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EMPOWERING THE ARMY RESERVE TO BALANCE THE TOOTH-TO-TAIL RATIO

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THE TOOTH-TO-TAIL RATIO**

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AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to illustrate how the effective training and employment of Army Reserve (ARes) soldiers will enable Regular Force (RegF) members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to adapt to the Future Land Operating Environment (FLOE) and maintain an acceptable “tooth-to-tail” ratio as the demand for enablers increases. This paper will suggest improvements to manning at ARes units and Collective Training (CT) in order to provide the flexibility needed for RegF Combat Arms soldiers (Infantry, Armoured, Artillery, Combat Engineers) to fulfill secondary roles as enablers. Empowering the ARes to provide substantial combat forces in times of war will ensure that the CAF can maintain “the necessary mass to perform either stability or combat functions”¹ as the RegF evolves to succeed in the FLOE.

INTRODUCTION

2. The Canadian Army (CA) is concerned that the “tooth-to-tail” (combat versus support) ratio will skew in favour of more “tail” in the future. It claims that “operations in the future will demand more ‘enablers’ (...in the ‘Sense’ operational function) and sustainment, at the expense of Act (generally manoeuvre forces and fires, excepting some ‘enablers’ such as influence activities and aspects of cyber-operations).”² This becomes problematic if combat arms soldiers Occupational Transfer (OT) to support trades and/or their positions are transferred to those trades because, under the current construct, it will erode the CA’s ability to generate combat-ready forces across three brigades.

3. As an Artillery Officer who has spent significant time both in Recruiting and as the Commanding Officer (CO) of an ARes unit, this paper will examine the author’s personal experience while training an ARes Independent Field Battery and working within a Reserve Brigade. Hopefully these experiences provide a unique perspective about the potential of the ARes to shoulder more of the burden of generating forces for stability and/or combat operations.

DISCUSSION

4. *Close Engagement – Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty* describes several considerations for the future of the CA as it evolves towards conducting Adaptive Dispersed Operations (ADO) over the next fifteen years. “Organizing, equipping and training balanced, agile and adaptive formations, units and sub-units in order to effectively form and employ empowered combat arms teams,”³ is one of the three key areas identified as needing special attention over the next ten to fifteen years. These areas

¹ “JCSP 47 DS 545 Service Paper Topics List AO 1 Jan (2),” n.d.

² Ibid.

³ Canadian Army Land Warfare Centre, *Close Engagement Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty* (Kingston, 2019), 7.

have not been strengths of the CA in the ten years since combat operations in Afghanistan ceased. The serviceability of various fleets of vehicles is laughable, the CA struggles with both recruiting and retention, and the “one Army” team mentality described in *Close Engagement* has yet to materialize as ARes soldiers are often treated with disdain by their RegF counterparts. These are not indicators of a balanced, agile, and adaptive formation.

5. Op MOBILE “was the Canadian Force’s participation in the international response to the popular uprising in Libya against the regime of Moammar Gadhafi”⁴ from Feb to Oct 2011. The mission relied heavily on airpower to deliver kinetic effects as well as conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Besides some special operations forces (SOF) deployed in the area, no Canadian ground troops were sent to engage the enemy or provide security after the bombing stopped. The impression is that the Canadian government does not want the CA to become embroiled in long, drawn-out stability operations akin to what was experienced in Afghanistan.

6. Op REASSURANCE is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) mission to provide assurance and deterrence measures in Central and Eastern Europe. These measures “aim to reinforce NATO’s collective defence. [The mission] also shows the strength of Allied solidarity.”⁵ There are approximately 500 soldiers conducting training with the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battle Group (BG) in Latvia. While ensuring that our NATO allies in eastern Europe are secure is an important mission, it is highly unlikely that Russia will do anything that would constitute an overt act of war against a NATO country.

7. If airpower and SOF are going to be employed to deliver the preponderance of kinetic effects in future conflicts, there is little reason that the CA needs to focus so much effort on maintaining its combat capability at peak efficacy. For the past ten years, Army personnel have been relegated to symbolic shows of solidarity with our NATO alliance partners, domestic operations (DOMOPs), and disaster relief. These tasks do not require heavy armour, long-range artillery, or brigade-level deployments of troops, so training events like Ex MAPLE RESOLVE seem to be missing the mark. As a soldier, it is demoralizing to conduct months of high-readiness training away from home when there is no mission to deploy to. For these reasons, it follows that the CA does not need to emphasize combat capability and should instead shift its focus to developing “agile and adaptive formations.” As the need for new enablers such as cyber and space operators, radar technicians, and air defence systems operators increases, it makes the most sense for those positions to come from the CA RegF combat arms as its soldiers are less gainfully employed than their counterparts in the Navy and Air Force.

⁴ Canada. “Operation MOBILE.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/recently-completed/operation-mobile.html>.

⁵ Canada. “Operation REASSURANCE.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html>.

8. *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) describes the “grey zone” as the hybrid methods used by adversaries “that exists just below the threshold of armed conflict. Hybrid methods involve the coordinated application of diplomatic, informational, cyber, military and economic instruments to achieve strategic or operational objectives.”⁶ Grey Zone tactics involve the use of emergent technologies, social media, and new tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) by our adversaries. An example of this is China’s use of sand dredging vessels to overwhelm Taiwan’s coast guard by skirting its Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ) Dredging the ocean floor has also disrupted Taiwan’s fisheries and underwater communications cables.⁷ These tactics, while not direct acts of war, are deliberate attempts to undermine the authority of Taiwan’s government and intimidate its people. Western nations need to figure out how to counteract these types of threats, but they must also remain cognizant of the fact that they cannot allow their own resources to be depleted disproportionately while supporting our allies.

9. The dynamic nature of Grey Zone tactics will require the attention of RegF soldiers while the CAF develops its own TTPs to counteract them, but these are not combat functions. As such, the continued emphasis on the maintenance of combat skills appears to be misguided because it leads combat arms commanders to focus too much effort on the development and maintenance of skillsets that are rarely used. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the CAF to evolve and develop new ways to conduct training and day-to-day operations. This time of change provides an excellent opportunity for Combat Arms soldiers to transition into learning a new set of secondary skills. While this paper will not delve into the nuances of the training required to be effective in various enabler roles, it makes sense to “double-hat” combat arms soldiers versus trying to create completely new trades and recruit to fill them from outside the existing CAF workforce. These new skills will enable CA soldiers to be gainfully employed when they are not required to fulfill their primary combat functions which should aid retention by giving them a sense of purpose when there are no wars to fight. It will also make it easier for more senior soldiers to transition into positions that are not as physically demanding where their experience and expertise can still be of value.

10. There are many ways that the CA can mitigate risk and generate combat forces if the need arises. One option would be to increase the size of CSOR and give it the mandate of being ready to provide the combat capability needed for the first 6-12 months of a combat mission up to a Battle Group in size. This plan would give “hardcore” combat arms soldiers the ability to avoid having to cross-train in a secondary enabler role while ensuring that the CAF maintains sufficient combat capability to respond to a crisis. CSOR would buy time for the rest of the CA to stand up a high readiness training cycle to get a follow-on forces ready to deploy and that cycle would continue as needed similar to the way it did during the Afghanistan mission.

⁶ Canada, *Strong Secure Engaged - Canada’s Defence Policy*, 2017, 53.

⁷ Yimou Lee. “China’s latest weapon against Taiwan: the sand dredger”, *Reuters*, (Feb 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-china-security-idUSKBN2A51EJ>.

11. Another way in which the CA can bolster its combat readiness is to give the ARes clear combat readiness mission tasks and verify that readiness on an annual basis by including them in CT with RegF units. The current set of mission tasks that have been slated for ARes units under the Strengthening the Army Reserve (StAR) initiative include providing capabilities “such as Influence Activities and Arctic Response Company Groups.”⁸

12. The issue with the mission tasks described in StAR is that they feel like they are the leftovers that the RegF did not want to deal with. My former unit had the mission task of providing a gun troop that would make up part of a composite 105 mm battery, but no CT was planned that would bring that battery together or have us fall under 1 RCHA to create a composite regiment. Our sister unit was given the mission task of training a Light Counter-Mortar Radar (LCMR) Detachment but was never given the equipment that the needed to train. Influence Activities (IA) positions are notorious in ARes units for being filled by less-than-stellar soldiers who are either looking for a way to avoid having to go to the field or are simply looking for some extra Class A pay. If they are good soldiers, they are often only interested in those positions because they see them as the only way to get a deployment. The point is that the current mission tasks are not properly resourced, and COs are unwilling to give up their best and brightest to fill those roles because they are critical to the functioning of their units.

13. The StAR website also claims that “ARes Brigades and their Units will have vital missions that provide meaningful contributions to the CA mission...[which will] help drive force generation structure and efforts by attracting prospective recruits with particular interest in those Mission Tasks.”⁹ The majority of young Canadians interested in joining the ARes are not doing it to become Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) or Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) operators. They want to be soldiers that go to the field every month or so to shoot weapons, blow stuff up, and be ready to defend Canada if the need arises. Twenty-year-old college students want to brag to their friends about how hard and dangerous their training is, not tell them that they spent the entire weekend fixing the radios in the command post. This is likely why the combat arms units in 41 Canadian Brigade Group (41 CBG) had much better success with recruiting than units like 41 Signals. The author’s experience is that most ARes units can do a few things very effectively, but if there are multiple conflicting tasks, training value drops off significantly and the morale of the soldiers quickly follows. The CA should not kid itself into thinking that the provision of mundane mission tasks will result in better recruiting and retention at ARes units.

14. The provision of more Regular Force Support Staff (RSS) to ARes units makes a huge difference in the quality of training. As an Independent Battery, my unit was the equivalent in size of an infantry company, but I was given the RSS and Class B positions afforded to an infantry battalion. Due to the lack of a qualified ARes Major, both my predecessor and I were RegF officers who got to fill what is normally a Class A position.

⁸ Canadian Army. “Strengthening the Army Reserve.”
<http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/en/star/index.page>.

⁹ Ibid.

Having my own full-time Orderly Room (OR) staff and Chief Clerk, Battery Quartermaster (BQ) and Recruiter were all instrumental in ensuring that administrative issues were dealt with quickly and effectively and our recruiting files were prioritized. I also benefited from having an experienced RSS WO who was trained as an Assistant Instructor in Gunnery (AIG) and had spent many years training at the Artillery school in Gagetown. His technical gunnery skills and experience running various courses made it much easier for the unit to plan effective training and run a variety of courses in-house. My RSS Capt was a qualified Forward Observation Officer (FOO) who had just returned from a deployment in Latvia and was ready for the Army Operations Course (AOC). Having experienced full-time people who could fill gaps during training weekends to ensure that all of the critical positions were filled was crucial to our success. Sending a Lt to fill a RSS position with no concept of how to be an Adjt or an Ops O can be an extreme burden to a unit, especially when the CO is Class A and does not have the time or resources to mentor that individual.

15. By having a strong team with good technical skills and developing a learning environment in the unit, we were able to drastically increase the gunnery skills of the soldiers in the unit in the three years that we were there. We provided indirect fire support to RegF exercises like Ex MAPLE STRIKE (Joint Terminal Attack Controller training) and sent a battery to Ex ORNERY RAM (level 6 live) that fired in support of 1 RCHA fire missions for a weekend. Even though we did not complete any of the gateway training with 1 RCHA, we were able to show them our in-depth training plan and the level of training that we had accomplished during our own Field Training Exercises (FTX). This gave our RegF counterparts the confidence to let us participate in their live fire training. We were under maximum supervision to start, but it did not take long for the soldiers to earn the trust of our RegF counterparts and our guns were often ready to fire before theirs. While there is no replacement for experience, the ARes is more than capable of providing combat capability when properly trained.

CONCLUSION

16. It is unlikely that the CA will be conducting any warfighting operations in the next fifteen years. Rather than risk losing positions to stand up new capabilities such as cyber and space operators, RegF combat arms soldiers should be trained as enablers so that they can fill those roles when their combat skills are not needed. ARes units are capable of providing combat power to bolster RegF ranks in the event of a major conflict. This is how the CA will develop balanced, agile, and adaptive formations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Increase the size of CSOR to ensure that there is a high readiness BG ready to deploy at any time. This will buy time for the RegF and ARes to conduct their own high readiness training and Theatre Mission Specific Training (TMST) so that they can deploy on subsequent rotations.

18. Simplify ARes mission tasks so that they are combat-focused. If properly resourced and trained, this will give ARes units purpose and pride and will lead to increased recruiting and retention.
19. Provide more RSS to ARes units; their experience and technical expertise is key to making ARes units competent.
20. Each Division should conduct combined RegF/ARes CT at least once every two years to confirm that ARes units are meeting the requirements of their mission tasks and ensure interoperability with their RegF counterparts.

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