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THE CANADIAN DEFENCE ATTACHÉ PROGRAM: WOMEN WANTED

Major Delaina Brown

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Solo Flight

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Major Delaina Brown

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THE CANADIAN DEFENCE ATTACHÉ PROGRAM: WOMEN WANTED

The Canadian Defence Attaché Programme (CDAP) is a unique opportunity, to lead a small Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) team, in relative independence and on foreign soil, yet it continues to struggle to find suitable people to meet the needs of the program. As diversity is the goal throughout the CAF, which means, greater representation of women, cultural minority groups and Aboriginal people, the CDAP in particular finding that meeting this goal is particularly difficult. In order to better understand the challenges the program faces in recruiting suitable candidates, this paper will examine the CDAP, its mandate, the application and training process as well as some of the responsibilities and challenges of life as a Canadian Defence Attaché (CDA) in general. This essay will focus specifically on the challenges in recruiting women, therefore further analysis of the previous topics will take into consideration issues that are specific to females both globally and in the CAF specifically and offer some opinions on how changes to the CAF's attitude towards this program could lead to more applicants in general, which would increase the odds of better overall female representation. Upon conclusion of this essay, an understanding of the CDAP challenges in recruiting women to fill CDA billets should be clear.

The VCDS is the CAF Functional Authority for the CDAP. The officer appointed as a CDA is a commanding officer, directly responsible to the VCDS through the Director of Foreign Liaison (DFL).¹ The mandate of the CDAP is to “Build, maintain, sustain, and nurture enduring Defence and Military relationships with the Host Nations to support

¹ Department of National Defence, “VCDS direction to post Canadian Defence Attaché Office, June 2017,” Template Letter, CDA Training (May 2020).

Canada's Strategic Defence Interests.”² This is achieved through the cooperation of the Department of National Defence (DND) representatives, the CDA and the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) representative, the Head of Mission (HOM), either an Ambassador or High Commissioner in the Host Nation. As part of this mandate, the CDA will support the CAF's Military Diplomacy and the Global Engagement Program, working towards greater interoperability with the Host Nation and delivery of Defence capabilities for current and future operations. As the DND/CAF official representative within the Host Nation, the CDA is the defence advisor to the HOM, provides support to strategic planning, is the CAF representative at diplomatic and commemorative functions, facilitates visits for Canadian delegations, enables support and implementation of bilateral co-operation agreements between Host Nation military and the CAF and reports on defence and military issues in their accredited countries.³

Currently, Canada has 39 CDAs that are accredited in 138 countries around the globe, in other words the majority of CDAs hold accreditations in more than one country. The largest portfolio currently belongs to Colonel Mireille Gignac, the only female CDA, who resides in Senegal and is accredited as the CDA for 13 African nations in total. There are 33 CDAs at the rank of Colonel/ Captain (Navy) (Col/Capt(N)) and 6 CDAs who hold the rank of Lieutenant Colonel/ Commander (LCol/Cdr). There are a number of Canadian Defence Attaché Office (CDAO) configurations, with the majority having a CDA and an Administration Assistant (AA) at the rank of Sergeant/Petty Officer 2nd Class (Sgt/PO2).

² Department of National Defence, “Canadian Defence Attaché Program- Defence Diplomacy Enabled,” PowerPoint Presentation, CDA Training (May 2020).

³ Ibid

Others offices include these two positions as well as a Deputy CDA (DCDA) while the CDAO in Russia consists of a CDA, DCDA and two AAs. The organizational structure for each CDAO is based on the complexity of the relationships with the Host Nation, the CAF level of interest in the country and the number of countries the CDA is accredited to within the region.⁴ As outlined above, the number of military personnel operating within the CDAO is very small, but this group also works within the diplomatic missions in cooperation with GAC, under the supervision of the HOM, but remaining under CAF command. Based on an interdepartmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) “GAC is paid by DND to provide furnished office, accommodation, communication services and transportation support for the CDAO personnel.” CAF members serving beside GAC personnel are full-fledged members of the Canadian diplomatic mission wherever they operate in the world.

The majority of the positions within the CDAP are accompanied posting that are two to three years in length, but unlike most domestic and even Out of Canada (OUTCAN) postings where the CAF member joins a large established team with significant administrative support for both the CAF member and their family, CDA postings are removed from the “green machine”⁵ and are instead relatively independent from the greater CAF organization. The unique and autonomous life of a CDA comes with a number of challenges, which is why the application and selection process for this program is so thorough. This process is a critical component in ensuring the success of the CDA and the program in general. The process to join the CDA organization, no matter what role, takes a significant amount of time and effort on the part of all involved.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

The initial process begins with a call for applicants that is issued through an annual CANFORGEN. “Interested personnel may initiate the selection process...by completing the Notice of Intent (NOI)...Applicants must receive chain of command endorsement before DFL can initiate deliberate selection process.”⁶ Although the CANFORGEN prerequisites are relatively easy to meet, (any MOSID, Canadian citizen, Regular Force, Operationally qualified, able to meet MOSID medical qualifications and Level III security clearance) the factors limiting the individuals seeking to join the CDAP begin with the very stringent rank qualifications for a CDA (Col/Capt(N) and LCol/Cdr). In 2018, the CAF only had 406 and 1,679 personnel respectively at these two ranks.⁷ With such limited numbers, and so many critical positions to fill throughout the entire organization, the approval from the applicant’s Chain of Command, including Branch and Career Manager is crucial, but often difficult to attain. In the past, individuals who have shown interest, have either been discouraged from the process by their Branch’s lack of enthusiasm for the program, for example being told that acceptance is a “career killer”⁸ or have been persuaded instead to continue on the path of “high profile positions with better opportunity for career advancement.”⁹ It is widely known that “once people go to the CDA programme, there is limited opportunity to be promoted.”¹⁰

⁶ Department of National Defence, “DIRECTORATE OF FOREIGN LIAISON - CDA PROGRAMME SELECTION 2019,” CANFORGEN 148/19 DFL2 001/19 091357Z, (Oct 2019).

⁷ House of Commons, Report of the Standing on National Defence, *Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 42nd Parliament, 1st session, June 2019, 63.

⁸ Catherine Deri (retired Col), Zoom tele-conference interview with author, 12 May 2020.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Col Jack Galuga, Telephone interview with author, 31 March 2020.

When the individual meets the basic requirements outlined above, including the approval of their respective Branch/Career Manager, there are still other obstacles that need to be overcome before acceptance into the CDAP. Initially the member will be interviewed alone and subsequently with their spouse (if married), these interviews provide DFL the opportunity to ensure that both individuals understand what to expect as part of the Attaché's life overseas. Candidates must demonstrate appropriate military experience, adaptability, social skills, language aptitude, capacity for work and dedication, while spouses must be able to adapt to an active social life, diplomatic requirements and the constraints of living abroad.¹¹ Both individuals must be willing to accept living standards that may not be equivalent to those in Canada, limited CAF support, security challenges for the CDA as well as family members and potential surveillance by the Host Nation for the duration of the posting. Posts are unofficially categorized as Supportive, Positive and Challenging. A supportive post is considered a positive atmosphere, where CAF relations are well established with the HN and the two nations share cultural similarities. A nation that is not deemed as threatening and where Canada is actively working to establish stronger military ties is considered a Positive post. A Challenging post means that a potential threat is perceived from the host nation towards Canada or CAF personnel deployed overseas, and where gaining access to, analysing and reporting military information on the host nation is difficult.¹² Understandably it is much easier to fill a Supportive or Positive post while the third category, being Challenging, speaks for itself. Individuals and their families must be prepared to accept any of these

¹¹ Department of National Defence, "Canadian Defence Attaché Program- Defence Diplomacy Enabled," PowerPoint Presentation, CDA Training (May 2020).

¹² Ibid.

posts and understand that it may not always be what they anticipated. The application process also requires that CAF members be able to get a Level III security clearance and their spouse must be able to attain a Level II clearance, for this reason, spouses and dependents must be Canadian citizens and all family members will undergo thorough background checks. This investigation is conducted in order to determine if the CDA or their family could be put into a situation where they can be exploited for information while serving at their post. “It is important to note that the CDAP while viewed as a diplomatic function, is truly a HUMINT capability that informs the CAF at the Strategic, Operational and Tactical levels. It is an enabling capability for all levels of command and supports information gathering activities across the spectrum of need for Canada and a wide range of partner nations.”¹³ For this reason, the selection of the right person for the position is crucial. As Canada’s representative in the Host Nation works to ensure that they gather, analyse and report information back to the DND/CAF, the Host Nation may also be looking for an opportunity to influence or manipulate that information.

The recruiting CANFORGEN that is sent out annually, seeks applicant for a two year period as several of the positions require the completion of language training prior to CDA training and posting. “Language training is the most important training that future staff of CDAO abroad receive.”¹⁴ This training may last a few short months depending on the candidate’s language ability, a yearlong intensive language training for most countries and two years to learn Chinese or Russian. Spouses may also attend the same language

¹³ Col Acton Kilby, E-mail interview with the author, 12 May 2020.

¹⁴ Military Personnel Command, “Canadian Defence Attachés Program Posting Requirements,” Last modified 29 February 2016, <http://cmp-cpm.mil.ca/en/recruitment-careers/senior-appointments/military-attaches-program-posting-requirement.page>.

courses but the CAF member's progress is key. Once this training is complete, usually six months prior to posting, the CDA training begins for all members of the CDAO. This training, lasting fourteen weeks, will consist of reporting, photography, communications, information gathering, diplomatic skills, observations, field craft, social skills, basic evasive driving, international policy and more. The fact that such a significant amount of information is provided over a short period of time makes this training mentally and physically draining but provides candidates with the true picture of what their position will entail while overseas. Briefings from key stakeholders such as Strategic Joint Staff, Canadian Joint Operations Command, Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, and the Canadian Forces Intelligence Command are complemented with Effective Networking and the GAC Integrated Program Managers Abroad (IMPA) courses. Although many who undertake this training will fully understand the roles of the military commands that brief them, the information and training they receive about operating in an environment such as a Canadian Embassy in a foreign country is the domain of GAC. This training is equally important to understand and respect, as it provides information on the roles and responsibilities of GAC within the host nation as well as the mutual support between the departments. "Like the military, the diplomatic community has its own written and unwritten rules for direction, supervision, procedures, method of operation and social behavior. Moreover, service abroad for most of GAC personnel is a common and frequent experience, requiring less adjustment than for CAF members and their families."¹⁵ Learning about the organizations and understanding their mandate and goals will make for a cooperative environment, benefitting all involved.

¹⁵ Department of National Defence, "Canadian Defence Attaché Program- Defence Diplomacy Enabled," Powerpoint Presentation, CDA Training (May 2020).

Prior to taking up post overseas, the CDA will receive one last critical piece of information; the VCDS' direction to the CDA. This letter is valid for the duration of the CDA tour and will outline the objectives, duties and responsibilities of the CDA based on national and departmental policies.¹⁶ This letter will identify all members of the CDAO, countries of accreditation, tasks and the anticipated CDAP outcomes, relationships with the host nation's Ministry of Defence (MOD) and other allies within the country.

Essentially this letter provides the primary focus for the CDA in addition to outlining the peripheral relationships with the organizations listed above. Once abroad, the CDA plays an essential role in the diplomatic mission. Relationships need to be developed and nurtured between GAC staff in the embassy, and specifically with the HOM. In addition to the role of defence advisor to the HOM, CDAs are essential in assisting the advancement of Canada's international defence materiel relationships with allies and partners through the management of bilateral co-operative programs, assisting the Trade Commissioner in better understanding defence industry and enabling Canadian Industries access to the Host Nation's MOD.

Having provided a review of the CDA programme, from application through selection and training and finally actual employment, this essay will now look at the processes identified above but will look at the entire process from a different perspective and attempt to identify why there are so few women CDAs serving globally.

Unfortunately this perspective does not align with our Canadian values but must be

¹⁶ Department of National Defence, "VCDS direction to post Canadian Defence Attaché Office, June 2017," Template Letter, CDA Training (May 2020).

considered based on the fact that CDAs are living in countries around the world that don't subscribe to our views.

The reality is, that in order to become a CDA, first, one must achieve the required rank. In 2018, the Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence reported that 29 females held the rank of Colonel and only 211 held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Essentially, only 7.1% and 12.6% of all Col/Capt(N) and LCol/Cdr respectively are women.¹⁷ Although these numbers continue to grow as more females achieve and surpass these ranks, historically it would have proven quite difficult to find women at this rank to even consider joining the CDAP. The Government of Canada has recommended that the CAF increase its female representation and the current Chief of Defence Staff has set a target to “build a more diverse military workforce”¹⁸ which includes increasing female representation from 14.9% to 25% by 2026.¹⁹ Setting these goals will benefit the CAF in general and potentially be the beginning of assisting the CDAP in achieving a more balanced representation of females in their organization. As stated previously, Col Gignac is the sole female currently serving as a CDA. Although there are female AAs currently serving and a new female DCDA will join the program this summer, the CDA is the CAF's representative in the Host Nation, and in order for the CDAP to align with the CAF's way forward with regards to female representation, more women will need to apply and be accepted into the program. Like all applicants, women who apply must also have the approval of their Branch, but each Branch is working to put their best people into high profile positions, to garner further advancement, in order to meet the

¹⁷ House of Commons, Report of the Standing on National Defence, *Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Canadian Armed Forces*, 42nd Parliament, 1st session, June 2019, 63.

¹⁸ Ibid. 8

¹⁹ Ibid

Government of Canada mandate to ensure “[a] more balanced distribution of men and women at all levels of decision-making is essential to a fair and democratic society.”²⁰ The CAF is providing women far greater opportunities than ever before, which means that there is a greater demand for women in high profile positions throughout the organization. “This naturally reduces the numbers of women potentially available at the Col/Capt(N) rank for the CDAP”²¹ In addition, a greater number of women have previously and “continue to join the CAF in support trades, which means there are still positions that require their expertise within these trades, as opposed to the Combat Arms, that have limited key roles after certain rank and staff or training positions are finished.”²² The CDAP is considered a good place to post this latter group. These are individuals who that have done well in their careers but for whatever reason, have little chance of further promotion. With women representing only 2.9% of the entire Combat Arms, it is safe to say that there are a greater number of men at the appropriate rank, who have fulfilled all the requisite command, staff and training positions, have not reached retirement age and who still have expertise and experience that makes them exceptional candidates for the CDAP. With time, we may see an increase of women who also meet these same criteria, who could eventually fulfill CDA roles, but thus far the CAF has not achieved this balance.

As if the small numbers of women at the right rank with Branch approval was not limiting enough, the Host Nation’s culture and acceptance of women also has to be

²⁰ Status of Women Canada, “Leadership and democratic participation,” last Modified 09 Sept 2019, <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/grf-crrg/leadership-en.html>.

²¹ Col Acton Kilby, E-mail interview with the author, 12 May 2020.

²² Col Jack Galuga, Telephone interview with author, 31 March 2020.

considered. Although within Canada, discriminating on the basis of gender is illegal, in other countries around the world, women are still not allotted the same rights, freedoms or respect as men. A country such as Kuwait, which is considered progressive in the Middle East and allows women many of the same rights as men, as long as they are Kuwaiti nationals, still does not have women serving in their military, even though women do serve within their Police Force. In discussions with Kuwait MOD representatives, Col Catherine Deri (retired), who was posted as the DCDA in Kuwait in 2016-2017, was told that “the reason women did not serve in the military was because the bases were too far away from the city and women would not be able to be home in time to prepare meals for their husband.”²³ Col Deri was a well-respected, highly intelligent, Canadian Army Logistics Officer who had significant deployed and domestic operations experience, undoubtedly more experience than her Kuwaiti military counterparts, but she still felt disadvantaged at times during her posting. As a single female, there were times when she felt unsure if she was equally accepted as her male, allied counterparts. The CDAP is not only about building professional relationships with host nation military, there is an expectation that social ties will also be made in order to build trust. Other female CDAs have had far greater challenges during their postings, where they have been openly disregarded by military personnel from other nations or have spent their entire three years on post building relationships with the host nation MOD, only to be quickly disregarded as soon as their male replacements arrived. Col Acton Kilby, who worked with CDAP over a period of seven years, as an Attaché as well as DFL running the programme, stated that there have been incidents of sexism to the point of sexual harassment by foreign

²³ Catherine Deri (retired Col), Zoom tele-conference interview with author, 12 May 2020.

CDAs towards females involved in the CDAP.²⁴ The CDAP does not wish to expose female CDAO staff to such inappropriate behaviours but understands that not all nations have the same values as Canada and therefore accepts that there is a risk associated to operating in certain countries and with personnel from other militaries. Training is critical to ensuring that CDAO personnel are aware of the risks and how they should deal with these situations. From a global perspective, greater representation of women in the CDA program in general would be most beneficial. Currently Canada is on par with other nations with the percentage of women serving as CDAs abroad. At this time, the only nation that has a female CDA accredited to Canada is Australia.²⁵ Col Gignac stated that she has met very few female CDAs during her five years within the programme but European countries are working towards better representation.²⁶ Canada needs to work towards a finding ways to increase the numbers of women as CDAs as opposed to further limiting female participation in the program due to the narrow minded views of other nation's representatives.

Although the focus thus far has been on how the basic criteria for the CDAP limits the ability of women to join, the issue of family status can be a limiting factor for both men and women. Single parents will not be considered as the nature of the job requires that the CAF member be able to work extremely long hours, often with no notice and no support to provide to the member (for example MFRC or family within close proximity). "In cases where we have had single parent circumstances arise (death and divorce), they

²⁴ Col Acton Kilby, E-mail interview with the author, 12 May 2020.

²⁵ Relations internationales et Francophonie, "Foreign governments offices and representatives," last modified 4 Mar 2020, http://www.mrif.gouv.gc.ca/content/documents/en/Protocole/Repertoire_en.pdf.

²⁶ Col Mireille Gignac, E-mail interview with the author, 11 May 2020.

have all resulted in early repatriation.”²⁷ Most recently, a single parent applied and had made arrangements to have her mother be posted with her to care for the child involved, but the plan fell apart at the last minute, leaving the programme to scramble to find a replacement. Same sex couples, openly gay CAF members as well as families with openly gay children, also pose challenges for the programme. The intent is for an applicant to apply for the program and based on their capabilities, experience and knowledge, be able to take up any vacant CDA position, but the reality is that members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ2) are not accepted in numerous countries. “In some cases they still maintain punitive and criminal punishment.”²⁸ There are countries that do not penalise homosexuality but they also do not recognize same sex unions, while on the other extreme, there are still countries that impose the death penalty for homosexuality.²⁹ When considering postings, the safety and security of the CAF member and their family is paramount, the CDAP will not risk putting a member in a situation where they knowingly will break the law of the Host Nation, even if this law does not align with the values of the Government of Canada.

As the CAF evolves to try to better reflect the Canadian population, by promoting cultural diversity and enabling the advancement of women to the highest ranks within the organization, it is also looking at ways to recruit the right people and ways to retain those same people as they advance through the ranks. The CAF has stated that it needs to “[u]ndertake a comprehensive review of conditions of service and career

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ The Week, “The countries where homosexuality is illegal,” last modified 3 April 2020, <https://www.theweek.co.uk/96298/the-countries-where-homosexuality-is-still-illegal>.

paths to allow much more personalized career choices and flexibility.”³⁰

Allowing movement between CDAP and the individual’s respective branch without being penalized in the PER process, could provide individuals who are looking for a change, the opportunity to find that within the CAF as opposed to leaving. Once the three year posting is complete, they can then return back to their branch for a few years, working towards the next rank. In order to do this, there needs to be a change of mindset with regards to the CDAP, it needs to be promoted as an opportunity and identified as a viable step towards the next rank. For those who are interested in the CDAP, the DCDA postings could be used as entry level positions which would allow an Officer at the rank of LCol/Cdr the opportunity to apply for the program and learn a different perspective of the CAF and its broader role within the Government of Canada mandate overseas. This will not solve all the issues of recruiting into the CDAP and specifically the recruitment of women, but it is a positive first step.

In order to become an organization that truly represents Canada, the CAF has recognized that it needs to diversify in many ways. Greater participation of women in key roles within the CAF both domestically and abroad is needed in order to ensure that the CAF aligns itself with the Government of Canada’s mandates. The CDAP is a program that provides critical information to the CAF in order to support its mandate abroad and to assist GAC by providing military expertise to the HOM in various nations, but it is also aware that it could better serve the CAF and GAC if it were able to attain a greater number of female CDAs within its ranks. The CDAP faces challenges meeting the

³⁰ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 22.

mandate of diversity, due to its limited numbers, limited rank requirements and peripheral factors such as family status, Host Nation cultural norms and laws. There are several challenges in recruiting the right people that will not be easily resolved as they are not only related to the CAF but instead, are global issues that need to be overcome. Canada must continue to work towards leading the way by putting highly qualified women in leadership positions, in Canada and abroad, in order to challenge outdated and oppressive norms. This is the only way to ensure change.

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