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A CHAMPION FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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A CHAMPION FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Institutional change is difficult, even more so in arch-conservative organizations such as the military. Today, wild-eyed adherents with complaints dating back to Hellyer's unification are fighting a successful rearguard action to destroy visible evidence of those changes; the abolition of Canadian Army officer ranks in use for two generations to restore the pre-unification British ranks is merely the latest manifestation of that reactionary trend. When Newton posited that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction he may well have been speaking on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and their reaction to change.

That said, the 1990s saw significant change within the Canadian military: reductions in the size of the Regular Force, mismanaged through the Force Reduction Program; increased deployed operational tempo as the peaceful rotations to Cyprus grew into a brief deployment to Somalia and over a decade of various deployments into the republics of the former Yugoslavia; and finally, following a great deal of soul-searching, internal examination, and external review with a select group of academics, sixty-five recommendations for institutional change directed by The Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces (the Report) in March of 1997.

The true driving force behind much of the Report was the parallel inquiry resulting from the Somalia deployment. Although its abbreviated final report was not issued until after the Report, its influence cannot be understated. Justice Letourneau minced no words when he wrote “The sorry sequence of events in Somalia was not the work of a few bad apples but the inevitable result of systematic organization and

leadership failures, many occurring over long periods of time and ignored by our military leaders for just as long.”¹ The Report was, in many ways, an attempt by DND/CAF to get ahead of the Somalia inquiry, which would ultimately be cut short.

Thus, the Report directed changes intended to blunt the critiques that were known to be coming out of the Somalia Inquiry. It was intended as a political tool to blunt the upcoming criticisms. Its recommendations spanned a wide range: military justice reform; production of a formal statement of values and beliefs; curriculum reviews; reviews of the Regimental system; terms and conditions of service; the nature of NDHQ; and communications with the public. A comprehensive review of all the sixty-five recommendations is well beyond the scope of this paper; however, an examination of two recommendations with long-term implications is instructive in seeing change in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and provides lessons for future change initiatives. If the lessons learned were to be summed up in a single succinct phrase, it would be: Successful change in the CAF requires a dedicated champion, otherwise it will fail. This paper will examine two recommendations: one which resulted in successful institutional change, one which did not achieve the directed goal.

“[I]f I ordered a general to change himself into a sea bird, and if the general did not obey me, that would not be the fault of the general. It would be my fault.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Arguably, the best-known of the Report's recommendations was Recommendation number ten, the degreed officer corps.

To improve officer development and to inculcate an ethos appropriate to the Canadian Forces we will:

¹ "Somalia Inquiry's Damning Report", *Macleans*, July 14, 1997.

10. Change policies beginning in 1997 to make a university degree a prerequisite to commissioning as an officer, with the only exceptions to be made for those commissioned from the ranks.²

A lesser known and lesser observed recommendation was to cap and reduce the number of General and Flag officers.

The number of headquarters is being cut and the number of generals and flag officers has been significantly reduced. More can be done to trim the command structure, and we will:

32. Make more organizational changes by 1998 to allow for a further reduction in the number of general and flag officers to fewer than 65.³

These two recommendations provide an interesting case study for change within the CAF. Both would require dedicated effort to achieve and both would have to be measured over time to gauge their success or failure. In that way they differ materially from other well known and well entrenched changes driven by the Report. For example, the notional abolition of Regimental affiliations for Army officers above the rank of Lieutenant Colonels and from battle schools, encapsulated in recommendations thirty-seven and thirty-eight, were simple, one time changes that are binary in nature and thus easy to monitor. Similarly, recommendation eight of the Report, directing the establishment of the office of the Ombudsman, is again simple to assess as a success or failure.

Recommendations ten and thirty-two have experienced radically different levels of success; while recommendation ten appears well established in the contemporary CAF, the number of general and flag officers has grown dramatically, and currently stands at over fifty percent above the mandated target. A review of each recommendation and its

² Douglas Young. *Report to the Prime Minister on the Leadership and Management of the Canadian Forces*, 42

³ *Ibid*, 45

progress over the past eighteen years provides valuable insight into change management within the CAF.

Recommendation ten of the Report, colloquially referred to as “MND 10”, and further broken down into MND 10A for the Regular Force and MND 10B for the Reserve Force was intended to address the perceived intellectual and ethical failures of the CAF during the deployment to Somalia. (This paper will focus on MND recommendation 10A; differences in terms of service and levels of control make a total force perspective challenging). With studies by a quartet of academic PhDs – Drs Bercuson, Granatstein, Legault and Morton – it is hardly surprising that the conclusion ultimately embraced was to increase the educational level of Canada's officer corps.

However, this was not uniformly embraced. Indeed, by early 1998 Granatstein sent further correspondence to the Minister of National Defence of the day, Art Eggleton, where he bemoaned the implementation of recommendation ten, calling it a serious error and claiming astonishment that his work had been cited to support the recommendation.⁴ (This letter has achieved somewhat of a cult status within military human resources circles; the best known copy has been much copied, faxed, scanned and shared, and was annotated by an unknown staff officer with “Frame this!”)

The Royal Military College, however, viewed this recommendation (and several related recommendations) as a key opportunity to solidify their position within the CAF. A retired alumni and former Chief of the Defence Staff, General Ramsey Withers, was commissioned to conduct a study.⁵ Titled *Balanced Excellence*, it was released in April of 1998, some thirteen months after the Report was released. It provided a roadmap for

⁴ Jack Granatstein, private letter to Art Eggleton, 26 February 1998

⁵ General Ramsey Withers et al. *Balanced Excellence*. 30 April 1998
<http://web.archive.org/web/20120201215652/http://www.rmc.ca/bg-cg/rep-rap/withers/index-eng.asp>

the future of RMC which, critically, included the creation of a Canadian Forces University, which evolved into the current formation of the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA).

“...[C]reated in 2002...the core raison d’être of the Academy continues to be the stewardship of professional military education...”⁶ That statement neatly encapsulates the history and purpose of CDA. It is obvious that the Report's recommendation ten is complementary to that purpose; indeed, that ministerial direction provides solid support to many contemporary activities under CDA's aegis.

Critically, Withers' report was embraced by the then Assistant Deputy Minister Human Resources Military (ADM (HR-Mil)), Lieutenant General Dallaire, who directed rapid implementation, including aggressive timelines of just over one year for certain initiatives, together with strong central oversight to monitor progress.⁷

While not a perfect example, the steps above closely parallel the steps outlined Kotter's 1995 paper on Leading Change.⁸ The urgency for transformation was driven by the Report and that of the Somalia inquiry. With RMC (and, after its 2002 formation, CDA) acting as lead, a coalition coalesced to contribute the necessary institutional leadership on the transformation. Leveraging the Report to have Withers produce Balanced Excellence provided and communicated the necessary vision to proceed with change. LGen Dallaire's direction provided the empowerment to various line and staff organizations to act, and his aggressive timelines provided for quick wins to provide demonstrable progress. Finally, his direction to enable strong central oversight permitted consolidation of the gains, and enabled the institutionalization of that change.

⁶ CDA website. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/training-prof-dev/canadian-defence-academy.page>

⁷ Withers et al, *op cit*

⁸ Kotter, *op cit*, 2

The Regular Force Strategic Intake Plan (SIP) for FY 2015/16 demonstrates the degree to which recommendation ten has been embraced and institutionalized.⁹ It shows zero intake for the Continuing Education Officer Training Plan (CEOTP),¹⁰ the only entry plan still in force not requiring or directly leading to a degree. (While CEOTP does require that officers enrolled under the plan obtain a baccalaureate degree during their variable initial engagement, it does not provide direct support in doing so).

Thus, there has been clear success in institutionalizing the change represented by recommendation ten. Today, some eighteen years later, the degreed officer corps has become an accepted, unquestioned part of the CAF identity.

Recommendation thirty-two, on the other hand, has seen much less success. Inspired in part by a pithy quote in Parliament, where one member of the Bloc Quebecois wondered why the CAF seemed to have “more generals than tanks”,¹¹ the intent was to reduce the number and size of headquarters and thus also reduce the number of general and flag officers. (There are obvious parallels to the 2011 Report on Transformation produced by Lieutenant General Leslie, although the Leslie Report did not explicitly identify the number of senior officers as part of the problem space).

Responsibility for the Organization and Establishment (O&E) of defence is vested in the Minister of National Defence, per section 17 of the National Defence Act.¹² On a day to day basis, however, much of the management function for O&E has been devolved to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS), buried within one section of one directorate,

⁹ As of this writing, the Regular Force SIP for FY 2015/16 has not been formally released. Once released, it will be available on the DWAN, through the DPGR website, under DGMP, under CMP.

¹⁰ DAOD 5002-6, Continuing Education Officer Training Plan – Regular Force, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-defence-admin-orders-directives-5000/5002-6.page>

¹¹ Philippe Paré, Hansard 10 March 1994, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=2332289&Language=E&Mode=1>

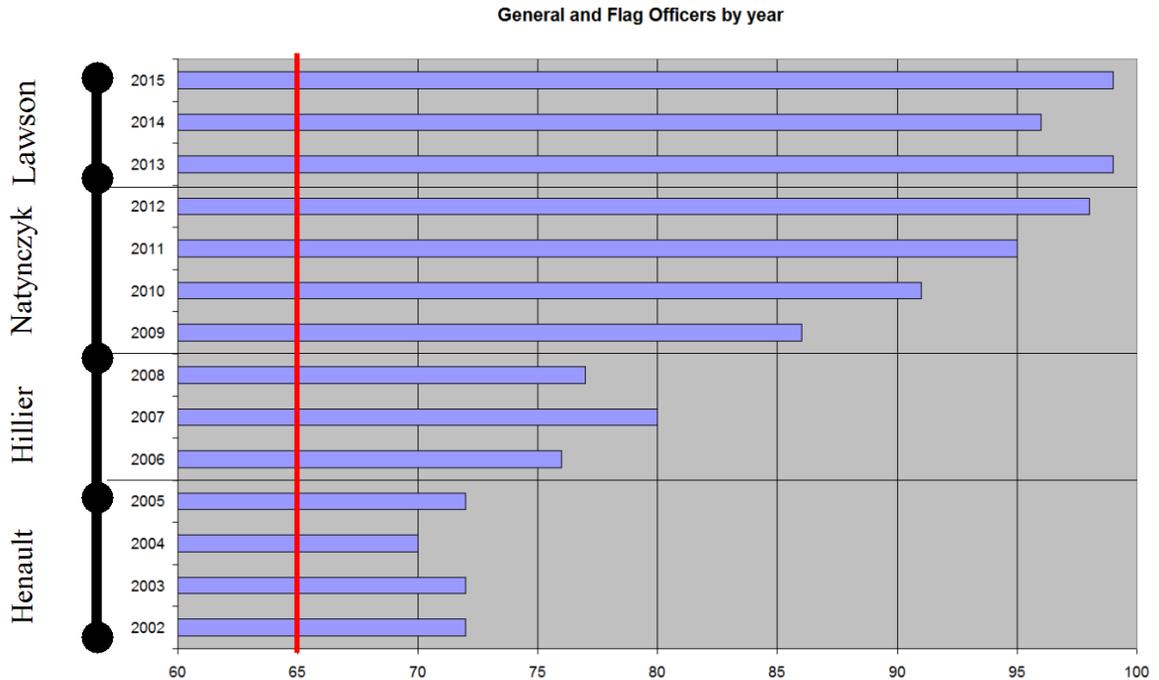
¹² NDA section 17, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-5/FullText.html>

located within the Chief of Programme organization.¹³ Thus, concerns over the number of general and flag officers are managed at a relatively low level. The VCDS has wide-ranging portfolio that covers force development, resource management, military police, general safety, grievances, reserves and cadets, and support to NDHQ, National Capital Region units and OUTCAN personnel. With such a wide and disparate range of responsibilities, it is unlikely that any one area will attract significant attention of the VCDS, barring some sort of senior level institutional champion (or some sort of institutional crisis).

A review of human resources data from 2002 to the present¹⁴ reveals some initial promise at reductions to meet the target of fewer than sixty-five general and flag officers in the Regular Force. Indeed, under General Henault the total dipped as low as seventy. Clear direction to reduce the number of general and flag officers per recommendation thirty-two notwithstanding; however, this was followed by a sharp spike during the tenure of General Natynczyk, who saw the total grow by nearly twenty compared to the number at the end of General Hillier's command. Today, the complement of general and flag officers stands a full fifty per cent about the mandated target, with no indication of any institutional intent or desire to reduce.

¹³ VCDS Organizational Structure, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-org-structure/vice-chief-defence-staff.page>

¹⁴ System limitations of the departmental Human Resources Management System, based on Oracle's PeopleSoft 7.5, preclude the availability of earlier data in a comparable format.



Graph 1: Regular Force General and Flag Officer strength as of 31 March

Interestingly, the seemingly unconstrained growth in the number of general and flag officers does not appear during the years of Canada's significant involvement in the campaign in Afghanistan; ironically, it appears to coincide with the years of the Deficit Reduction Action Plan and Strategic Review, activities intended to reduce defence spending.

The gradual return to the status quo of general and flag officers suggests a failure in the desired institutional change. It appears that, ultimately, resistance to change was triumphant.



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Kotter's eight step model is informative in reviewing the lifespan of recommendation thirty-two from the Report. As with recommendation ten, the Report established the urgency, and served to create and communicate the vision. And while short-term wins were achieved under General Henault, where the number of general and flag officers approached the target of less than sixty-five, ultimately dipping to seventy, there was no consolidation or institutionalization of the new approach.

Kotter posits that the full eight steps, in sequence, are required for change to succeed.¹⁶ Failure in later stages suggests incomplete or inadequate work in earlier stages. For recommendation thirty-two, it appears that Kotter's second step is missing entirely; no powerful guiding coalition was formed. While outside observers assume that a military is an orders obeying automaton, and therefore direction from the Prime Minister would be slavishly obeyed, the military is like any other large organization, with

¹⁵ Garry Trudeau, *Doonesbury*, 09 May 1976

¹⁶ Kotter, *op cit*, 1

institutional norms, internal power dynamics, and a distinct organizational culture.^{17,18}

For change to be anything but superficial, senior organizational buy in is required.

Kotter's second step explicitly recognizes this; he writes, "No matter how capable or dedicated the staff head, groups without strong line leadership never achieve the power that is required."¹⁹

Why, then, the significant differences between the success of recommendation ten and the relative failure of recommendation thirty-two? In his controversial essay asserting that command and control is a concept whose time has come and gone, Alberts wrote "... leadership remains an essential ingredient for a successful endeavor as does the existence of trust, which in large measure is a result of accountable and responsible behaviors."²⁰ Similarly, in the 2007 CAF guide to institutional leadership, a full chapter was dedicated to the need for leaders to be agents of change within the institution.²¹ Despite the intellectual awareness of the need for institutional leadership for change, there appears to be an institutional leadership gap between the two recommendations. As previously noted, the Report and its peers spawned the Canadian Defence Academy. CDA has continued to champion and lead recommendation ten (and other, related transformational recommendations) as part of its larger mandate, and its staff have published numerous articles promoting and supporting that change, aiding in the institutionalization of that

¹⁷ See, for example, James Pierce in "Is the Organizational Culture of the US Army Congruent with the Professional Development of its Senior Level Officer Corps?", <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1015>

¹⁸ *Leadership in the Canadian Forces*. Kingston: CFLI, 2007: 83

¹⁹ Kotter, op cit, 8

²⁰ David S. Alberts, "Agility, Focus, and Convergence: The Future of Command and Control", *The International C2 Journal* vol 1 no 1: 1

²¹ *Leadership in the Canadian Forces*. Kingston: CFLI, 2007, 82ff

change.²² No similar institutional champion was created to govern the size of Canada's cohort of general and flag officers; that function remains a minor staff role buried deep within the Vice Chief of Defence Staff. There have been no scholarly articles supporting recommendation thirty-two; no symposia; no champion with direct access to the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Paul Strebel wrote on employee resistance to change, opening with the statement "Change management isn't working as it should."²³ This simple assertion is clearly demonstrated in the defence response to Report recommendation thirty-two. As Strebel writes, it was disruptive, intrusive, and upset the balance. Such change, according to Strebel, requires rewriting the compact between individuals and their employing organizations.²⁴ Leadership is therefore required to make those changes. This is reflected in Kotter's model as well; he posits that change which lacks the support of a powerful coalition will fail. Viewed through those two complimentary lenses, the reasons for the inability of the CAF to succeed at reducing the number of general and flag officers become clear. Lacking strong leadership to redefine the organizational norms (per Strebel), any changes made in immediate reaction to the Report were overcome in time (per Kotter).

As posited initially, this failure of transformation was due to the lack of a strong champion to preserve and promote the change. With Defence in the throes of yet another effort at cost savings and transformation, this time labeled as "Defence Renewal",²⁵ this

²² The Canadian Military Journal has been littered with articles by Bentley, Horn and Wakelam on this topic.

²³ Paul Strebel. "Why Do Employees Resist Change?", *Harvard Business Review*, May/June 1996. . Last accessed May 29, 2015. <https://hbr.org/1996/05/why-do-employees-resist-change>

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ "Defence Renewal Overview". Last updated October 07, 2013. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/defence-renewal.page>

is a timely observation. Unfortunately, the current trajectory of Defence Renewal does not suggest that this lesson has been learned; with no clear leadership for the transformational efforts, it seems unlikely that significant change will result.

Successful change within Defence is possible, as demonstrated by the institutionalization of the degreed officer corps following recommendation ten of the Report. The creation of the CDA provided the ongoing institutional support and champion to see success; dedicated internal institutional leadership is a *sine qua non* for success. Merely relying on command fiat will see efforts fail; perhaps not immediately, and perhaps there will be some initially promising signs. But without a champion, initiatives will founder and begin a slow regression back to the previous status quo; the Great Wall will be rebuilt.

With apologies to *le Petit Prince*, it may well be possible to have a general change himself into a sea bird; but left to his own devices without ongoing leadership, it remains extremely unlikely.

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