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Maj Candice Hudson

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Maj Candice Hudson

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RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF WOMEN IN THE CAF

AIM

1. With the introduction of the new Defence Policy, Strong Secure Engaged, a spotlight has been shone on the retention and recruitment of women. Specifically, the Canadian Government has established a quota of one quarter of the CAF (Canadian Armed Forces) to be women by the year 2025. This paper will analyze the issues and possible hurdles the CAF will face trying to reach this quota, and what can be done to prevent it. Although it is a noble challenge, motivated for the right reasons, more must be done than setting quotas to increase Canadian female participation in the military.

INTRODUCTION

2. In the past ten years the CAF have evolved from a mysterious and distant organization to one that is in the media more frequently. This evolution has occurred by choice of politicians who use it as a catalyst for their own careers, and because of the war in Afghanistan, the focus on sexual assault and mental health. This has forced the Canadian Government to look at the make-up of the CAF and how it reflects society. The military is supposed to be a reflection of the society it serves, and unfortunately when it comes to females and visible minorities, the representation is quite visibly lacking.

3. Understanding the requirement to update its “look” and be more inclusive, the government, and the CAF, have embarked on a mission to increase the female representation in the military. Although the increase to 25% will still not be representative of the 51% female

population, it would be a notable increase from the 15% that are in the CAF now.¹ The Canadian government understands that in order for the CAF to be considered a professional organization it must be more representative of those whom it protects. This will ensure the CAF has legitimacy, diversity and equality that reflect the values that Canadian citizens hold dear.

DISCUSSION

4. In order for the military to recruit and retain more women it must look at the organization as a whole and the standard of life currently given to military members. There are aspects of military life that are no longer attractive to many societal groups, not only women. Time away from home, geographic instability (often to isolated locations), perceived gender discrimination and dangerous employment are just some of the factors that affect the negative civilians have of the military prior to joining.² These are multiplied when considering women often are also the caregivers within their family and are more concerned with work/life balance and time away from children. Although this is evolving with younger generations, where men are taking considerable more responsibility in the home, it still must be considered.³

5. Time away from home, and deployments to unsavoury or dangerous locations, and lack of work/life balance are all factors under the same umbrella of reasons women are deterred from joining the forces. Although the majority of women fall under the five following trades: supply tech, clerks, medical techs, nurses and Logistics Officers, they are still trades that require

¹ Canada. Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy”. (Ottawa 7 June 2017).

² “Report 5—Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence.” (2016 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, 2016).

³ Canada. Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy”. (Ottawa 7 June 2017).

deployments and training away from home.⁴ The CAF as a whole, no matter what trade, requires a significant amount of time to be spent away from home. Although units or headquarters, depending on an individual's situation can mitigate this, this is completely dependent on the leadership of that organization taking such initiative. Many women are loathe to be away for weeks, or even months at a time especially if they are, in fact, the primary care-giver in their family: "...there continue to be worries about how an unpredictable life will affect her family."⁵ Furthermore, even when not deployed on operations or training, there is an expectation in the military that members will work hours longer than usually expected in civilian life.

6. Work-life balance is not only one of the reasons why women are hesitant to join, it is often given as a reason why they leave the forces. The most difficult issue to overcome is that the intensity and length of training is often required to ensure CAF members attain the required standard to remain deployable. Of course, with more flexible employment options offered in "the Journey", this will hopefully become less of an issue. If women choose to be considered "not deployable" or even part-time, it will be done without severe ramifications. Of course, this solution is still on the horizon and no specific timeline has been issued regarding when "the Journey" will be implemented.⁶ Other than the completion in 2030, the steps that will be taken to implement "the Journey" will have significant impact and will have to be set to a timeline to ensure smooth transition. "The Journey" does not, however, tackle the concern of women who want to remain deployable and still serve as full time members who still want to maintain a work

⁴ *IBID*

⁵ Sarah Boesveld, "Inside Canada's Campaign to recruit Women," *Chatelaine*, Nov 2016.

⁶ Canada. Department of National Defence, "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy". (Ottawa 7 June 2017).

life balance. Ultimately, the CAF will have to become much better at prioritizing which training is most important and what can be sacrificed for quality of life.

7. When it comes to geographic uncertainty, and postings to locations in rural or undesirable locations, the military has historically not been able to make many concessions. The locations of military bases, and the isolated nature of many of the bases, are a point of contention for many members. This issue becomes more prevalent as the younger generation will more likely be drawn to urban environments. The isolation of many bases is due to the requirement for training areas to be large enough to manoeuvre a Brigade, isolated enough to not bother civilians and secure enough to ensure the safety of those working on the bases. These factors create the perfect storm of bases and training areas that are generally in rural areas and far from any cities. Conversely, bases that are near cities, such as Edmonton and Winnipeg, have little to no area to train and require members to be travelling to the larger training areas throughout the year. This means that CAF members are less likely to be posted near family support, as most of the Canadian population lives in urban areas. When considering raising a family, in a job that requires frequent travel and time away from home, not being able to live near a support network is a critical failure.⁷

8. Another concern women have stated when asked why they wouldn't be interested in joining the CAF is the perceived gender discrimination.⁸ This includes, but is not limited to, the sexual harassment reported in *Maclean's* magazine in 2014.⁹ The article led to the investigation, spearheaded by the CAF, to determine how in depth the sexual misconduct went. The very

⁷ Sarah Boesveld, "Inside Canada's Campaign to recruit Women," *Chatelaine*, Nov 2016.

⁸ Noémi Mercier and Alec Castonguay, "Our Military's Disgrace," *Maclean's*, 16 May 2014.

⁹ *IBID*

publicized investigation painted the male military members as a group of degenerate predators, with females being harassed and abused in every corner of the CAF. Although this view is not shared by all, it will be a very long time before the military rebuilds its credit. There were, and still are, issues of inequality and harassment that must be corrected, it certainly is not to the extreme the media would like to have the public imagine. The military must continue to discourage and correct improper behaviour and make the CAF a supportive environment. The only thing that will heal the public image of the military is continued effort and time to prove to the female population of the country that the CAF will not condone discrimination or harassment of any kind.

9. One of the most hotly and publicly debated topics regarding women in the military, and not just in Canada, is the concept of women in conflict. There continues to be a perceived notion by the public that women should not be involved in battle on the front lines. Although the Canadian military has had all trades open to women since 1989, with the exception of Submarine service in 2000, “the employment of females in combat trades has been considerably lower.”¹⁰ The amount of women in the combat arms, fighter pilot and submarine service is starkly lower than other trades within their respective services.

10. The nature of combat operations does tend to attract the more aggressive, physically fit and type-A personalities. Whether or not women do not see themselves in these positions, or are just have more self-preservation instinct, the combat trades currently only have two percent

¹⁰ “Report 5—Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment and Retention—National Defence.” (2016 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, 2016).

female participation in Canada.¹¹ Although this number does seem to be increasing somewhat, it is still unlikely to see the equality within the combat arms in the near future. Although there have not been blatant internal factors that have reflected poorly on the CAF regarding combat arms and its ability to recruit women, such as more pronounced harassment or more time away from home, it remains male dominated. This could be based on media and Hollywood portrayal of the “infantry soldier”. The general misconception is that the combat arms means constantly running in formation, digging trenches, and living in the dirt.¹² There is an overall lack of understanding regarding what exactly the trades within the combat arms do, specifically on a day-to-day basis. Fortunately, the CAF has created its somewhat arbitrary quota, which is not based on what trades or services they want women to join.¹³

11. Similar to the combat arms trades, the military in general is very misunderstood by the Canadian public. In order for the CAF to be more appealing to women, it must advertise the many trades and different types of employment that are available to everyone. If the general public understood the great variety of employment opportunities, and the flexibility of employment contracts they would be more likely to join: “...there are definitely misconceptions about what the military has to offer women and most of them just aren’t true.”¹⁴ Again, the media has not done any favours for the military, only highlighting the negative aspects. Specifically, the military gets the most media coverage when mental health or sexual harassment

¹¹ Tamar Freeman, “Women in Combat”, <https://sistersinarms.ca/history/women-in-combat-pros-and-cons>, last updated June 2009.

¹² Women in the Canadian Armed Forces.” (Ottawa – National Defence / Canadian Armed Forces -March 7, 2017)

¹³ Canada. Department of National Defence, “Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy”. (Ottawa 7 June 2017).

¹⁴ Kim Smith, “Canadian Armed Forces pushes for more Women”, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3923213/canadian-armed-forces-women-military>, 5 Jan 2018.

are in the storylines. In order for the CAF to overcome the general misconception of the military, as well as media bias, it must increase its ability to market itself.

12. The CAF must continue to act as ethically as possible and battle the current sexual misconduct and sexist environment. As the public trust in the CAF is being restored a media campaign, and increased social media footprint, to increase awareness in the employment opportunities in the CAF would allow civilians, and potential future members to see the diversity of employment opportunities. This would allow women, and other all potential CAF members, to understand that there are positions in the military that do not include constantly digging trenches, being yelled at by Sergeants or marching long distances with backpacks. Ultimately, the CAF requires a complete media overhaul and a more robust outreach program. If women understood exactly what being an infantry soldier, or fighter pilot, or submariner was like, they may be more inclined to join the forces. Further, if being in a front-line role still didn't suit them, women must understand what other options are available to them regarding employment in the CAF.

CONCLUSION

13. Ultimately there are many reasons why women do not want to join the forces, or why they decide to leave once they have joined. If the CAF wants to begin recruiting and retaining more women, it must look seriously at why they aren't coming through the doors, and why they leave. In order for there to be a serious consideration of increasing the amount of women from 15% to 25% there must also be serious changes.

14. The CAF will continue to struggle recruiting and retaining women in its employ until it tackles the general “dissatisfiers”: time away from home, isolated and undesirable posting locations and gender bias and discrimination. The issue that many struggle with, and will continue to battle, is making the forces inclusive and welcoming for all while still maintaining a fighting standard. The forces must take the time now to ensure that proper planning is done, and not rushed, to maintain a suitable standard for deployed soldiers while achieving the requirements of “the Journey”. The CAF will be

RECOMMENDATION

15. The evolution of the program, “the Journey”, is one important step in enticing women to join the CAF. Allowing more flexible employment options, geographic stability and optional deployment opportunities is more likely to be more appealing to women. This is also true of the new generation, and those immigrating to Canada. Flexibility is the key to success when it comes to recruiting women. Although “the Journey” is not specifically targeted to increasing recruiting and retention of women, it is the type of program that will make the CAF more appealing to women.

16. The CAF must focus less on quotas to attempt to recruit women and more on rebranding and rebuilding its image. As the “role of women” in society continues to evolve, women will naturally feel more interested in employment that may have been considered impossible at one time. Although the CAF has been an inclusive organization since 1989, the societal expectations as a whole are changing. It is likely the CAF will naturally begin to see more interest from

women and will be able to capitalize if the proper steps are taken. In order for the natural evolution of women in the CAF to continue, the forces must be truly and wholly welcoming to women and battle any sexual misconduct from within. It must also understand that flexibility and open-mindedness will be the keys to success with any recruitment in the future. Although the maintenance of tradition is important, evolution will continue to be paramount for survival and success of the organization.

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