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TOO BUSY TO FIGHT: DEGRADATION OF INFANTRY CORE COMBAT CAPABILITIES THROUGH EXCESSIVE TEMPO

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AIM

1. The aim of this paper is to identify and study the greatest challenge to the ability of the Canadian Army (CA) to apply land power over the next ten years and provide some recommendations as to how to ameliorate the situation. Specifically, this challenge will be identified as the degradation of core collective combat capabilities within the infantry corps through the effects of tempo, key drivers of this phenomenon investigated, and mitigating measures proposed.

INTRODUCTION

2. CA doctrine identifies the role of the Army as “. . . generat[ing] and maintain[ing] combat capable, multi-purpose land forces to meet Canada’s defence objectives.”¹ Though all branches and corps play a critical role in delivering on this objective, there can be little arguing the central role of the infantry. No other arm can hold ground, fight in all land environments, or so easily provide a scalable range of effects from lethal force to peaceful engagement. As a result, the ability of the CA to apply land power is fundamentally predicated on the capability of the infantry. Consequently, challenges to the ability of the infantry to deliver core combat capabilities represent the single greatest threat to the legitimacy of the CA as a land power for the next decade and beyond.

¹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, *Land Operations (English)* (Fort Frontenac, Kingston, Ont: Issued on the authority of the Chief of Land Staff by the Army Publishing Office, 2008).

3. Though the infantry corps faces challenges in the form of equipment scarcity and quality, ammunition restrictions, limited training areas, and a myriad of other issues, the most fundamental is that of excessive tempo. In the context of this paper, tempo will be defined as proportional to the ratio of tasks to resources as illustrated below:

$$\textit{Tempo} \propto \frac{\textit{Tasks}}{\textit{Resources}}$$

In short, the ratio of tasks assigned to resources allocated within the key force generation (FG) elements, these being the nine regular force battalions (bn), has reached a point where the ability to maintain core combat capabilities has been critically compromised. More specifically, the ability to train collective skills at the section to company level represents the greatest resulting deficiency.

4. Given the definition posited above, there are two predictable drivers for high tempo: an overabundance of tasks, or a scarcity of resources. The infantry corps currently experiences both; however, the number and variety of tasks and resources is such that an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. In order to reduce the space for study, analysis will be limited to some select critical factors related to personnel availability and employment.² In order to support this analysis, the metric of the “task-day” (T-D) will be employed to quantify both tasks and resources.³ This metric has been previously used in a similar study conducted by the RAND

² Selection of these areas is at the discretion of the author based on 13 years experience as an infantry officer the majority of which has been spent within first line units.

³ A T-D is simply defined as the availability of one soldier to conduct full duties for one day. For example, one soldier working for 3 days represents 3 T-D, 2 soldiers employed for the same period represents 6 T-D etc.

Corporation for the US Air Force though in this case it was termed a “mission-day”.⁴ The following section of this paper will identify the key drivers of tempo as well as seek to more precisely define effects.

DISCUSSION

5. Tasks. Infantry bns conduct a large variety of tasks stemming from both internal requirements as well as external sources. A summary of some key task areas is presented below:

- a. Internal Tasks. Core internal tasks include the conduct of unit-based individual training (IT), collective training (CT), and the routine administration required for the functioning of the bn. Of these three categories CT, though arguably the most critical in ensuring the ability to deliver land power, is often the most difficult to accomplish due to competing priorities as well as a lack of a specific driving policy. Whereas there are clearly defined requirements relating the quantity and quality of IT and administration, the design and delivery of CT is often conducted on more of an ad-hoc basis and heavily subject to available resources. For example, the centrally controlled training plans (TPs) associated with IT courses define the time and personnel resources to be allocated. Similarly, administrative policy clearly lays out the requirements for most routine processes. The design of CT, on the other hand, is left more open to interpretation and provides the flexibility to absorb resource constraints, as will be expanded on below, at the cost of quantity and quality.

⁴ Timothy Bonds et al., *Measuring the Tempo of the Mobility Air Forces* (Santa Monica, California, USA: RAND Corporation,[2005]).

b. External Tasks. These tasks come from a variety of sources and have a significant impact on the ability of the bns to focus on key internal tasks. As noted above, the result of these competing priorities is often manifested in the degradation of CT quantity and/or quality. Significant sources of external tasks include:

- (1) Support to IT. As a result of the structure and resourcing of some training institutions there is a high demand on bns to provide incremental instructors and other staff to support the conduct of centralized IT. These tasks are above and beyond the draw on students to attend said courses and represent a significant drain on personnel resources. For the purposes of this paper a more detailed analysis of tasks generated to support the Infantry School, Canadian Army Advanced Warfare Centre (CAAWC), and the three Division Training Centres (DTCs) was conducted. The 2016-2017 fiscal year was selected as it is the most recent with complete data. Canadian Forces Tasks Plans and Operations (CFTPO) software was used to extract all tasks to the noted IT institutions filled by infantry trade personnel posted to bns. A summary of some notable findings is illustrated below with a more complete compilation presented at Annex A:

Rank	All Battalions											
	Inf School			CAAWC			DTC			Total		
	Tasks	Task Days	Avg Task Days	Tasks	Task Days	Avg Task Days	Tasks	Task Days	Avg Task Days	Tasks	Task Days	Avg Task Days
Pte	13	795	61	0	0	0	18	668	37	31	1463	47
Pte(B)	63	3438	55	1	26	26	90	3397	38	154	6861	45
Cpl	67	4092	61	14	668	48	192	9180	48	273	13940	51
MCpl	33	1875	57	20	890	45	126	7588	60	179	10353	58
Sgt	28	1641	59	18	613	34	126	6718	53	172	8972	52
WO	18	1157	64	5	143	29	9	596	66	32	1896	59
MWO	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	136	136	1	136	136
2Lt	1	101	101	1	14	14	7	531	76	9	646	72
Lt	2	116	58	1	54	54	19	1210	64	22	1380	63
Capt	15	1154	77	0	0	0	17	930	55	32	2084	65
Total	240	14369	60	60	2408	40	605	30954	51	905	47731	53

Table 1: Summary of IT Support Task-Days to Battalions

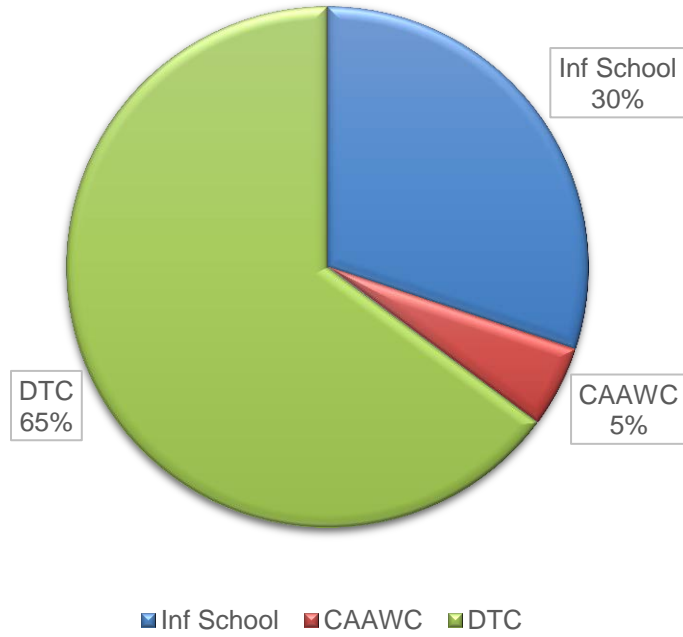


Chart 1: Summary of IT Support Task-Days to Battalions by Source

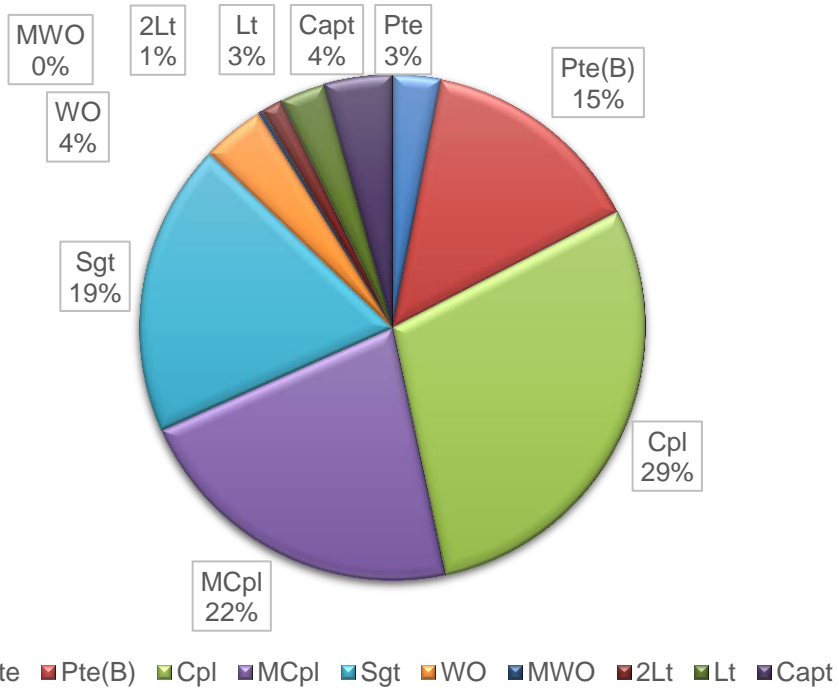


Chart 2: Summary of IT Support Task-Days to Battalions by Rank

The combined 47,731 T-Ds supplied to IT institutions represents a significant portion of the available personnel resources of the field force. By way of analogy, this number of T-Ds is equivalent to removing approximately two full rifle companies from the infantry units.⁵ Expressed differently, this reduction represents approximately seven percent of personnel available across all bns. However, the impact of these tasks is significantly greater than these figures suggest in isolation. The nearly 20,000 T-Ds filled by Master-Corporals (MCpls) and Sergeants (Sgts) imposes a disproportionately high toll on critical junior leadership. Without these leaders at the section level it is difficult to impossible to conduct meaningful CT at the lowest level and by extension at the platoon and company levels as well. Furthermore, the fact that these tasks are spread across the training year means that it is effectively inevitable that some portion of the critical non-commissioned officer (NCO) population will always be absent. Finally, given that these two ranks make up approximately 22 percent of the infantry positions in a bn, the fact that 41 percent of tasks fall on this limited pool further exacerbates the situation.

(2) Operations. Bns exist to FG personnel for operations and this paper will not argue that operational tasks should be overall reduced. However, the nature and associated structures of current operations have resulted in a notable increase in tempo within bns by disproportionate targeting of

⁵ A rifle company is established at 106 infantry PYs and it is assumed that after leave and other factors the average soldier is available to work for approximately 200-220 days a year. 47,731 T-Ds divided by 212 is 225.

certain ranks. For example, on a recent rotation of Operation *Unifier*, 35 of the 109 infantry positions sourced to second bn Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) were to MCpls and Sgts. Once again, this disproportionate draw on key junior leaders impacted that ability of those elements not deploying to conduct CT. Similarly, the exceptional demand for officers to fill positions on deployed headquarters has resulted in difficulty conducting and coordinating training within the bns.

(3) Support to External CT. Exercise *Maple Resolve* requires a large contingent of support staff and this is often drawn from bns not participating in the exercise itself. During the 1601 iteration of the exercise 52 support tasks totalling over 1200 T-Ds were filled by non-training bns.⁶ The makeup of these tasks was once again prejudiced towards NCOs with 34 percent of tasks going to the already overstressed MCpl and Sgt ranks.

The cumulative effect of the external tasks identified is that exceptionally few personnel are routinely available for internal tasks and, as noted, the majority of these are not CT related.

5. Resources. The paragraphs above have identified a number of factors that remove personnel from employment within their home bns. It must also be noted that the bns themselves

⁶ This total does not include those personnel tasked to act as opposing forces as these were conducting CT to some extent.

are already short on this critical resource. Some select drivers for this phenomenon are identified below:

- a. Establishment Reductions. As a result of the re-apportionment of person-years (PYs) conducted under the auspices of the CA “Force 2013” re-structure, infantry bns were significantly reduced. Specifically, each rifle section was reduced in strength from ten to eight soldiers with approximately an additional 30 infantry PYs harvested from the third bn of each regiment. Taken as a whole, this reduction represented approximately 575 infantry PYs, greater than the infantry establishment of a mechanized bn, or approximately 12 percent of the field force.

- b. Routine Under-manning. Exacerbating the effects of fundamental reductions is a routine under-manning of bns. The following comparisons of key infantry personnel posted compared to establishment positions across the field force was generated from a report pulled from Monitor/MASS on 2 Feb 18:
 - (1) Master Corporals – 491/532;

 - (2) Sergeants – 403/429; and

 - (3) Warrant Officers – 189/195.

These totals represent a baseline under-manning of approximately 6 percent across critical mid-level NCO positions.

- c. Medical Restrictions. Of the limited number of personnel present within a unit there is a further impact on employment due to medical restrictions. This phenomenon is reaching critical levels within the infantry. A review of parade states submitted on 15 Dec 16 indicates that the average bn contained 36 infantry personnel with non-deployable temporary medical categories, 27 on light duties, and a further 41 on some form of permanent category. As a result, the average bn operates day to day with somewhere between 21 to 23 percent of its infantry personnel on some form of medical restriction.

Taken as a whole, the impacts of PY reductions, under-manning, and medical restrictions have left the field force with a critical shortage of its most valuable resource, personnel. The average bn is currently operating with effective infantry personnel resources well below 70 percent of those allocated prior to Force 2013 restructuring.

6. Tempo Impacts on CT. It is somewhat difficult to specifically quantify the impact of excessive tempo on the quality and quantity of CT as there is little supporting documentation upon which to establish a standard. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that there are significant issues in this area. As a result of the factors discussed above it is unusual to see conditions where CT is conducted within bns outside of formal exercises planned and executed at the unit level or higher. The personnel required for more frequent and informal training at the

company level and below simply do not exist. In the current reality it is not uncommon for a section commander to lead their element on a tactical task less than 20 times a year, a platoon commander may see less than ten, and a company commander as little as five or six with one or two live fire events if they are fortunate. It is concerning that critical skills are being practiced at such a low frequency. Further, as a result of time and personnel constraints the quality of training is often affected with simple “check in the box” activities conducted to meet training gateways but not develop fundamental capabilities.

CONCLUSION

7. Given the data and analysis presented above it is clear that there are significant drivers for exceptionally high tempo within infantry bns especially for certain stressed ranks. The results of this situation are manifold and include impacts on retention, mental health, and efficiency of the bn as an organization. However, from an operational effectiveness standpoint the most notable result is a critical deficiency in the ability to conduct meaningful CT at the section to company level. It is exceptionally rare for all members of a section to be available at the same time, more so for a platoon, and almost unheard of at company level. Only during high readiness training is the tide of external tasks stemmed to some degree; however, at this point the focus of CT tends to shift to battalion and higher level training. The end result is that the standard of core collective combat capabilities has and continues to be degraded with attendant impacts on the ability of the CA to project land power in high intensity operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. In order to relieve the effects on CT delivery described above, measures must be taken to mitigate the key tempo drivers identified and re-invest personnel and time in the form of T-Ds back into bns. Some recommendations related to the areas discussed include:

a. External Tasks

- (1) Support to IT. Central IT institutions should be resourced to a level where they are not reliant on significant augmentation from the field force. This would relieve a major task burden on units as well as likely increasing the standard of training. Sourcing PYs for such an expansion would be difficult; however, it may be preferable to have fewer field force units functioning at a high level than the current model of overstressed bns unable to perform their fundamental tasks. Re-apportioning the type of training conducted centrally might also be examined. If courses that require an element of CT, generally leadership courses, were run within bns, this would provide numerous opportunities for training at the section and platoon level consequent to the requirement for assessment of candidates.
- (2) Operations. Where at all possible efforts should be made to deploy infantry elements in organic groupings at the company level and above. By enforcing proportional deployments across ranks, a significant source of over-tempo at the NCO and junior officer levels could be mitigated.

(3) Support to CT. The value of extremely large exercises that require significant external augmentation should be examined given the knock-on effects on other units. Prioritization of training at the section to company level would allow bns to be self supporting and develop the critical building blocks required for success at the formation level.

b. Resources

(1) Establishment Reductions. As it is unlikely the PY reductions undergone will be reversed other mitigating measures are required. Re-apportioning remaining personnel in fewer but fully resourced bns would allow for a renewed focus on CT.

(2) Routine Under-manning. The priority of filling first line bns should be increased. Once again, it may be necessary to re-consider the number of units supportable given the current size of the infantry corps.

(3) Medical Restrictions. Personnel with ongoing medical restrictions should not be counted against the effective strength of field force units. Though many of these members continue to fill valuable roles they should be either held in a separate portion of the establishment or formally posted to an external unit with their place of work remaining at the bn.

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