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How Double-Dipping Could Help to Balance the Scales and Combat the RCAF's Retention Issues

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**How Double-Dipping Could Help to Balance the Scales and
Combat the RCAF's Retention Issues**

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A SIMPLE FIX: HOW DOUBLE DIPPING COULD HELP TO BALANCE THE SCALES AND COMBAT THE RCAF'S RETENTION ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present a persuasive argument that the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) must be allowed to use Primary Reserve Force (ResF) members to a greater extent to fill vacancies, stemming in large part from retention issues, in the Regular Force (RegF) organizational structure. The current balance between ResF and RegF is not working for the RCAF and the solution, in principle, is a relatively simple fix that will be discussed throughout this paper. Due to the length of this paper and as a means of managing the scope of argument, the paper will focus exclusively on the RCAF and the ResF and RegF balance, even though other retention and workforce balance issues exist within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Also, due to relevance, the focus will be on the Primary Reserve as opposed to the other three sub-components of the Reserve Force, being the Canadian Rangers, the Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) and the Supplementary Reserve.¹

With the goal of establishing a basis for argument, a brief history of the overall issue will be identified, followed by a look at current impediments to achieving a more balanced RCAF, including unsupportive cultural norms and injurious policies and practices. Finally, with future capabilities in mind, there will be an examination of what the right balance is for the RCAF, and how to go about achieving this balance.

¹ Canada. Government of Canada. About the Reserve Force. Last Modified 15 April 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/supporting-reservists-employers/about-reserve-force.html>

While the perfect balance between RegF and ResF personnel in the RCAF is of less importance, it is clear that ResF personnel are currently being underutilized. In an ideal world, there would be more than enough RegF personnel to accomplish the mission, since they offer the most flexibility to the CAF, but that has not been the case. There are significant vacancies in a great number of occupations, and retention continues to be a problem with no apparent solution. With seemingly unsurmountable challenges over the past 30 plus years, from the decade of darkness, to numerous government imposed deficit reduction or transformation initiatives, the RCAF is in desperate need of an easy win and a better long-term government backed strategy.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Not long after the end of World War One (WWI), according to the official Government of Canada (GoC) webpage on the subject “Canada’s Air Reserve came into being on 1 April 1924 as part of the official inauguration of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).”² The next 90 plus years would see the RCAF ResF (also known as the Auxiliary) numbers increase and decrease again and again, based on the needs of the day. Technological improvements in the 1960s, such as “the introduction of more powerful radar in the Pinetree Line, resulted in the disbandment of the Auxiliary's Aircraft Control and Warning units”³ and 80% of RCAF ResF personnel resigning or being declared surplus.

With the introduction of new defence budget cuts in the 1970s, there was a resurgence of the RCAF Reserve, which allowed planners to take advantage of part-time workers to fill specific tasks in support of RegF personnel.⁴ The resurgence was

² Canada. Government of Canada. History of the Royal Canadian Air Reserve. Last Modified 06 March 2017. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/air-reserve/history-air-reserve.page>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

short-lived though, and again in the 1990s, both RegF and ResF personnel were being released in large numbers and multiple Reserve flying squadrons were either disbanded or “zero-manned.”⁵

A major shift happened in the late 1990s, and by the year 2000 “the RCAF Reserve had become an integral part of the Total Air Force.”⁶ Reserve members were occupying positions throughout the RCAF, in both a support and an operational capacity, and they were operating both domestically and internationally. The RCAF had fully embraced the “Total Force” concept and was taking advantage of highly skilled full-time ResF members to fill positions in their headquarters, wings, squadrons and units, all across the country.⁷

Following the “Great Recession” of 2007-2009 and with the anticipated end of major conflict in Afghanistan looming, a “transformation team was established in 2010 to develop ideas to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and to act as the driving force behind organizational changes needed to reposition the DND/C[A]F for the future.”⁸ A common saying in the CAF for the past decade has been “doing more with less”, and this stems most recently from the 2011 Transformation initiative, not that it was a new concept. A main goal, as stated in the report on Transformation 2011, was “reducing duplication, increasing efficiency by reducing headquarters and staffs, protecting future equipment purchases by reducing numbers of people or training levels and doing more with less.”⁹ Canada’s economy had done remarkably well in comparison to most others, but to preserve national financial security, the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Canada. Government of Canada. Report on Transformation 2011. Last modified 23 August 2016. <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/report-on-transformation-2011.html>

⁹ Ibid.

deficit had to be eliminated and the DND/CAF was expected to contribute a fair share of such reductions.¹⁰

With a new Liberal government elected in 2015, significant changes were proposed for DND's portfolio, and promises were made to once again improve the ResF, mainly through Canada's Defence Policy, Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE) initiatives.¹¹ According to Dr. David Perry, President of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, "Canadian governments post-World War II have generally sought to keep defence spending relatively low, as there is little domestic political incentive for politicians to spend more on defence."¹² Although, Dr. Perry goes on to say that "Canadian officials must always maintain the minimum level of spending necessary to keep their allies happy," while ensuring that just enough is spent to ensure the CAF in interoperable with its allies.¹³

UNDERSTANDING THE PRIMARY RESERVES

The Primary ResF, although often considered part-time, is composed of personnel operating in one of three classes of service. According to the official GoC webpage, "Class A service is the part-time employment most often associated with service in the Reserve Force. The vast majority of reservists in all sub-components serve on this basis."¹⁴ Class B and C service are described as being full-time service, or working more than 12 consecutive days. Also, Class A and B service personnel receive ResF rates of pay, and Class C service, being operational in nature, must be

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Canada. *Defence Policy – Strong, Secure, Engaged*. Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017, 67-69.

¹² Perry, David. "A Return to Realism: Canadian Defence Policy After the Great Recession." *Defence Studies* 13, no. 3 (2013): 340.

¹³ Ibid., 340.

¹⁴ Canada. Government of Canada. About the Reserve Force. Last Modified 15 April 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/supporting-reservists-employers/about-reserve-force.html>

approved by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or CDS delegates, and is paid at RegF rates of pay.¹⁵ A change to the ResF pay structure took place in 2019, which saw ResF pay increase from 85% of RegF pay to 92.8%, a move that was directly linked to Canada's defence policy, SSE.¹⁶

CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Members want to be able to choose where they live, and have more stability for their families as children age and couples get closer to their retirement, as highlighted in the 2019 CAF Regular Force retention survey. According to this survey, key reasons for leaving the CAF included “the impact of military life on spouse or partner (25.4%), job dissatisfaction (21.5%), lack of meaningful, satisfying, or challenging work (20.6%), and the lack of geographic stability (19.1%).”¹⁷ One way to satisfy the need for more meaningful work and to ensure that additional full-time CAF members remain deployable, would be to change the voluntary nature of full-time ResF members' requirement to deploy, removing the voluntary element. Exceptions would of course need to be made, being required for members who are on course, in school, away from full-time civilian employment, or in other similar situations.

Post COVID, the RCAF must take full advantage of the ability of its members to work remotely, reducing the need to move members as often. This is in line with Transformation 2011 process change initiatives, in that “postings are extremely costly in terms of both time and money, but often appear to be used haphazardly or by

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Canada. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2019/06/change-in-reserve-force-pay-structure.html>

¹⁷ Yeung, et al. *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey: Descriptive Analysis*, 2020, 21.

custom, rather than as part of a coherent force generation plan.”¹⁸ Reducing the need for 25% of postings would work both as a satisfier for RegF personnel, based on 2019 retention survey results¹⁹, and create room for additional full-time ResF personnel across the CAF.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

In the 2011 report on transformation, there was a concerted effort to reduce the number of full-time ResF personnel from 9,000 to 4,500, many of whom were working within the RCAF.²⁰ According to MGen Tremblay and Dr. Howard Coombs, a former Commander of Military Personnel Generation and an Assistant Professor at the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) respectively, “the Air Reserve is an integrated or “Total Force” organization that is fully amalgamated into the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).”²¹ The accuracy and impact of the statement is evident in the fact that it is echoed in the RCAF Reserve official webpage. In addition, MGen Tremblay and Dr. Coombs go on to say that, “Air Reservists are almost all former Regulars who have been trained in the Regular Force and have completed component transfers to the Air Reserve.”²² Therefore, a solution to the problem of having trained personnel leave, when they are arguably most valuable to the RCAF, is to take advantage of double-dipping as a retention tool. Double-dipping can mean various things, but when related to public employees and pensions, Caroline Banton from Investopedia describes it as “a legal but frowned upon practice that exploits legal

¹⁸ Canada. Government of Canada. Report on Transformation 2011. Last modified 23 August 2016. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/report-on-transformation-2011.html>

¹⁹ Yeung, et al. *The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey...*, 21.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Tremblay, Éric and Howard Coombs. "Canadian Armed Forces Reserves - Quo Vadis?" *Canadian Military Journal (Ottawa)* 16, no. 3 (2016): 20.

²² Ibid.,

loopholes. In effect, it involves retirement that is on paper only.”²³ Double-dipping may be frowned upon, but according to a 2017 CBC News article, 20 percent of Canada’s members of Parliament were double-dipping, all of whom had either federal government or CAF pensions.²⁴ Moreover, it is still perfectly acceptable to collect a CAF pension and work full-time as a public or private sector employee.

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau was vocal in making a counter argument to allowing double-dipping, indicating that he believed it was not socially acceptable, deprived younger members of opportunities to rise in the ranks and was depriving someone else of the opportunity to earn a pay check.²⁵ These would have all been valid points, if not for the fact that vacancies still existed in the organization, beyond what was being filled by full-time ResF members. Changes to the organizational structure, which limit the number of full-time ResF positions in the RCAF, to a number that is detrimental to the RCAF’s ability to effectively carryout its mandate, has been happening since its inception in 1924. Policy changes to better shape the organization to meet its goals may be a more effective way of tackling this problem.

POLICY ISSUES

In the early years of the twenty first century, a number of policy initiatives were implemented and working concurrently, or in succession, to improve and strengthen the ResF throughout the CAF. The lack of a long-term vision for Canada’s defence establishment is blatantly clear when comparing three major policy shifts in just over a decade. There was the “International Policy Statement (IPS) released in

²³ Caroline Banton, Investopedia website, last accessed 26 April, 2022. Double Dipping Definition (investopedia.com)

²⁴ Murray Brewster · CBC News. "Canadian Military Looking to Loosen Double-Dipping Rules for Ex-Soldiers | CBC News." Accessed Mar 12, 2022.

²⁵ Harris, Kathleen and NATIONAL BUREAU SUN MEDIA. 2009. "Retired Officers 'Double-Dipping' ; MILITARY: A Report Finds Top Officers can Collect both a Pension and Salary by Switching to the Reserves After Retirement." *The London Free Press*, Nov 17.

2005, which took into account the ongoing C[A]F transformation initiative of then-CDS, General Rick Hillier, and reinforced the necessity to increase the size of the Reserves.”²⁶ Hillier went on to write his memoirs, and profess “that the outcome of this period was a defence policy statement – the “Canada First Defence Strategy [CFDS]” - that provided the overarching Whole of Government (WoG) strategy for the use of Canada’s military.²⁷ Aspects of that strategy endured, but not the interest in growing the ResF. The report on Transformation 2011, following shortly after the CFDS call for an increase to the size of the ResF, argued for a drastic cut the number of full-time ResF personnel. The proposal was for a cut to full-time ResF position, by as much as 50%. This was outlined in the Primary Reserve Employment Capacity Study (PRECS), which the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) launched in 2010.²⁸ ²⁹ Finally, Canada’s Defence Policy, SSE, has once again supported the need to increase ResF numbers, but with a more moderate increase of 1,500 personnel and without the renewed investment in full-time ResF positions.³⁰

Murray Brewster, a senior defence writer for CBC News, wrote an article in the summer of 2017 following the release of SSE. In the article, the former Chief of Military Personnel (CMP), Lt.-Gen Chuck Lamarre was quoted as saying, “[double-dipping] is an important tool in retaining experienced members and "top talent".”³¹ The former CMP also said that he was expecting to have regulations changed within a year of SSE’s release, with improvements to policy restrictions for full-time reserve

²⁶ Tremblay, Éric and Howard Coombs. "Canadian Armed Forces Reserves - Quo Vadis?"..., 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Canada. Government of Canada. Report on Transformation 2011. Last modified 23 August 2016. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/report-on-transformation-2011.html>

²⁹ Tremblay, Éric and Howard Coombs. "Canadian Armed Forces Reserves - Quo Vadis?"..., 23.

³⁰ SSE. Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy. (publications.gc.ca) pages 67-69.

³¹ Murray Brewster · CBC News. "Canadian Military Looking to Loosen Double-Dipping Rules for Ex-Soldiers | CBC News." Accessed Mar 12, 2022.

service members who were collecting a pension.³² It has been almost five years since the release of SSE, and double-dipping regulations have yet to change.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

If the CAF wants to promote longevity and bolster its middle ranks, then something has to be done to change the game. As was seen in the 1970s, technological improvements can drastically reduce the requirement for personnel, but technology can also be tied to new requirements for personnel, as is the case with the emerging space, cyber and information domains. As flexible work arrangements for military members in the National Capital Region (NCR) becomes more the norm, rather than the exception, new opportunities to employ full-time ResF personnel directly in support of the RCAF mission present themselves.

The relative certainty that future transformation and budget reform initiatives will negatively impact any significant gains to ResF and RegF balancing, at least in the long-term, should be a serious concern. Plenty of historical examples exist of a constantly swinging pendulum, transitioning between a healthy force and one that has critical shortages of personnel, courtesy of the Government of Canada (GoC) and its policy shifts.

Some changes do stand the test of time, even though major shifts in policy occur. One such possible change came from Dr. Allan English, a former air navigator and war studies professor at the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC), who wrote an article in 2006, which proposed that there is opportunity for the RCAF to employ part-time ResF members to fill the Effects Based Operations (EBO) requirements. The idea was to draw from civilian ‘knowledge workers’ in order to build Reserve

³² Ibid.

squadrons, supported by RegF members, and fill gaps in EBO operations with minimal cost, commitment or additional training, as the skills required would be specifically targeted from industry.³³ This idea, if implemented, would help to fill gaps in numbers, but could also help to create a more diverse RCAF, drawing ResF personnel from ethnically and culturally diverse centers like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented a brief history of the Canadian air reserves in order to highlight some of the major transformational shifts throughout the decades and to assist with the identification of potential future challenges, while attempting to find the right balance of part-time and full-time RCAF employment. The balance between ResF and RegF has changed multiple times throughout history, in large part due to evolving global conflicts, government policy shifts, technological improvements, budget pressures and a whole host of other reasons. It is very likely that this trend will continue well into the future, especially with major cultural and environmental changes affecting the way the RCAF and the overall CAF function. This ebb and flow is something that has remained relatively constant during much of the RCAF's history.

The fact that the RCAF has been able to recover from each iterative forced reduction of the ResF numbers is a testament to its ability to do it once again, as long as the right policies are in place to grow and retain full-time ResF membership. Double-dipping was extremely popular just a decade ago and continues to be popular, even though the ResF members are not able to do it as easily through the use of a

³³ English, Doctor Allan. "'Back to the Future': A New Golden Age for the Reserve?" (2006), 92.

preferred long-term Class B contract, as they could in the past. Going back to policies on ResF employment, to reflect what was authorized prior to the 2011 transformation and PRECS review, would greatly assist the RCAF with filling in its hollow center, and retaining skilled members that may otherwise release and seek civilian employment.

The argument, posited by retired Colonel Drapeau in 2009, that full-time ResF members were holding back junior members and taking away salary opportunities from the unemployed is no longer applicable today, and was arguably not entirely true in 2011. The RCAF was extremely successful in taking advantage of the “Total Force” model, and a shift away from this model has disproportionately affected the RCAF, compared to the army and the navy, due to the fact that the majority of air reserve members were already trained senior personnel.

The 2019 CAF Regular Force retention survey clearly shows that members, at least pre-COVID, were interested in reducing the impact of military life on family, including through geographical stability, and joining the ResF would likely satisfy certain aspects of these issues. Changing policies for full-time ResF members, requiring deployability as a condition of employment, would also satisfy members’ needs in terms of offering them challenging work and thus improving job satisfaction. The ability for much of the RCAF’s senior members to take advantage of virtual or remote work, especially at the strategic level, has made it possible to employ these members from almost anywhere, which should go a long way to assisting with generating the right balance for the RCAF moving forward.

The future of the RCAF, in terms of RegF and ResF balance, is both promising and challenging at the same time. New opportunities exist to use in

leveraging diverse and skilled workers from anywhere in the country and, as Dr. English puts it, fill the EBO, which are becoming more prominent in today's conflicts. At the same time, the RCAF continues to struggle with retention issues, due to a whole host of other cultural, economic and environmental factors. Improving the ResF numbers to take advantage of a proven Total Force concept will not be an issue, as much as maintaining that balance throughout major political shifts over the coming years.

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