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OPERATIONALIZING THE AIR RESERVES

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OPERATIONALIZING THE AIR RESERVES

AIM

1. The aim of the service paper is to propose a conceptual way in how the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) can efficiently utilize the Air Reserve to meet its operational requirements. This would require amendments to existing policies in order to remove barriers which impede the recruitment and retention of valuable Reserve resources, being its Reserve members, and ultimately increasing the RCAF operational capacity.

INTRODUCTION

2. It has been shown that the operational capability, and operational capacity, of a military force is a function of its personnel, training, equipment and leadership. It is equally true that these attributes of capability and capacity are not simply the sum of the various components, but are rather something greater. The force multiplier effects of personnel, training and leadership should not be discounted. It therefore stands to reason that failing to optimize any of the functional components can lead to, at best, inefficiencies and at worse, ineffectiveness. Inside the RCAF, each of the constituent parts of its workforce brings with them certain attributes, strengths and limitations. The Regular Force, Air Reserve, Civilian and Contractor components of the RCAF all contribute to the generation and employment of airpower within these parameters. Without operationalizing their attributes and strengths, while minimizing any limitations, the RCAF runs the risk of sub-optimizing its operational effects and output.

3. Within the RCAF, the Air Reserve represents approximately 14% of the uniformed workforce. A significant proportion that, at the height of the war in Afghanistan, ‘punched above its weight’ in its contributions to the RCAF operational ability and more importantly operational capacity. However, a changing operational tempo and the introduction of human resource policy revisions have created challenges for the recruitment and employment of Air Reserve personnel in support of air force operations. These challenges have led to the need to study the factors affecting the sustainability of the Air Reserve, and to conduct a proper forecast of its population over the next ten years.¹

DISCUSSION

4. The RCAF is currently facing a major gap in Reserve recruitment. Defence scientists conducted a study on retention of the Air Reserves and found that the top three reasons behind attrition was due to “Air Reserve retirements, Regular Force attrition and reduced interest the Air Reserve force.”² Currently, the majority of serving Air Reserve members are former Regular Force members.³ Some are working part time to give them the slow work transition they need from Regular to Reserve Force. Others have transitioned to the Res F to assist the RCAF in providing that bridge in support. Reserve Force members are working part time on Class A anywhere between 12 to 14 days a month. They are also available to surge class B or C if necessary. With their training and skill sets being equally comparable to their Regular Force counterparts, they are an integral entity to both the Force Generation and to contributing on

¹ DRDC, Air Reserve Population Forecast, Ottawa, March 2016, 1

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*

upcoming deployments. The RCAF Reserve Force employment model affirmed, “The Air Reserve needed to provide responsive and flexible support to routine Force Generation activities and to Force Employment in both domestic and expeditionary operations.”⁴ When the Regular force members deploy, the RCAF does not halt force generating. Preparation for backfilling these Regular force members and preparing the next Rotation to deploy, the Reserve members readily step in to cover this gap. At times, they volunteer to be part of the cadre deploying, thereby providing the operational capability to fill taskings; taskings which Regular force members were not available to fill. There is a need for the RCAF Reserve members to fill various position, supporting operations, primarily from their home base and every so often from theatre. Over the last 10 years, the effective Primary Air Reserve strength has declined. As an example, the Air Reserve has an authorized establishment of 3200 positions. The effective strength is much less than that. This is due to various reasons, where recruiting into the Air Reserves is harder than recruiting in any other element. Those reasons will be discussed in more intricate detail later in this paper.

5. The effective strength of the RCAF Reservists in 2012 was 2145, where by end of 2012, approximately 12 were deployed. In 2014, the number of Reservists deployed had risen to 52 on international operations and up to 79 on domestic operations. By 2017, the effective strength had declined to 2009.⁵ Of the 2009 members, approximately 322 were deployed. Therefore, while the effective strength has declined, there has been a drastic increase in need to support direct operations. Furthermore, the existing Reservists are approaching their Compulsory Retirement

⁴ RCAF, Air Reserve Integrated Force Generation / Force Employment Model, March 2013, 1.

⁵ Email, *Air Reserve Employment Model*, 24 January 2018.

Age (CRA). According to the report conducted by Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC), more than 85% of the Reservists enrol in the Air Reserves at age 40 or just above. This was further analyzed that 50% of the Air Reserve population is at least 50 years of age.⁶ These members have less than 10 years to serve before reaching CRA 60. The RCAF will not regrow their replacements at a faster rate than that of the rate of attrition. The elimination of allowing annuitants to earn a Reserve salary while earning a pension made the Reserve employment less attractive. Furthermore, the budgetary constraints of not allowing members to work more than a certain number of days per year on class A compounded the problem of retention. The assumption was that members recruited would step in and provide this employment gap. However, their recruiting and retention strategies were analyzed, and it was found that active recruitment of new members is one area that needs to be invigorated. It also found that there was a need to work on prolonging retention rates up to the CRA.⁷ There is a clear need to provide some recruitment and retention strategies to not only extend retention but also suggest attractive employment deals for members coming off the street (referred to as *ab initio*).

6. To begin with, one must analyze the issue with retention through the lens of the RCAF Reserve employment pattern. Reservists are restricted to a maximum of 12 to 14 days of class A per month. To surge for class B, there is an exhaustive process in substantiating the Reserve member's requirement for full time employment, irrelevant of length of the contract. The contract could be to backfill a Regular force member who was deployed, to fill a Class B or C tasking if the Wing found that the Reservist was the best one to fill a position, backfill a

⁶ DRDC, Air Reserve Population Forecast, Ottawa, March 2016, 2.

⁷ Canada's Reserve Force, "*The Royal Canadian Air Force Reserve*," <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-reports-pubs-report-plan-priorities/2017-canadas-reserve-force.page>.

maternity leave of absence or even to handle specific yearly projects that required them only a few weeks, at a particular time of the year. But the transition from being a class A member to class B or C was a detailed administrative procedure that could never be shortened or actioned in quick time. The Force Employment Model produced in 2013 reaffirmed that, “the Air Reserve needed to remain primarily part-time, yet retain the ability to quickly shift from part-time to full-time status in response to shifting operational need.”⁸ To date, this process remains a work in progress. This cumbersome process needs to be streamlined in order to be more efficient and allow for a more hasty transition of the member’s employment from being part-time to the need for employing him/her full-time for contingencies.

7. The issue of prohibiting annuitants from working full-time for the same government department, earning both their Reserve and Pension income at once,⁹ made retention of senior Reserve members less attractive.¹⁰ It had a significant impact in that it decreased the number of Regular force members transitioning to the Reserves upon their retirement from the Regular force. In 2008, the number of component transfers (CT) was 218. By 2013, it had declined to 115.¹¹ Reversing the 2012 changes made to the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act may provide for more attractive employment and promote the increase of Reserve members transferring from the Regular force, by allowing annuitants to work full-time and earn their salary and pension at once. The probability of increasing retention of our trained and skilled

⁸ RCAF, Air Reserve Integrated Force Generation / Force Employment Model, March 2013, 1.

⁹ CANFORGEN 070/12, *Employment of CFSA Annuitants in Continuous Reserve Service*, 101602Z April 2012.

¹⁰ DRDC, Air Reserve Population Forecast, Ottawa, March 2016, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

force will be positive and will allow for senior members to assist in the mentorship and training of the junior reserve members.

8. Another factor that one must consider is that recruitment is limited by geographical locations. In order to recruit in a particular city, that region needs to have an Air Force Wing or Squadron or establishment. As an example, a recruit interested in becoming an Air Reservist in Toronto cannot enrol because there is no Air Force establishment in this city. Furthermore, many recruits enjoy the Reserve employment because it comes with geographical stability for themselves and/or their families. One cannot expect a recruit to show up at the recruiting centre only to be told that he/she must move in order to be enrolled. This limitation has always caused a setback to meeting recruiting drives and meeting the yearly target enrolments. That means that the recruiting drives must be more frequent and much more active at all times in the current regions where Air establishments exist to promote intake.

9. Wings, funding dependant, are able to put Reservists through the required training in order to prepare them for deployments. Thus, funding is critical. Allocation of funding needs to increase to support the Reserve members looking for employment, while simultaneously removing the impeding policies that place restriction on number of days the Reservists are allowed to work per month or per year. Furthermore, there is a will to deploy so long as the average deployment is around six months long and that family stability is guaranteed in one geographical place. To leverage that will, the RCAF leadership needs take advantage of the members ready for employment and utilize them to the fullest capacity in backfilling deployed

Regular force members or employing them to provide direct operational support from home.

Moreover, the number of days worked should be congruent with the organization's operational needs and with the training required to upkeep the skillsets of each member.

10. In addition to all the reasons already mentioned, the attrition rate in the Regular force increased dramatically between 2009 and 2015 due to medical releases. Consequently, that had a direct effect on the CTs to the Air Reserve. Furthermore, although a lengthy study has not been conducted, there are reasons to believe that the policy change in the Years of Service (YOS) for retirement may in fact have an impact on the CTs. Director of Air Reserves' concern was, "the change from IE20 to IE25 may also reduce interest in the ResF because RegF members retiring with 25 YOS will tend to be about five years older than those retiring with 20 YOS, and consequently less interested in continuing their military service."¹² Combining the cumulative reasons above, it is no wonder that there is reduced interest in the Reserves. It is obvious that recruiting and retention have decreased and will continue to decrease, affecting the RCAF Reserve force's role in direct support to operations. In fact, because of the continued forecast of attrition, the Defence Researchers warned that if no action was taken to look at improving recruiting and retention, the Air Reserve population would decrease to half its size with 10 years: "population is forecasted to continue decreasing throughout the next 10 FYs. If current recruiting and attrition patterns remain the same, the population is expected to drop to half the current size by 24/25."¹³

¹² DRDC, Air Reserve Population Forecast, Ottawa, March 2016, 5

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

CONCLUSION

11. The Journey has already commenced a review of the transition time when switching between full-time and part-time, as well as restricted (non-deployable or restricted geographically) and unrestricted (deployable / mobile) status. This seamless transition will allow Reserve members to be employed quicker than the current process that is bogged down needlessly. It will also provide for more flexible employment patterns to increase RCAF's overall operational capacity by removing the barriers and making their employment more attractive through the right compensation and benefits afforded to them. That includes reversing the annuitant policies in allowing them to *double-dip*. Until the Journey is ready to change the bureaucratic policies and legalize the changes, the RCAF leadership must make every effort to encourage retention of the senior members releasing from the Regular force by committing to employing them and committing the funding to secure their employment in the Reserves. Furthermore, prior to the finalization of members' release from the Regular Force, their Reserve employment offer must be prepared and finalized, such that the member can walk in the very next day after his/her release to commence work as a Reserve member. Waiting on the administrative process to see itself through without hastening it or allowing current policies to continue to dictate the way ahead, without revising them, will have detrimental effects on the Air Reserve Force population and certainly the sustainability of operations. Intelligent recruitment initiatives demonstrating flexibility in employment patterns and options will need to be studied further to attract more *ab initio*. As it stands, it is not sustainable to rely solely on CTs to augment the Air Reserve but it does offer a quick, yet valuable solution in the interim. After all, they are a trained and highly skilled force that can be attracted to stay in the organization longer

and pass its skillsets to the younger generation of members being enrolled, while contributing directly to the support of operations.

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