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CANADIAN FORCES OUTCAN ASSIGNMENTS: ARE WE SENDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE?

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Exercise Solo Flight

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THE RIGHT PEOPLE?**

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Introduction

When a member of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) attempts to acquire information for an Outside Canada (OUTCAN) posting, there is very little available. The Government of Canada website has some details, but it's relatively vague. It essentially explains what any CAF member should consider for an upcoming relocation, fitness testing, medical, children's education, possibility of deployment, and culture shock.¹ One could argue that culture shock is relevant in almost all CAF relocations based upon the vast size and cultural differences within our own nation. The Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) organization has the responsibility to manage the OUTCAN program on behalf of the Department of National Defence (DND), but really only ensures that positions are filled; they are not involved in the selection of candidates. The granular OUTCAN selection details that one would be in search of ultimately rests with the individual's career manager and branch. With that said, one clear consistent message exists with each branches approach, an OUTCAN posting is a great personal opportunity, but likely will not be beneficial for one's career progression. This approach is simply wrong. The CAF should, and needs to, regard OUTCAN positions, especially the ones in the Joint Multinational Headquarters, similar to the way our Allied partners do, as a career progression opportunity. There is no greater example than that of the United States of America's approach under the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. This paper will explore the benefits that exist from these positions and explain why the CAF should develop a departmental wide policy on the selection process that can exploit the

¹ Government of Canada. "National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces OUTCAN Program," last accessed 2 May 2017, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-support-services-outcan/index.page>

opportunities available within specific billets in Joint Multinational Headquarters. Due to the brief nature of this paper, the OUTCAN positions that will be focused upon will be the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) billets, not the tactical, support, or exchange positions the CAF employs OUTCAN.

In June of 2006, the VCDS organization took the overall responsibility for the CAF OUTCAN program, with the Coordination section responsible for the policy and directives. The existing policy and directives are extremely vague at best and only lays out the baseline information of a potential applicant's considerations and benefits; the selection piece ultimately lies within the branches. This allows the branches to select and screen individuals that best meet their needs, not necessarily who the VCDS organization would envision in these positions. For example, the VCDS agrees to fill these billets based upon the job description, and then leaves it to the branches to execute, which they do, but routinely do not meet the qualification criteria. One way the VCDS organization could monitor the selection more closely would be to conduct the survey of returning OUTCAN members, to verify the accuracy and legitimacy of the positions, which is one of their responsibilities laid out on the Government of Canada website.² If these surveys were regularly conducted, or at least conducted honestly, perhaps the perception of these positions could change.

If one were to walk through a NATO Multinational headquarters on a civilian Friday you could easily identify the Canadians. They are the ones with the slightly grayer hair and a few more wrinkles. Some of our other allied partners, like the Germans, Americans, British for example, would represent the younger faces in the crowd, as these

² *Ibid.*

nations regard and approach the employment of their forces in these billets from a succession planning and career progression perspective, rather than the carrot at the end of one's career, or what is simply most convenient to the relative branch. This is also evident in the Australian approach to foreign postings. One of the eliminating criteria is that the interested candidate cannot be above of the age fifty at the time of application.³

Part of the problem is when a CAF member expresses interest to their respective branches to go on an OUTCAN assignment they are often informed that it essentially places your career on hold, as going OUTCAN is non-beneficially for career progression. Some of the additional selection criteria from the branches are; only candidates will be considered if they have left the succession planning scope of their classification, they would not be promoted while OUTCAN, they cannot retire while on an OUTCAN assignment or upon immediate return, they must complete one assignment in Canada upon completion of the OUTCAN position, and in some cases this assignment will be within the VCDS organization.⁴ Each one of these criteria, or lack of criteria, will now be further dissected.

When you review the job descriptions in the NATO HQ positions, one key qualification emerges. The selected candidate must have Joint Operational Planning training. Most other nations meet these criteria because they understand the importance and benefits these positions bring, and place National Staff College educated individuals in these billets. Due to the Canadian approach with limitations on promotion while

³ Government of Australia. "Overseas applicants for the Australian Army", last accessed 2 May 2017, <https://m.defencejobs.gov.au/recruitment-centre/can-i-join/citizenship/army/>.

⁴ Career Manager e-mail correspondence LCdr Cynthia Kerwin. *Logistics branch OUTCAN selection criteria*. 3 April, 2017.

OUTCAN, we can almost only send members who have never had the experience of Staff College, resulting in the Canadian members unable to effectively contribute to a Joint Operational Planning Group (JOPG) like the other allied nations. One way to address this problem is similar to the way most of our allied partners approach the rank requirements for each billet. For example, most staff officer positions, unless it is identified as a Section or Branch Head position, is set at the rank of OF-2 to OF-4, or Senior Captain to Lieutenant Colonel. The cautious Canadian approach to this rank requirement is very Goldilocks like; we must send someone in the middle and are very strict on sending an OF-3 in this scenario. Other allied nations will send an individual that can be promoted while out of country and can mature into the position. This approach does not handcuff these nations to a limited time window to send an individual out of country, and allows them to send individuals that have been identified for career succession. The ideal approach from a Canadian perspective would to not be so restrictive and exact in the rank requirement and look at these positions as an opportunity. In the above example of the staff officer, it would be recommended that the individual selected would have just completed the Joint Command Staff Program (JCSP), and then posted to one of these positions. This would allow for them to be promoted while in the position, meet the qualification requirements, they can employ their recently acquired skills, all while exposing them to a Joint Multinational Headquarters.

The days of the mythical OUTCAN, specifically the NATO postings, are relaxed, underemployed, and part time billets is simply not true, and the political state of the world simply does not allow for this. These Joint Headquarters need to have individuals

that possess the right skillsets to contribute to the requirements of the headquarters, and as a contributing nation we owe it our allies to send the properly qualified people.

The concept that one would not retire while OUTCAN, or upon immediate return, is a concept that makes sense as these individuals would ideally return to the CAF with a vast amount of recently acquired Joint and NATO knowledge that they could then employ upon return to Canada. This unfortunately, due to our branch selection philosophies and low regard for OUTCAN positions, does not happen. A fair amount of people retire upon completion of their OUTCAN positions, not due to a desire to leave the CAF but because they are approaching 35 years of service, or creeping extremely close to Compulsory Retirement Age (CRA) 60. These members take their recently gained experience to the civilian world or golf course, not back to the CAF. This could be rectified by being more flexible on the rank requirements in the specific positions as previously explained.

Some of our other coalition partners approach to out of country positions, and the importance held on joint experience, specifically the United States Approach and the Goldwater-Nichols Act is significantly different, but for the right reasons. The Goldwater-Nichols Act was signed by President Ronald Regan on October 1, 1986, it had many underlining effects to the US Department of Defence. It streamlined the military Chain of Command, it addressed the division within the military branches, and it

introduced shared procurement, and in relation to this paper, it brought in dramatic changes to the personnel management of officers.⁵

The most notable change to the personnel management of officers is the requirement for joint experience in order to be competitive for promotion to rank of General or Flag Officer. The US understands the importance and relevance that the experience a joint assignment can bring and how critical it is to the development of their future Flag Officers, not only for a brief one year check in the box tour, but a required 36 months in post.⁶ With significant, but not enough, positions within the US to meet this requirement, the US utilizes these NATO Joint billets.

The CAF places a significant weight on the requirement for its officers to be bilingual and possess a Master's degree in order to progress in one's career. It is understood that this is important, but it should hold as much weight for our future Flag Officer's to have job, and in this argument, joint experience as leaders versus ability to be bilingual or have a Master's degree in an unrelated subject other than defence. The CAF should strive to have Flag Officers with a breadth of joint and leadership experience, that may require the use a translator to communicate, but it appears that the CAF prefers to have a bilingual officer with less experience. The weight that is placed upon joint experience could not be achieved within Canada alone, our forces are simply too small, but Canada could leverage these OUTCAN billets in order to allow its identified succession planed officer's to fulfil this requirement, similar to that of the US and our other allied partners. If the CAF decided, and recognized, the experience that can be

⁵ Goldwater-Nichols, "Department of Defense reorganization Act of 1986". *Public Law -99 -433*. 1 October, 1986, P 35.

⁶ *Ibid*, P 38.

gained through the exposures to these OUTCAN positions it would be an ideal way to seek and justify additional positions, to not only show the Canadian Flag more on the international stage, but to get the joint experience. And there may be no better opportunity than now to obtain more NATO OUTCAN positions with the increased defensive posture in Europe.

This year the logistics branch criteria for OUTCAN selection was a *good* performer, would not be promoted in the next three years and possess the right experience for specific position. For example, finance experience for a finance position, transport for transport position etc. Another interesting criteria was individuals with previous OUTCAN experience would not be considered.⁷ Within the NATO Joint context alone, in the Joint Forces Command Naples (JFCNP) the CAF employs the Deputy Commander⁸ and in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe (SHAPE), the CAF provides the Logistics Division Commander, who is also double hatted as the Standing Joint Logistics Support Group (SJLSG) Commander.⁹ This position is currently occupied by an engineer. It makes little sense to send CAF senior leadership into these high profile, visible, multinational positions with no prior exposure to the intricacies of NATO. It does not set up our senior leadership for success by not exposing these individuals, and obviously highly regarded, to NATO until they are in these high ranking positions. From a logistics perspective, the approach they have taken in the past has

⁷ Career Manager e-mail correspondence LCdr Cynthia Kerwin. *Logistics branch OUTCAN selection criteria*. 3 April, 2017.

⁸ Allied Joint Force Command Naples. "Deputy Commander", last accessed 3 May 2017. <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/page5734824/deputy-commander>

⁹ Berlin Security Conference. "Congress on European Security and Defence, Commodore Marcel Halle", last accessed 3 May 2017, <http://www.european-defence.com/Programme/Panels/binarywriterservlet?imgUid=e967781f-53af-7516-bad1-b247b988f2ee&uBasVariant=11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111>

proven unsuccessful by having to rely on the engineering branch to fill the highest ranking Canadian logistics position within NATO.

The logistics branch has also expressed concern with the lack of applications to fulfil the logistic OUTCAN positions in recent years. This is clearly a doubled edge sword. Why would an individual apply for an OUTCAN position when the message portrayed that it is detrimental to one's career. If the CAF, specifically the logistics branch, understood the value in these positions, and changed their attitude then perhaps the desire for members to go OUTCAN would be increased. It would be naïve to believe that everyone would personally be capable of going to an OUTCAN billet due to family dynamics, medical, or spousal employment for example. With that stated, every CAF member is supposed to be portable, and from a distance perspective it is a shorter distance to relocate to most OUTCAN positions than it would be to relocate from the West Coast to the East Coast of Canada, like our sailors do on a regular basis. If the CAF would look at the OUTCAN positions with higher regard, then the struggle to find applicants some years would not be as difficult.

From a navy standpoint, in the last few years with the decommissioning of our Auxiliary Oil Replenishment (AOR) and Destroyers (DDG) we have lost five platforms that were critical to the career progression and professional development of our naval officer's. This loss is significant to the navy as all branches are in search of billets that can similarly provide the experience and the responsibility that our officers had onboard as a Head of Department (HOD). Without identifying additional billets, it will create a shortfall of qualified officers that will need to be available when the Artic Offshore Patrol Ship (AOPS) and the Canadian Surface Combatants (CSC) are commissioned in the

coming years. Numerous of our naval OUTCAN billets could be leveraged to meet these needs. There are opportunities in the NATO Operational and Strategic Headquarters, as well as billets with the Maritime Component Command (MCC) that would provide both leadership and career progression opportunities.

From a branch, career manager standpoint, particularly in the logistics branch, obviously not every position can be regarded as a career progression or Command equivalent. There has to be positions that can employ our people whose careers have perhaps fizzled, and there is additional pressure on the branches to fulfil all their identified OUTCAN billets, particularly since they are a priority posting. The resources that go into these moves are significant, and having an individual that cannot fulfil a three or four year posting due to career courses, promotion or unforeseen personal reasons can greatly effect a branches overall posting plot. This is why proper selection of the correct individual at the *right* time in their career appears to be more important than the experience that can be gained from such a posting. The department simply can't afford to move members in and out of OUTCAN billets every two years. The counter argument to proper selection is, more education needs to be put into each and every OUTCAN position, not only by the branches but the VCDS Coordination section, to identify the billets that have a flexible rank requirement and could also meet the aims of career progression. Then selection would not only go to individuals that is most convenient to the branch, but also beneficial to the future of the CAF as skills are reemployed back in Canada. This would be a win win scenario and where a CAF wide, VCDS developed, OUTCAN selection policy would help the branches and the members leverage these OUTCAN opportunities.

Conclusion

The Canadian Armed Forces has an opportunity with its OUTCAN billets, specifically NATO Headquarter positions, that it could leverage to provide Joint Multinational experience. Sure we fill the positions, but there exists opportunities with some, not all, of these positions that we can exploit and gain more from versus just using them as a reward at the end of someone's career. The first step we need to take is to fully understand each and every position, recognize which ones that we could use as a career progression and which ones that may be more suitable for regular appointments. Then the CAF, and the VCDS organization, needs to establish a policy that advises branches, career managers, and interested candidates to what type of position each OUTCAN billet is considered, especially the ones that have required qualifications such as Staff College and OPP training. The CAF also has to follow the lead of our other allied partners in being more flexible on the rank requirements and allowing our selected candidates the possibility of promotion without having to switch positions and return to Canada. This simple adjustment could significantly change the outlook of the candidates that we choose for OUTCAN positions. Other nations have realized the importance of obtaining joint experience, especially in the development of their future Flag and General Officers, as we have seen within the US under the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. The bottom-line is that the CAF is letting down our allies by not sending qualified individuals into important billets, where they are expected to contribute as per the expectations of the position. Lastly, why would the CAF invest the resources that it does in sending a member OUTCAN when they receive nothing in return. The skills, experience, and

knowledge that they gain goes untapped in a lot cases when they return to Canada and simply retire.

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