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## IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE AIR TASK FORCE CONCEPT: A SERVICE PAPER FOR COMMANDER 1 CANADIAN AIR DIVISION

Major P.J. Leblanc

**JCSP 45**

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By Major P.J. LeBlanc

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## **IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE AIR TASK FORCE CONCEPT: A SERVICE PAPER FOR COMMANDER 1 CANADIAN AIR DIVISION**

### **AIM**

1. Though the Air Task Force (ATF) concept has brought “structure and predictability to the way the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) formed its deployable forces,”<sup>1</sup> there are ways that this doctrine and structure can be improved upon to make it more efficient. This paper will suggest improvements to the ATF and Air Expeditionary Wing concepts to aid in the global delivery of air power. These suggested improvements to both the structure and doctrine should enable mission success, resulting in a more agile and effective force.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. The RCAF has always been able to deliver tactical air effects; however, multiple lessons learned after major operations noted that Command and Control (C2) processes were lacking. This resulted in the creation of the ATF concept.<sup>2</sup> Current ATF doctrine defines an ATF as “a temporary grouping of RCAF operational/tactical formations, squadrons, units or detachments formed for the purpose of carrying out a specific operation or mission.”<sup>3</sup> The ATF concept has allowed planners to ensure that the support requirement on all operations is met. The ATF concept is still relatively new and some issues have arisen.

3. One issue noted is that the manner in which an ATF is employed for force employment (FE) operations differs compared to force generation (FG) missions. A second issue with the ATF concept is that RCAF doctrine states that an ATF is a scalable entity; however, what constitutes the proper size for each is debatable. The proper size of an ATF depends on the operation and the RCAF has struggled to find the proper balance of line operators and support staff required on recent operations, including Op IMPACT and Op RENAISSANCE.

4. This paper will look at improving the ATF concept. It will first point out the discrepancies between FE and FG missions and how planning occurs for each. Next, it will look at the scalable aspect of an ATF and provide ideas on how to make ATFs as efficient as possible, including when ATF and JTF HQs are co-located.

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<sup>1</sup> Pux Barnes, “The RCAF Air Task Force: The New Kid On The Block,” *Royal Canadian Air Force Journal* 4, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 38.

<sup>2</sup> Pux Barnes, “The RCAF Air Task Force: Considerations for the Employment of Air Power in Joint Operations.” (Royal Canadian Air Force, 2014), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GA-402-001/FP-001, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Command and Control* (Trenton: Canadian Forces Aerospace Warfare Center, 2018), 11.

## DISCUSSION

5. One issue with how ATFs are employed is the fact that “C2 authorities and relationships differ greatly when forces change from FG to FE.”<sup>4</sup> When switching to FE, an ATF Commander (Comd) is given a Transfer of Command Authority (TOCA) message, detailing exactly what their C2 structure looks like and how that person is allowed to employ the assets given to them for an operation based on agreed-to parameters.<sup>5</sup> When forces go on exercises in an FG role only, this message is not created.

6. When ATFs are conducting exercises, normally an ATF Comd is assigned after planning has commenced. The ATF Comd writes an exercise directive which the Wing Comd reviews and signs. The C2 relationships during exercises can become confusing when units from multiple bases are involved and fall under a single ATF Comd. To alleviate this confusion, a Wing Comd should develop the exercise directive immediately after committing to an exercise. This exercise directive should detail who will be assigned as the ATF Comd, give them planning authority and describe what support units under the Wing Comd are to be given to these individuals. When units of multiple wings are to participate in an exercise under a single ATF Comd, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) should be drafted between the Wing Comds so individual Detachment Comds have an idea of what powers have been delegated to the ATF Comd for that exercise.

7. As noted in RCAF doctrine “a C2 system is made up of three constituent elements: people, infrastructure and processes.”<sup>6</sup> If the processes are robust enough to enable reach back capability, the infrastructure required is minimized, resulting in fewer people deployed and a smaller footprint in theatre. This smaller footprint leaves more room for front line operators, providing redundancy and increasing the chances of mission success, especially when the number of deployed personnel is limited due to government mandate. This smaller footprint also remains more agile, with the ability to house and feed from smaller institutions.

8. RCAF doctrine also states that “air power C2 systems are heavily reliant on effective communications and computer systems that are interoperable, agile and trusted.”<sup>7</sup> The same requirements exist to ensure the reach back connectivity is strong; therefore, ATFs should ensure they bring a robust A6 function with them when deploying. Since reach back is already used for the residual authorities of air doctrine, aircrew training and standards, flight safety, operational airworthiness and technical airworthiness,<sup>8</sup> the information technology (IT) infrastructure already is a requirement to be in place for any ATF deployment.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Keynotes V.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Keynotes V.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9.

9. With fewer people in theatre, the physical infrastructure such as accommodations is reduced, requiring fewer logistical requirements. One issue noted in the Op RENAISSANCE 17-03 Post Op report was that personnel had to be moved between hotels due to contracting requirements.<sup>9</sup> Having a smaller footprint may alleviate some logistical and contracting problems. Host nation or coalition partners may also be able to support a smaller ATF, negating the requirement to set up amenities strictly for Canadian use. This would alleviate the requirement for support trades, such as construction engineers, that need to deploy to maintain infrastructure.

10. Further benefits are available when the size of an ATF is limited. If an ATF can sustain itself with the minimal footprint in theatre, force protection requirements may also be less, requiring fewer individuals, or could be provided by a host nation or coalition partner when able.

11. To make reach back effective the IT infrastructure must be robust.<sup>10</sup> The CAF has the capability today to provide CSNI connectivity through any commercial internet connection with minimal equipment. Satellite connectivity can also allow deployed ATFs to connect to both regular and secure internet, as well as providing encrypted communications to both Canada and other deployed forces. In order to use this infrastructure effectively, processes need to be developed to facilitate the flow of information when using the reach back capability. These processes include ensuring a proper battle rhythm, having proper pre and post mission products available in a timely manner and having contingency plans ready in case an emergency develops or communication issues arise.

12. To ensure reach back processes are developed and utilized properly throughout an operation, a reach back team, specific to each operation, should be named prior to an ATF deploying. This team would essentially be on the same battle rhythm as the deployed ATF and could support them from a distance utilizing the IT infrastructure that one deployed A6 technician team could create. Once this infrastructure is set up, any admin requirements could be completed electronically. Digital signatures using PKI cards can result in any document requiring a signature to be electronically signed in theatre and sent back to the reach back team to process. This would *almost* eliminate the need for any clerical type positions within theatre.

13. Processes for pre-mission and post-mission requirements could also be handled from a distance via a reach back team with proper connectivity. Pre-mission briefing packages could be created by mission support officers who are able to gather the required information via computers and telephone, compile the information into a proper briefing format and deliver the briefing remotely. This process is already used for meteorology reports to aircrew quite regularly. Intelligence personnel could also aid the mission support officer in the creation of this

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<sup>9</sup> Department of National Defence, *Post Operation Report: Op Renaissance* (n.p., 2017), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GA-402-001/FP-001...,5.

document; however, having an intelligence presence in theatre may still be preferred to ensure the human interface gets all required information. Upon completion of a mission, details could be sent back to a mission support officer to process, format and disseminate any required post-mission products. The mission support officers that worked for the CP-140 Aurora detachment on Op IMPACT routinely carried out their duties via phone and internet and could arguably have completed their required products from any location with connectivity.

14. In order for a reach back team to be effective, this team would have to be dedicated to the mission and not given other tasking's during this time. An MOU between commanders would be required to essentially task these individuals with only supporting the mission to which they were assigned. They would be required to operate on the same battle rhythm as the operators in theatre, be available when personnel in theatre required them and provide any assistance requested remotely.

15. Advantages of utilizing a more robust reach back team are numerous. First of all, the amount of pre-deployment training is minimized as these individuals would not be required to complete all of the readiness training required for those deploying to theatre. These personnel would also not face the risk and hardship deploying into theatre may pose. Individual members of a reach back team would also spend less time away from home.

16. From an institutional perspective, members operating in Canada as part of a reach back team would not require the same amount of pre and post mission leave, allowing them to be available for longer periods of time for follow-on tasking's. The costs associated with deploying personnel would be reduced as well if members could perform their duties from their home bases.

17. Having more people remain in Canada as a reach back team also poses some issues. If specialty trades are required or this team needs to be co-located, members may still have to travel from their home units for a period of time. Remaining in Canada minimizes risk to these personnel. Heavy reliance on communications could also be a weak link during operations and is vulnerable to attack. The feasibility and effects of enemy forces attacking the IT infrastructure of an ATF using reach back capabilities would have to be taken into consideration when planning to employ an ATF in this manner.

18. Another issue relating to maintaining reach back teams during operations has to do with honours and awards. Members would still need to be recognized for their support to the operation. Currently, the CAF honours and awards system is based heavily on the amount of time individuals spend in theatre. General Service medals could still be given to individuals based on the amount of time they spent as part of an official reach back team for each operation. As stated in the manual *Canadian Honours and Awards bestowed Upon Members of the Canadian Forces*, "General Service Medal or the Operational Service Medal, may also be

awarded to those who serve in direct support of the operation from outside the theatre.”<sup>11</sup> If members supporting an operation remain in Canada, their support to the operation can still be recognized.

19. The size of an ATF can also be minimized by doing an efficiency study prior to deployment where an ATF and JTF are going to be co-located. As seen at Op IMPACT, having both an ATFHQ and JTFHQ co-located created many redundancies and confusion over which positions were supposed to carry out certain tasks. Adding to the large footprint at Op IMPACT was also the fact that operations, including the ATF and JTF HQs, were based out of an air base that already had a support hub prior to this specific operation. During Op IMPACT, the Operational Support Hub remained in place, and a full Joint Task Force Support Cell (JTFSC) remained throughout the entire operation. These multiple organizations created a need for a large footprint in theatre, resulting in even more personnel required to maintain the resulting infrastructure.

## **CONCLUSION**

20. The ATF construct has done well at giving the RCAF sound doctrine to follow and a common approach to deploying task tailored forces. As the doctrine is relatively new, there are ways to improve on the concept. The first lesson to be learned is that the RCAF needs to train like it fights. Following the same process for FG and FE missions is critical in ensuring personnel understand the concept of an ATF. For FG missions, Wing Commanders should give proper guidance to ATF Comds through an exercise directive, similar to a TOCA message.

21. The second lesson that can make an ATF more efficient is to limit the footprint of the actual ATF in theatre. The more reliance placed on reach-back, including having dedicated reach back teams for each operation can limit the footprint in theatre. Though some issues need to be sorted out when creating reach back teams, the smaller footprints created in theatre will allow ATFs to be more agile and efficient.

22. The ATF construct has made the RCAF much more predictable in how it deploys assets to project air power globally. This process has been successfully utilized on recent missions such as Op IMPACT and Op RENAISSANCE, though room for improvement exists. Though the ATF construct is a relatively new concept, the RCAF can continually strive to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its forces around the globe.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

23. ATF Comds that are tasked to exercises for FG should be given an exercise directive immediately upon their assignment dictating what support they can expect from units and what authorities they are able to operate under while on exercise. If units from multiple wings fall

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<sup>11</sup> Department of National Defence, *Honours and Awards Bestowed Upon Members of the Canadian Forces*. (Ottawa: 2008), 23.

under a single ATF Comd for an exercise, an MOU should also be drafted between commanders stating what authorities the ATF Comd holds over those individuals and equipment.

24. Create a reach back team for each ATF that is deployed as an expeditionary force. This team should consist of administrative support personnel, including clerical support, mission support operators and intelligence operators. These reach back teams should be tasked only with supporting the operation and work on the same battle rhythm as the individuals in theatre.

25. Update the CAF honours and awards system to recognize support to operations by members remaining within Canada.

26. An efficiency study should be required when an ATF and JTF are to be co-located to ensure no redundancy in staff roles.



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