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PRECARIOUS POLICY: THE SLOW DEMISE OF COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT

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Exercise Solo Flight

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SUPPORT**

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PRECARIOUS POLICY: THE SLOW DEMISE OF COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT

From the decade of darkness to the present day, fiscal restrictions the Combat Service Support (CSS) community has always been considered easy fat to trim. Perpetual change compounded with inadequate capability development and procurement systems have left the CSS reeling with little expectation for improvement in the near term. The Canadian Army places little importance on Sustain functions¹ as they shadow in importance to the traditional combat arms. As such the lion's share of manpower and capital procurement power does not reach CSS organizations. As well, the CSS community has perpetrated a can-do attitude that has allowed CSS units to do more with less, often at the expense of the morale and well-being of the individual soldier.

This paper proposes that the effects of continual transformation coupled with institutional policies that do not meet the needs of the CSS community have weakened the overall sustain capability of the Canadian Army. This will be accomplished in two parts. First, the paper will review the impact transformation – the cuts, structural change, personnel and equipment atrophy – has had on operational and institutional CSS. This will be accomplished first by reviewing the impact of perpetual transformation on the CSS community. Next the paper will touch on the myth of BGen Leslie's tail to tooth recommendations in his report on transformation.² Finally, the first part will evaluate the most recent transformation efforts.

¹ John D. Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 64

² Andrew Leslie, *Report on Transformation 2011*. (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2011)

The second part of the paper will investigate current practices of capability development and procurement within the Canadian Army as it pertains to CSS to include; institutional vs operational development efforts within the army, capability development deficiencies for the Sustain functions and the procurement strategies for CSS.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation has been an ongoing endeavour for service support organizations for as long as its history exists. Change has been a constant; in the past 100 years combat service support has undergone significant transformation as illustrated in diagram 1-1.

The latter part of the last century to the present has been no exception with troop

PERIOD	EVENT
WWI	Support through separate corps introduction of the truck
Post WWI	Units disbanded or reduced to a small permanent force
WWII	Stand up and reinvestment into the Corps optimization of the use of the Truck
1944	Stand up of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Post Korea (1953-1960)	Canadian Army Moves to Brigade groups instead of Divisions
1960	Experimental Service Battalion created to support Brigade Groups
1968	Stand Up of 4 additional Service Battalions
1992	Division Support Group Structure abandoned
Mid 1990s	Force Reduction Plan - Cuts to CSS structure and personnel reduces size of support organizations across the CAF
1998	Army's Core Service Support Restructure (Service Battalion Split into Close Support and General Support Battalions stand up of the Area Support Groups)
2005	Army Support Restructure - Close Support and General Support Battalions amalgamated to form Service Battalions under the Area Support Groups outside of Brigade control)
2011	DRAP and SR - Closure of Area Support Units, Disbandment of the Area Support Groups and cuts to public service. Service Battalions revert to Brigade control

Figure 1-1 - Timeline of significant changes to CSS organizations within the Canadian Army

reductions, significant organizational change and budget constraints which have plagued the CSS community. On top of direct change to CSS structures, indirect institutional changes such as base closures and public service reductions through initiatives such as Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP) and the Strategic Review (SR) serve to increase the workload to CSS organizations across the Army without the benefit if increased

resources. The culmination of these changes has had damaging impacts on the CSS community and the Canadian Army as a whole. Besides being overburdened and overworked, the high frequency of organization change has had a negative impact. Organizations that experience rapid or frequent changes may also experience emotional impacts such as decreased morale, dissatisfaction, alienation, anxiety and loss of identity.³

The CSS community is on the verge of the breaking point and is a prime example of change fatigue. Change fatigue as defined by Dawn Marie Turner is “passive resignation. It is not the acceptance or rejection of change. Instead it is a general sense of apathy towards the organizational change(s). Individuals with change fatigue have neither the energy to defend the status quo nor enough interest to move through the change process.”⁴ Six signs of change fatigue have been identified⁵ as per figure 1-2

- | 6 Signs of Change Fatigue | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Outsiders increasingly question the value/objectives of the change effort |
| 2. | Change effort leaders/coordinators are stressed out and/or leaving |
| 3. | Reluctance to share or comment on data about the effort |
| 4. | Budget and resources are diverted to other strategic initiatives |
| 5. | Customer impatience with duration of change effort |
| 6. | Key leaders not attending progress reviews |

Figure 1-2

³ Roy K. Smollan & Janet G. Sayers, “Organizational Culture, Change and Emotions: A Qualitative Study” *Journal of Change Management* Vol. 9, No. 4, (December 2009): 438-440

⁴Turner Change Management, “Change Fatigue: Is Your Organization Too Tired To Change?” Last modified 30 March, 2012, <http://www.thinktransition.com/articles/change-fatigue-is-your-organization-too-tired-to-change/>

⁵Eric Beaudan, “Making Change Last: How to Get Beyond Change Fatigue,” *Ivy Business Journal*, January/February2006, <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/>

Although not all of the 6 signs identified apply, the majority anecdotally are felt within the community. First, the last round of changes which saw the restructure of the formation headquarters, closures of Area Support Units across the country and the elimination of hundreds of military and public service support positions raised questions both inside the CSS community and throughout the Canadian Army as to the value and intent of the change. Additionally, resources that were destined to the support community have been cancelled or applied to other causes; a promised re-investment of personnel has been delayed indefinitely. Finally, past and current transformation initiatives have left the Service Battalions decimated leaving its customers frustrated. It has become so bad that the Directorate of Land Force Development has set up a working group to investigate, once again, restructuring the Service Battalions to better meet the institutional and operational needs of the Canadian Army⁶. All of these are signs of change fatigue. Poorly executed and planned change continues to be an issue.⁷ The last time CSS transformation was executed with any vigour was with the studies and innovation of the initial Service Battalions in the 1960's. Since that time it has seemly been cuts without thought as the CSS community was relegated to the back burner of importance as the Canadian Army struggled to protect its core combat arms components⁸.

Protectionism, the regimental system and a cultural belief within the Canadian Armed Forces that support trades and their operation are of secondary importance has contributed to the degradation of capability. Although this has been a common trend since the end of World War II, it has been exacerbated by the 2011 report on

⁶ Department of National Defence, Canadian Army Force Development Working Group – Service Battalion Structure, (Ottawa: Directorate of Land Force Development, November 2014)

⁷ John D. Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 68-70

⁸ *Ibid.*, 64-66

Transformation written by Lieutenant-General Leslie in which he states in the recommendations and findings that the tail has increased disproportionately to the tooth (40% vs 10%)⁹. He further suggests that a rebalancing needs to occur to reduce the amount of tail¹⁰ in order to maintain operational effectiveness.

We are going to have to reduce overhead and invest in output; we have to become slimmer, to trim the top and middle while protecting and investing in the various systems that result in the people in the ships, battalions and squadrons of aircraft doing the tough and often dangerous work that Canadians are so proud of. In short, we are going to have [to] reduce the tail of today while investing in the teeth of tomorrow.¹¹

This sentiment has resonated throughout the Canadian Army over the past four years resulting in cuts and restructure mainly to headquarters, public service employees and other entities seen as the “tail”. This has placed a target on the backs of any organization that is not seen as a fighting or “tooth” organization. Unfortunately, it seems that the definition of tail and tooth is not well established and many people consider entities such as the service battalions as part of the tail that can be further reduced or cut. This is a flawed logic as seen by the US Army on Operation Iraqi freedom “CSS units get into the fight and therefore must have the right stuff to decisively engage and defeat the enemy while providing support...CSS units at all levels must become self-sufficient; failure is not an option during war.”¹² However, if the Canadian Army is to maintain the goal of operational capability the sustain functions provided both domestically and internationally, the service battalions are a critical part of the functionality of the tooth rather than the tail. The Army G4, Logistics Branch and Royal Corp of Electrical and

⁹ Leslie, Andrew. *Report on Transformation 2011*. Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2011. Pg xii

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23, 79

¹¹ *Ibid.*, iv

¹² Shawn Walsh, 2004, “More Tooth for the Tail: The Right Stuff for CSS Operations”, *Army Logistician*, 36, 1, (2004): 13

Mechanical Engineers (RCEME) must do a better job communicating the importance and function of these organizations¹³ in order to prevent further degradation of an already weakened capability.

As previously mentioned the recent transformation efforts have negatively impacted CSS capability. Although there are several initiatives that have impacted service support the paper will focus on the two most recent. First, the creation and dissolution of the close and general support battalions and secondly, it will examine the latest round of transformation efforts of DRAP and SR. In reviewing these transformation initiatives it will demonstrate that efforts meant to enhance capability only served to create confusion, reduce capability and perpetuate change fatigue.

In 1999 as part of the Army's Core Service Support Restructure¹⁴ the three regular force Service Battalions were split into two entities a Close Support Battalion (CS Bn) and a General Support Battalion (GS Bn). This split was intended to relieve the CS Bn of the burden of providing 3rd line and institutional support allowing an operational focus. Although this intent was good in theory and in vision, it lacked depth to the plan and resources to complete the project effectively. Because the organizations were undermanned and proved to be ineffective, the Army Support Restructure in 2005 was implemented to join the CS and GS Bns. However, this time the amalgamated service battalions would belong to a formation outside of the brigade that they would be supporting. The re-established battalions were smaller than the pre-split structures with increased dependence on contracted or public service support to meet the institutional

¹³ John D. Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 66

¹⁴ Wikipedia, "1 Service Battalion," Last accessed 18 May 2015.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1_Service_Battalion

functions. Unfortunately, the battalions still struggled to support both overseas operations, training support to the brigades and the gaps in institutional support.

In 2013 another transformation initiative attempted to ameliorate the support deficiencies within the Army. Force 2013 promised an infusion of personnel into the now atrophied service battalions in order to meet the needs of the Army. However, with resources waning post-Afghanistan and an economy still recovering from the 2007/08 financial crisis, the promises fell short. In 2011 the DRAP and SR initiatives caused the closure of Area Support Units and the drastic reduction of public servants working across the country forcing the service battalions to pick up the slack while already being overburdened and short-staffed.

The latest institutional change of DRAP and SR came under the guise of streamlining and optimizing the Department of Defence. The intent to cut away the fat of the overinflated “tail” as identified in the Leslie report. Unfortunately, this latest round of adjustment has been destined for problems since inception. Communication at the onset was non-existent, due to the sensitive nature of the closures and cuts decisions, planning was conducted at the highest levels with limited impact assessment or input from the affected organizations. Coordination and planning across organizations was forbidden. For example, the Army was closing the support unit in North Bay but was not permitted to discuss future support plans or impacts with the co-located Air Force units. The intended cuts to both public service positions and military positions were done in isolation, DRAP and SR cuts were determined separately without consultation to each initiative resulting in the double cutting of critical positions and the decimation of some functions entirely.

The lack of foresight and planning of transformation initiatives has inevitably created a continual state of transition and confusion. Although these changes have been labelled as transformation it should more realistically be change for the sake of cost savings and downsizing. Downsizing is a common practice within the business world as a means to save costs but studies have shown that reductions without other significant changes do not achieve long term success.¹⁵ Personnel reductions without well thought out restructuring can lead to imbalance, overload and burnout as well as negative impact on internal and external processes¹⁶. This has had long lasting effects within the community. The CSS community has always had a can-do attitude and proudly did more with less throughout these periods of change. This was often done at the expense of its soldiers. With the latest round of cuts and adjustments however the attitude is changing and a “less with less” mantra¹⁷ is bubbling just below the surface however it is unlikely that this will be allowed to occur.

Another side effect of continual change is that CSS organizations have become the “have nots”. One such example is infrastructure, 2 Service Battalion based out of Petawawa has required new buildings to house the organization since 1987¹⁸ due to the deplorable condition of the buildings currently occupied. However, due to the constant reorganization and restructuring, the statement of requirements for the buildings is in a perpetual state of flux and new structures are still not built. This has an impact both on

¹⁵ Iris Boyd, "Human Service Organizations: Downsizing A Performance Improvement Strategy." *Review Of Management Innovation & Creativity* 6.18 (2013): 32.

¹⁶ Susan Reynolds Fisher and Margaret A. White. "Downsizing in a Learning Organization: Are there Hidden Costs" (*Academy Of Management Review* 25, no. 1, 2000): 244-45

¹⁷ David Perry, *Doing Less with Less: Canadian Defence Transformation and Renewal*. (Vimy Papers. Ottawa: Conference of Defence Associations Institute, 2014), 3-5

¹⁸ Defence Construction Canada. “CFB/ASU Petawawa 2 Service Battalion Project Development Study”, Volume One Statement of Operational Requirement (Infra) Project No: 00004366 Final Report (15 May 2006), 1-3

operational effectiveness, as the current infrastructure does not meet the needs of today's equipment and operations and it also impacts on unit morale. This phenomenon can be seen through all aspects of procurement.

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT AND PROCURMENT

Although transformation agendas have played a major role in the deterioration of service support capability across the Army, transformation is not the only negative influence. The structure of the capability development process and the procurement system does not provide adequate scrutiny to fully appreciate the needs of CSS within the Canadian Army.

The capability development process is very limited when it comes to sustain functions and does not place enough rigour during the process to truly identify the requirements of service support for the Canadian Armed Forces let alone the Canadian Army. The products of the force development process are the strategic capability roadmap (SCR), investment plan, and the defence plan¹⁹ are based upon the Scenario Capability/Capacity Requirements Assessment and Outlook Tool (SC2RAT) in addition to the Chief of Defence Staff Action Team 3 Capability Assessment Methodology (CATCAM). These methods focus on the overall capability and although the process uses future scenarios in an attempt to predict future requirements it tends to focus more on current capabilities.

Because the capability development process drives the investment plan and budget allocations, the identification of future capabilities is critical. Unfortunately, the

¹⁹ Mark Rempel "An Overview of the Canadian Forces' Second Generation Capability-Based Planning Analytical Process." *DRDC CORA*, no. TM 2010-198 (September 2010), 5-6

outcomes of the process tend to be focused on current capabilities, leaving very little opportunity in the investment plan for innovation, implementation of new technologies or revolutionary acquisitions. This limitation is further intensified by the previously discussed belief that CSS is part of an excessive tail. Strategic goals, business plans and operation plans within the Canadian Armed Forces place much emphasis on the need to support the force and the emphasis is placed on organizations and equipment for the “teeth” of the forces. This combination of limited resources and a focus on current capabilities does not mesh well with the desire to reduce the logistics footprint while optimizing support.

Another drawback in the force development system is that although the Canadian Army is involved in the process, there is a tendency to not give the task the appropriate importance. The Canadian Army is represented in the process by one or two personnel that may or may not have the required experience to act as a subject matter expert and it is a rare occurrence that there is representation from the Canadian Army with detailed knowledge of sustain issues. The Canadian Army Land Warfare Centre and the Directorate of Land Force Development attempt to develop and reinforce requirements separate from the higher level force development efforts but manpower limitations and other priorities often mean that CSS requirements remain a lower priority.

The culmination of the attitude that CSS is a low priority, organizations that are in constant flux, a capability development process that restricts innovation and limited spending power impact the overall procurement process. The procurement process although dependant on the force development process is completely distinct and involve

separate considerations²⁰. This means that timelines and cycles of the force development process may not mesh with the procurement cycles leaving the potential for a procurement project to commence without significant force development input.

For example, the Logistics Vehicle Modernization project commenced in 2008 as the current fleet of vehicles was reaching its end of service life. At the time of implementation of the project, limited detail from the higher level capability development process would have been available as little more than a statement that a capability requirement to move equipment and personnel was ever developed. The available Army level future plans documents only provide vague descriptions²¹ of likely requirements. Finally, Army force development has been continuously changing the force structures since the 1980 with no true vision for the future. This led to a weak initial estimate of costs for the replacement platform as numbers of platforms required was not well understood. Seven years later, the costs have increased, structures and tasks are different but there is no willingness to adjust or increase the budget to meet the current demands. In addition to not having enough funding to buy the required vehicles, there is also no flexibility to increase funding for additional requirements or technological advances such as vehicle diagnostic systems, global positioning, radios or integrated weapons systems. This effectively means that when the project delivers its first vehicle in the 2020 time frame it will be based on a requirement that is 10 years out of date and vehicle technology from the 1990s.

²⁰ Charles Davies, "Understanding Defence Procurement", *Canadian Military Journal* vol 15, no 2, (Spring 2015), 5

²¹ Department of National Defence, *Designing Canada's Army of Tomorrow: A Land Operations 2021 Publication* (Kingston: Army Publishing Office, 2011), 62-63

The procurement struggles to replace existing systems also extend to new or innovative procurement. Networking, communication systems, air support and total asset visibility²² as well knowledge management tools and systems have been identified as a requirement for successful²³ logistics transformation. These advances to CSS are essential to enhancing the sustainment system, reducing the logistics footprint and ensuring the maintenance of support in operations of the future but there is currently no appetite to push these into the investment plan for procurement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, throughout this paper we have seen the power that institutional policies have had on the Canadian Army's support capabilities. It has been proven throughout history the importance of effective logistics to ensure mission success yet several of our current practices have neglected CSS capability. The tail to tooth mythology has painted a target on the seemingly overborne tail when in all reality the support provided by the CSS organizations in the Canadian Army should be classified as part of the tooth. The over transformation of the CSS organizations has left a confused, under resourced, demoralized and less proficient group held together by the professionalism of the soldiers.

Other process such as the capability development and procurements systems are disjointed and are not well designed to delve into the intricacies of support organizations. This has left the support entities waiting extended periods for desperately needed

²² Department of National Defence, *Designing Canada's Army of Tomorrow: A Land Operations 2021 Publication* (Kingston: Army Publishing Office, 2011), 71

²³ Nicholas J Anderson, "Army Logistics Knowledge Management and SALE: A Paradigm for Military Logistics Transformation." (*Army Logistician* 41, no. 2 2009): 32-34.

equipment, such as vehicles, impacting on their ability to provide consistent effect support. It has also meant that modernization of support processes has been hampered as innovative platforms or disruptive technologies cannot be incorporated into operations.

Current policies and practices have positioned CSS capabilities as a secondary priority allowing deterioration to an unacceptable level. If the current propensity to push transformation without well thought-out planning and experimentation continues we may soon reach crisis. As well, injects of equipment and manpower are required if we wish to see continued success on the modern battlefield.

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