for precision insertion of soldiers was limited to the Reconnaissance Platoons of the nine infantry battalions.

adjustments to the plan but arguably most portions of the vision have been expedited by the change in government and new defence spending rather than hampered by it. The Canadian Forces have incorporated many of the changes into their planning brought about by the Conservative government. The ‘Canada First’ strategy, territorial defence battalions, ice breakers, strategic airlift, and emphasis on the arctic have all found their way into military plans and daily conversation. The most notable omission in Army planning documents is any reference to a parachute or airborne unit in Trenton.<sup>131</sup> It appears as if the military’s vision of strategically relevant and responsive forces still does not include airborne forces. If the Conservative Government does succeed in establishing a new parachute/airborne unit in Trenton, it will be for political vice military reasons.

The current hope for airborne forces in Canada is politically driven and the military requirement for airborne forces is the subject of debate. There are still advocates in the military that continue fighting to re-establish airborne forces by protecting the seeds of a capability using many different justifications. These justifications include response to a major air disaster, protecting arctic sovereignty and conducting forcible entry for expeditionary forces. The fact remains however, that there is still no clear, viable role for airborne forces in Canada.

The response to northern emergencies such as a MAJAID is adequately provided for by current Search and Rescue assets and the CFLAWC. Each Search and Rescue aircraft can drop the personnel and resources to care for twenty survivors and the CFLAWC has twelve personnel and prepared equipment to care for an additional 320

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<sup>131</sup> LGen A.B. Leslie, *Land Forces Command Business Plan, Part 1 - SORP 2007* (Chief of Land Staff: file 7000-1 (DLSP 4-3), 12 November 2006). This document includes plans for force expansion, territorial defence battalions and increased emphasis on the arctic through the Canadian Rangers but it does not include a plan for establishing a new unit in Trenton. In fact, regular force restructuring is completely focussed on creating affiliated battle groups.

survivors on four hours notice to deploy.<sup>132</sup> The frequency of flights over the arctic is increasing but the probability of a crash during level flight combined with the probability anyone would survive to be rescued<sup>133</sup> precludes the necessity for a more robust response.

The requirement to respond to northern emergencies or to defend Canada's arctic sovereignty is no more compelling than it was during the Cold War. The debate over Arctic sovereignty is not new but it has new emphasis due to global warming and the implied threat of increased international shipping through the Northwest Passage.<sup>134</sup> The ice is melting but it is unlikely that this trend will present a challenge to Canadian sovereignty over the region,<sup>135</sup> especially of the sort that could be countered with an airborne capability. The Cold War threat of an enemy lodgement on Canadian territory provided a more compelling requirement for airborne forces than the threat of increased shipping does today. It appears as if the North continues to be a boon and a bane.

Given Canadian history and current international policies and defence plans, the requirement to conduct a forcible entry in a hostile foreign country is an unlikely response to protecting national interests. The government certainly views airborne forces

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<sup>132</sup> Department of National Defence, *MAJAJID Plan Draft V4*, 8 and LCol R.B. Ewing, interview with author, 23 March 2007. This response package is more than sufficient to deal with the projected number of casualties that might result from a major airliner crash in the Canadian Arctic.

<sup>133</sup> The US National Transportation Safety Board data for the past 10 years indicates that there are an average of 2.2 major disasters (causing multiple casualties) each year and the 98% of the total casualties caused were caused on board of the aircraft. National Transportation Safety Board, "Aviation Accident Statistics," <http://www.nts.gov/aviation/aviation.htm>; Internet; accessed 14 April 2007. If this data is combined with the fact that only six percent of airline accidents result from mid-air flight then the chance of an arctic major air disaster is extremely small. Boeing, "Statistical Summary of Commercial Jet Plane Accidents," <http://www.boeing.com/news/techissues/pdf/statsum.pdf>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2007.

<sup>134</sup> S. Jeff Birchall, "Canadian Sovereignty: Climate Change and Politics in the Arctic," *Arctic* 59, no. 2 (June 2006): iii.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

as a means of defending Canada instead of a means of projecting national power and the military has not yet included it in strategic plans for domestic or international purposes.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the facts that nullify the justifications that airborne advocate use, there are political motives at play. This time they aim to build airborne capability to right the wrongs of a previous government and promote Canadian sovereignty of the Arctic. For those in uniform, it seems extremely difficult if not impossible to let go of the past. The proud history of airborne forces in World War II has continued to have influence today. The enduring pride of past accomplishments and airborne traditions continue to live on in those who have served in some airborne capacity. These soldiers have served admirably and they must always be remembered for their service; however, it is also time to face reality.

Canada has not required airborne forces in the past and nothing has happened to change that fact. Creating a unit or capability for purely political purposes without a credible role will place the potential leaders and soldiers involved in an unfair position. They may be initially filled with pride, accomplishment and a profound sense of purpose but, in the end, the Cdn AB Regt demonstrated that the lack of a clear role could have undesirable effects. Recreating that situation is not a fitting honour to those who have gone before. Perhaps the situation will change in the future.

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<sup>136</sup> General Rick Hillier, "CDS Transformation SITREP 02/05," 7 September 2005, [http://www.cds.dnd.ca/cft-tfc/pubs/SITREPO205\\_e.asp](http://www.cds.dnd.ca/cft-tfc/pubs/SITREPO205_e.asp); Internet; accessed 23 March 2007. This document states the Department has initiated the development of a Defence Capability Plan (DCP). The DCP will articulate the capabilities necessary to attain strategic objectives identified in the DPS and the National Security Policy (NSP). These capabilities will then be costed to balance resources against capability requirements and identify capabilities for elimination or curtailment to focus limited resources on those areas that will provide Canada with relevant, responsive and effective forces. Concurrently, systems and structures that are less effective or relevant to operations must be rapidly divested. The author was unable to find any indications, unlike a wide range of other capabilities that have been identified as priorities (ships, aircraft, command structures, etc.), that airborne capability has been extrapolated from the DCP or NSP by military commanders or staff.

## CHAPTER 5 - FUTURE CANADIAN AIRBORNE CAPABILITY

### PREDICTING THE FUTURE

The future of Canadian airborne capability is unknown. Political expediency could again come into play or a pervasive, clear role could be found. As previously stated, there are many who argue for a return of the Cdn AB Regt both internal and external to the military. At present, it appears as if they have found hope in the Conservative Government's plan for a new unit in Trenton. Senior military leaders and planners, however, do not seem to share the government's understanding of the requirement for this new unit. An examination of what is currently understood about the future environment the Canadian Forces will be expected to operate in will allow an extrapolation of whether or not a future requirement exists for airborne forces. This analysis will allow the central question to be answered: Does Canada require an airborne capability?

Before making predictions about the viability or potential requirement for Canadian airborne forces, it is necessary to understand something about the difficulties of reliably predicting the future, especially in predicting the future of warfare based on recent experiences. Dr. Colin S. Gray wrote in 2005 that, "... four caveats, or warnings ... bear upon the degree of confidence that should, and should not, be placed in strategic futurology."<sup>137</sup> Understanding these warnings and avoiding their dangers will not allow a greater degree of precision in predicting future requirements but it will ensure that the analysis is not fundamentally flawed by an avoidable error. Dr. Gray's four caveats are:

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<sup>137</sup> Colin S. Gray, "How Has War Changed Since the End of the Cold War?" *Parameters* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 14.

- War should not be approached in ways that would divorce it from its political, social and cultural contexts.
- Defense [sic] establishments are apt to develop impressive military solutions to problems that they prefer to solve, rather than those that a cunning or lucky foe might pose.
- Trend-spotting and analysis is not a very helpful guide to the future. The strategic future is driven by the consequences of the trends we see, trends which interact and can trigger nonlinear developments.
- Surprises happen. Some are agreeable, while some are not. It is unlikely that we will prove any more farseeing than were our predecessors.<sup>138</sup>

A considerable amount of work and research has been done within the Canadian Forces and Allied nations for the express purpose of understanding how the world is changing and what threats may present themselves but, as Yogi Berra said, “It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future.”<sup>139</sup> Conclusive arguments based on future predictions that use qualifiers such as ‘most’, ‘likely’ or ‘foreseeable’ are also difficult, however, this is exactly what is required since the current view of the future for the Canadian Forces does not specifically state whether or not airborne forces are required.

In order to accomplish the task of determining Canada’s need for airborne forces, the current body of work will be analysed to determine whether or not it supports a Canadian requirement for airborne capability and how that requirement might be extrapolated. The extrapolation will then be judged based on Dr. Gray’s caveats about future predictions. In the end, the extrapolation that heeds the warnings the best will be the best prediction about the future.

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>139</sup> Famous Quotes and Quotations, “Yogi Berra Quotes,” <http://www.famous-quotes-and-quotations.com/yogi-berra-quotes.html>; Internet; accessed 25 March 2007.

## A FUTURE THAT REQUIRES AIRBORNE FORCES?

Within the constructs of the Future Security Environment (FSE) and the Contemporary Operating Environment (COE) it is not hard to envision a series of scenarios where airborne forces could be a decisive element for the Canadian Forces. The extant National Security Policy (NSP) of 2005 states that Canada has decided to concentrate its efforts in areas of the international security environment where it can make a difference; failed or failing states.<sup>140</sup> The ability to respond to these challenges is to serve as the benchmark for the Canadian Forces. In order to achieve this goal, Canada will need to maintain effective, relevant and responsive armed forces with substantial capabilities that will also enable responses to other international contingencies. This will provide insurance against the unexpected as the Canadian Forces must also be prepared to act quickly in the event of crises, both in Canada and around the world.<sup>141</sup> Within this context, there are two major operations where the requirement for airborne forces could be adequately justified – the seizure of an airport or the rapid response to a crisis within Canada.

The ability to respond to international crises to conduct stability operations or non-combatant evacuation (NEO) operations normally requires a secure airport that can be used to support the force. It can not be guaranteed that this will be possible within a failed or failing state and it might be necessary to forcibly take and hold one in order to deploy a larger force, evacuate civilians, deliver humanitarian aid or assist in stabilizing a

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<sup>140</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canada's International Policy Statement. A Role of Pride and Influence in the World: Defence* (Ottawa: ADM(PA), 2005), 5.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

foreign government. Airborne forces are ideally suited to this task<sup>142</sup> and it is relatively easy to extrapolate this requirement from what is predicted about the future. The problem with deducing that Canada requires airborne forces based on a specific operation within this view of the future is related to Dr. Gray's first and second caveats. A Canadian airborne force seizing an airport is a concept that is divorced from the political, social and cultural contexts of Canada and it is an impressive military solution to a preferred problem.

The need to understanding the political, social, and cultural context that future Canadian military capabilities will be required to support is evident. The Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts (DLSC) held a symposium in 2003 titled "Canada's Army in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". The first chapter of the proceedings deals specifically with the political and social framework within Canada. The Army Commander, LGen M.K. Jeffery stated up front that these issues cannot be ignored in determining where we go in the future.<sup>143</sup> Two relevant aspects that can be drawn from the context presented at the symposium. The first is that problems between Canadian society and the Army can result from different perspectives being adopted by the different groups.<sup>144</sup> That is to say that if the military envisions a warfighting response to an international situation and the government envisions diplomacy, tensions will exist. The second is that warfighting still determines the central beliefs and values that define the Army but this construct does not resonate

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<sup>142</sup> Tom Clancy, *Airborne: A Guided Tour of an Airborne Task Force*, (New York: Berkley Books, 1997), xvii.

<sup>143</sup> LGen M.K. Jeffrey, "Introduction," in *Towards a Brave New World: Canada's Army in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. LCol Bernd Horn and Peter Gizewski, vi-ix (Canada: Army Publishing Office, 2003), viii.

<sup>144</sup> Donna J. Winslow, "Canadian Society and its Army," in *Towards a Brave New World: Canada's Army in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. LCol Bernd Horn and Peter Gizewski, 1-22 (Canada: Army Publishing Office, 2003), 14, 18.

well in a post-modern Canadian Society.<sup>145</sup> Canadian society is far more comfortable with the role of the military as a force for peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention than it is with warfighting.

The use of airborne forces to seize an airfield is an impressive warfighting solution to the problem of getting into a particular location in order to solve a potential problem that the government may need the military to solve. Unfortunately, Canada prefers multi-national approaches to solving international issues and in the past it has not, nor will it in the future require the Canadian Forces to replicate every capability of the world's premier militaries.<sup>146</sup> Professor Horn argues further that the ability to quickly project national power is seen by politicians as more of a liability than strength.<sup>147</sup> Following allies into trouble spots is less risky than leading the charge while still contributing to international security. Within this context, it is much harder to envision the Canadian government, supported by the public, committing its military to forcibly seize an objective either unilaterally or even as the vanguard of an international force. It is even harder to envision the dedication of scarce resources to defence spending within Canadian society to ensure that the military has the joint capabilities to conduct these operations such as attack helicopters and modern multi-role fighter aircraft.<sup>148</sup>

Developing a Canadian airborne capability is an impressive military solution to the preferred problem of rapid international intervention and justification for a multitude

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 18.

<sup>146</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canada's International Policy Statement ... Defence...*, 11.

<sup>147</sup> Horn and Wyczynski, *In Search of Pegasus ...*, 240.

<sup>148</sup> The resources and capabilities to conduct airborne operations are covered in Chapter 1. They include but are not limited to airlift, suppression of enemy air defences, fighter support, close air support, attack helicopters, joint fires and sustainment.

of equipments that currently do not exist within the Canadian Forces. Those within the military who advocate airborne forces constantly seize upon this solution as a role for airborne forces. Unfortunately, although surprises do happen, this solution has a low probability of being acceptable in the future due to the Canadian context. There is, however, the other main justification that advocates use to support airborne capability within Canada – responding to a crisis at home.

The requirement to have an airborne capability to quickly respond to crises within Canada is not a viable role nor has it been throughout the history of airborne forces in Canada. In this situation, it is a case of both the military leaders and politicians solving the problem of national security and protecting Canadian sovereignty in a manner they prefer. The ‘ideal’ solution to the problem of defending the vast reaches of Canada with the least amount of resources has been airborne forces since the very first threat was identified. Unfortunately, the same issue has always existed with this ‘ideal’ solution – the threat to Canada has never been great enough to maintain the capability over the long term. There may be emerging threats to Canadian sovereignty caused by global warming and other developments but they are no more compelling than the threat of a Soviet foothold was during the Cold War.<sup>149</sup> The extrapolation that Canada requires airborne forces in the future does not heed Dr. Gray’s warnings well at all.

An extrapolation that observes Dr. Gray’s caveats better is required. It has been demonstrated in previous chapters that any capability that Canada creates will need a clear role and the potential to be employed in that role in order to be relevant and to avoid

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<sup>149</sup> The Senate security and defence committee reported that they found it ‘unfathomable’ for politicians to focus so many military resources to protecting Arctic sovereignty when not threat existed. They argue that the greater threat from shipping and traffic in the Great Lakes and other southern littoral areas. Tenille Bonogurore, “Coastal Defence a Toothless ‘Hoax,’ Senate Reports Says,” *Globe and Mail*, 28 March 2007; [www.globeandmail.com](http://www.globeandmail.com); Internet; accessed 29 March 2007.

the troubles this situation has caused for previous Canadian airborne forces. In other words, it will have to fit within the political, social and cultural context of Canada. It is therefore, more appropriate to envision Canada filling a more general and sustainable role (across the full spectrum of conflict) within a coalition of the willing in order to protect Canadian interests at home and abroad. Fortunately, it appears as if this is the direction that the Army is taking in the new “Force Employment Concept for the Army of Tomorrow”.<sup>150</sup>

#### AIRBORNE FORCES IN THE ARMY OF TOMORROW?

The new Force Employment Concept (FEC) states that the Canadian Forces’, “...core mandate is – and will continue to be – the defence of Canada and Canadian interests and military contribution to international peace and security.”<sup>151</sup> It calls for an Army capable of conflict intervention across the full spectrum of the FSE through an operating concept of adaptive dispersed operations. This concept will provide an approach to conducting complex, multi-dimensional conflict within a non-contiguous dispersed battlespace.<sup>152</sup> In order to achieve this goal, the Army will have to generate combat-effective, multipurpose forces that are strategically relevant and tactically decisive.<sup>153</sup> It is within the characteristics of these two core elements and their

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<sup>150</sup> Department of National Defence, B-BL-310-001/AG-001 *Land Operations 2021: Adaptive Dispersed Operations – A Force Employment Concept for the Army of Tomorrow*, Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007). This capstone document was obtained from the editors immediately following Army Commander approval. The concepts contained therein will be discussed in more detail in this section.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17. The adaptive dispersed operating concept seeks to create and sustain operational advantage over adept, adaptive adversaries through the employment of land forces alternatively dispersing and aggregating throughout the battlespace.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

corresponding capability requirements where it is possible to extrapolate whether or not airborne forces have a role in the Army of Tomorrow (AoT).<sup>154</sup>

Strategic relevance refers to the Army's ability to, "project a credible, timely, nationally and internationally recognized Land Force capability."<sup>155</sup> The two characteristics of strategic relevance that are germane are adaptable and deployable. Adaptable forces will have to operate in a complex and extended battlespace while effectively operating across the full spectrum of conflict. Deployable forces will be modular in design and include capabilities that allow for timely responses at home or abroad. A tactically self-sufficient and robust element will be immediately deployable by air while the remaining forces assemble and move by sea.<sup>156</sup> Airborne forces are not adaptable across the entire spectrum of conflict; they fulfil specific roles and tasks. They are certainly strategically and tactically deployable but they are not usually described as tactically self-sufficient and robust even in the world's premier militaries. The need for surprise and the lack of equipment, fire support and mobility once on the ground<sup>157</sup> that are inherent to airborne forces do not fit the future mould of strategic relevance.

Tactical decisiveness refers to the Army's ability to,

... integrate all capabilities required to prevail in the future battlespace.  
Information dominance, assured timely sustainment, and highly agile,

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<sup>154</sup> Department of National Defence, *Future Force – Concepts for Future Army Capabilities*, (Kingston: Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts, 2003), 182-192. This work precedes the new FEC but it was fundamental to the process of developing the FEC.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-184. The four characteristics of strategic relevance are: adaptable; deployable; interoperable; and modern.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-184.

<sup>157</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-002/FP-000 *Land Force Tactical Doctrine*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1997), 7-5.

mobile and lethal forces will provide the overmatch required to win throughout the spectrum of conflict.<sup>158</sup>

The relevant characteristics of tactical decisiveness are mobile, modular, and survivable. Airborne forces can certainly be mobile but the AoT envisions mobility throughout the battlespace at any time, in any weather and by any means. There is certainly an argument to be made that airborne forces are highly mobile but their dependence on airlift and the limitations inherent in that mode of transport limit their uses to specific conditions. Modular forces in the adaptive dispersed operating concept will allow the Land Force to be adaptive, robust and agile to rapidly deploy and remain sustainable.<sup>159</sup> The AoT also mentions that these forces must be multipurpose to provide full spectrum capability and that they may contain a mixture of medium, heavy and light forces. These light forces would compensate for reduced combat power through agility in specific roles<sup>160</sup> which does seem open the door for airborne forces. Finally, the AoT will require forces that are survivable. Airborne forces do not possess the same survivability characteristics as medium or heavy forces conducting operations. This will certainly be a limiting factor.

Taken as a whole, and within the overall context of the FEC, the requirement for an airborne capability does not extrapolate well from the characteristics of strategically relevant and tactically decisive land forces if, of course, one heeds Dr. Gray's warnings. There are opportunities, as before, to extrapolate the requirements for deployability, mobility and light forces (within modularity) into an airborne force. In doing so, one

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<sup>158</sup> Department of National Defence, *Future Force...*, 185. The four characteristics of tactical decisiveness are: lethal; mobile; modular; and survivable.

<sup>159</sup> Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021...*, 14.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

falls into similar pitfalls as before – the solution corresponds to a preferred problem and it ignores the Canadian context.

In order to meet future requirements, the AoT will need balanced, modular forces that are, “... adaptive, remain robust, and provide the agility needed for rapid and sustained deployment of forces at home and abroad.”<sup>161</sup> This means that more than one element of each capability will be required to sustain operations over a longer period of time, respond to multiple crises, or to reconstitute while maintaining readiness. Given the Canadian context, it is not realistic to project sufficient airborne forces to accomplish these requirements. Certainly, the Conservative Government’s plan for a parachute battalion in Trenton is insufficient.

The extrapolation that Canada does not need airborne forces is more mindful of Dr. Gray’s caveats. It is in keeping with the political, social and cultural context of Canada. Although the future will require Canadian Land Forces that are strategically relevant and tactically decisive, the existence of a unique airborne capability does not fit well into the concept of robust and adaptive forces that can be deployed and sustained to support national policy. Not creating airborne forces for a specific situation of forced entry avoids the pitfall of creating a capability to solve a preferred military solution. Finally, although it can be argued that surprises do happen, Canada’s current alliances and defence agreements provide a large degree of security against the unknown.

It should be noted that this extrapolation does not rule out the possibility of parachuting being conducted within the Canadian Forces. As previously stated, LCol Ewing is in the process of advocating a role for precision parachuting within elements of

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

the Canadian Forces such as the CSOR, infantry reconnaissance platoons and others. He is of the opinion that,

While this proposed re-alignment of parachute forces and tactics away from the mass drop concept to an increased use of precision parachute forces in the CF, for both the LF and SOF, would require a complete change of mindset for many people, I believe that it would truly provide ... a credible, capable, and vital force...<sup>162</sup>

However, these forces are not airborne nor are they formed in a single parachute unit or formation. They are an integral part of a balanced, joint force capable of operating in the future battlespace and of being sustained over time. It does not appear as if the AoT holds much hope of providing the water necessary for Canada's desert flower – airborne forces – to bloom again. While this may prove true, there is no way to predict whether or not political expediency will play a role in a future airborne force. It can, however, be said with some certainty that, if Canada does form a new airborne force, political expediency will play a role.

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<sup>162</sup> LCol R.B. Ewing, *Precision Parachute Capabilities...* , 32.

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

### THE FINAL ANALYSIS

Canada developed airborne forces at the start of World War II driven by military desire to have this new capability and political need for homeland security. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn was sent to the war to fight under British command and served with such valour, distinction and honour that they shall always be remembered and should forever be praised. Following the war, the political situation in Canada saw the disbandment of many units, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Para Bn, but a kernel of capability clung to life. First the torch was carried by the SAS Coy, then the MSF and finally the DCF before the Cdn AB Regt was formed in 1968. Each successive modification of the capability was driven by political expediency and military decisions made easy by the lack of a clear role.

The Cdn AB Regt was the epitome of combat readiness and it served Canada with distinction on many operations and in many circumstances but it, like its post-war predecessors, lacked a clear and pervasive role. This fatal flaw meant that it was never used as it was intended. Soldiers and leaders trained hard and were proud of their accomplishments but the unit was never to operationally deploy by parachute. Eventually other priorities began to take precedence within the Canadian Forces and the best soldiers and leaders no longer found their way into the Regiment. Leadership and discipline started to suffer. Eventually, the tragic murder of a Somali teenager during a United Nations mission sparked a political scandal that would ultimately see the disbandment of the unit in 1995. Despite the reforms in progress, this incident sparked a politically expedient decision by the ruling Liberal Government to get rid of the problem rather than fix it. This decision did not sit well with many in the military but ultimately,

the lack of a clear and pervasive role made it easy for the government and military leaders to react in this manner.

Over the past decade, the kernel of an airborne capability has continued to hang on within the Canadian Forces inside the training establishment and the three dispersed light infantry companies. Today, the level of capability that exists has been described as not being able to get much lower, but there is new hope. The Conservative Party made election promises of an airborne regiment in Trenton and once they gained power, they announced a new parachute unit in the same location. Unfortunately, the motivation for the announcement was clearly politically motivated and once again tied to the protection and exercise of arctic sovereignty in light of perceived threats in that area.

Within this context of political change, the Canadian Forces had already started a process of transformation and, although many new defence projects and capabilities have been incorporated into transformation as a result, no evidence can be found of a current military driven requirement for a parachute unit. Therefore, the hope of renewing this capability is false. Even if the government decides to create a new parachute unit in Trenton for political reasons, it will be doomed to the same fate as the Cdn AB Regt. The lack of a clear role will relegate it to a lower priority for resources within the multitude of current defence priorities and it will never be used as it is intended. Furthermore, the creation of the CSOR has overtaken the intangible role that airborne forces used to provide. The CSOR now provides something for motivated volunteers to aspire to achieve and it is unlikely that the Canadian Forces could generate appropriate numbers of suitable volunteers for two organizations of this type. Without a clear role, creating this

capability is a situation that is unfair to the soldiers and leaders involved and one that the overextended Army can ill afford.

The Army has done a tremendous amount of work to envision the future and to produce a FEC for the AoT. This work can be enticing to those looking to justify a requirement for an airborne capability. The requirements of future forces to be deployable, mobile and modular can be extrapolated as the justification for airborne forces. In doing so, one must ignore the warnings that Dr. Gray has provided about predicting the future. Specifically, this extrapolation does not take into account the political, social and cultural context of Canada. Canada envisions a military working within a multinational coalition to support peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts abroad. This will ensure global security and prosperity and serve Canadian interests in a manner that shares the risks involved.

As well, Dr. Gray warns against impressive military solutions to problems that the military wants to solve. Airborne forces in Canada are an example of this phenomenon. It is clear from a more complete analysis of the FEC that the AoT will need to be deployable, mobile and modular but that these things do not require airborne forces as the only or even the preferred solution. The AoT will also need to be adaptable across the spectrum of conflict, tactically self-sufficient, robust, survivable, and multipurpose. In other words, Canada is looking for land forces that can be rapidly generated and deployed to fulfill a wide range of sustained operations across the spectrum of conflict in order to promote national interests at home and abroad. Within the Canadian context, airborne forces do not fit this profile.

It appears that if Canada is to have airborne forces again, it will not be due to a clear and pervasive role. Proponents who seek such a capability would be wise to review in detail the myth of Bellerophon that has provided an enduring symbol for airborne forces. Riding on the back of Pegasus, his skill as an archer allowed him to complete heroic, normally deadly, tasks and to win the favour of the gods. He gained much but it was not enough. He decided to ride Pegasus to Mount Olympus but Zeus sent a Gadfly to sting Pegasus. Bellerophon was thrown to the ground and, although he survived, he was crippled. He spent the rest of his life wandering the earth to die alone. Seeking airborne forces for Canada without a clear and pervasive role is tempting the gods. There is a real danger of creating something that is destined to live out a life without purpose, subject to the whim of political expediency. Eventually, it will come to an end leaving soldiers and leaders disillusioned and betrayed.

Despite the emotion, the tradition, political manoeuvring or the wishful extrapolation of possibilities, Canada does not need airborne forces. It is far better to honour those who have served this country as airborne soldiers by holding their accomplishments high and letting their memories live on than it is to create something lacking purpose - something that has more potential to be less than envisioned rather than all that it once was.

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