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Canadian Army Training Approach in the Modern Era

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PREPARE FOR THE NEXT WAR OR REMAIN IN THE PAST? CANADIAN ARMY TRAINING APPROACH IN THE MODERN ERA

AIM

1. This service paper aims to analyze key aspects of the Canadian Army's (CA) current approach to training and highlight areas where it may not be readying Canadian soldiers for success in future conflicts. It is written in response to an inquiry made by the Canadian Army Doctrine and Training Centre (CADTC) questioning if the CA's current individual and collective training approaches are effectively preparing the CA for the next war (Topic C1. Training for the Next War). This service paper will present recommendations that seek to provide actionable changes that can be adopted to better prepare the CA for the challenges that will be encountered in the future operating environment.

INTRODUCTION

2. Warfare is currently undergoing a period of rapid evolution. Technological developments have led to significant increases in the importance of new warfighting domains such as space and cyber. Established technologies such as precision-guided munitions and electronic warfare systems continue to be improved with significant increases in effectiveness and lethality and are being proliferated throughout many regions of the globe.¹ There is considered to be an "increased likelihood of great power / regional power conflict, whether directly or by proxy,"² with general war between the western states and Russia or China not seeming to be an impossibility at some point in the near future. The total dominance of the warfighting domains that the CA, often through the direct support from allies, had previously enjoyed has been reduced to the current situation where the CA must now expect the adversary to be able to achieve overmatch in capabilities such as artillery, precision-fires, cyber and on the electronic spectrum.³

3. Despite the increase in adversary capabilities, the CA retains the responsibility to be ready to defeat any adversary's land element "across the full spectrum of operations."⁴ The CA must also be ready to support the other elements of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and contribute to both joint and pan-domain operations in support of Government of Canada objectives. As pan-domain operations remains an emerging concept, the CA's contribution to the pan-domain fight will depend on investment choices made by CAF leadership. However, it must be assumed that with the current state of defence spending in Canada, the CA will likely never see the full range of technologies and equipment that larger armies are procuring and developing to be ready for future conflicts. However, this does not excuse the CA of its responsibility of being ready for operations in the future

¹ Department of National Defence. *Close Engagement: Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty: Evolving Adaptive Dispersed Operations*. (Kingston: CALWC 2019), 13-14.

² Ibid, 14.

³ John Gordon et al. *Army Fires Capabilities for 2025 and Beyond*. (Santa Monica: RAND 2019).

⁴ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*. (Ottawa: CCA 2014), 1-2-1.

operating environment and the CA can best achieve the required operational readiness by leveraging and maximizing the abilities of the true source of the CA's strength, its people. It will be only through the realistic and arduous training of its people, that the CA will develop the skills and capabilities that will be required for it to remain effective in the modern operating environment particularly when limitations to equipment and limited access to emerging technologies are taken into account.

4. Unfortunately, the current CA approach to training is not adequately preparing its soldiers for the next war and for operations in conditions where dominance of the warfighting domains is not assured. The CA appears to have adopted the dangerous mentality of an army that has been at peace for too long where easy and always basic-level training is considered good enough and where there does not seem to be an expectation that training activities provide a high standard of learning or soldier skill development as an output. To be effective, training must be challenging, varied, and engaging to participants.⁵ The capacity to fund, organize and execute training in the CA has indeed become more challenging due to many competing factors such as reduced training budgets, increased requests for assistance from civilian authorities for domestic operations and the requirement to reconstitute the force after a period of high attrition. However, some immediate measures can be taken with the resources currently available to improve the quality of training in the CA and ensure that it is more prepared for the challenges of the next war. Particularly, maximizing the value of annual Individual Battle Task Standards and collective Battle Task Standards (IBTS/BTS) training events and mandating an increase in active opposing force elements during training.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5. Despite the ongoing evolution of modern warfare and the increasing importance of integrating sophisticated technologies in military organizations, the nature of land combat still possesses some enduring characteristics that the CA must prepare its soldiers for. These characteristics include operating in conditions of uncertainty, chaos, complexity, and unpredictability.⁶ The ability to thrive in these conditions and the maintenance of the mentality of achieving mission success via any possible means must be nurtured in CA members. However, the CA is currently not maximizing the value that it derives from its investments into training and is poorly instilling those values due to how it conducts its baseline training that most soldiers in operational units participate in annually known as IBTS/BTS. IBTS/BTS is a form of continuation training and is intended to ensure that soldiers maintain and improve upon skills learned during previous military courses and training events.⁷ Unless attending a career course or participating in a major exercise, IBTS/BTS training events are often the only time each fiscal year where a soldier will conduct combat training to include firing live ammunition, conducting tactical activities such as offensive and defensive operations, or practicing general fieldcraft. Unfortunately, too often in the CA, IBTS/BTS is considered to be little more than a check-in-the-box training event, with the organizers not taking advantage of the

⁵ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*, 1-6-12.

⁶ Department of National Defence, *Land Operations*. (Ottawa: CLS 2008), 2-20.

⁷ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*, 4-3-2.

opportunity to develop a truly challenging and engaging training event. This leads to soldier complacency during the training and a lack of personal growth for the CA member participating, leading to CA members that have yet to develop the skills required to thrive in the future operating environment.

6. To be ready for the challenges of the future, the CA needs soldiers who can operate independently and who possess the ability to understand a commander's intent and can take action to achieve it without requiring direct supervision. This will be necessary due to increases in adversary precision fires capabilities, ISR technologies, and their strengths in electronic warfare. Additionally, in the future as with the present, superiority in the air, space, and cyber domains by western forces cannot be guaranteed.⁸ CA elements will need to be prepared to operate dispersed to minimize the value of that element as a target for adversary air and artillery attack, including multi-launch rocket system strikes. Additionally, it must be expected that CA elements will be subjected to electronic warfare attacks or that command posts will be targeted and destroyed leading to disruptions in communications. The loss of communications with higher headquarters must be considered the norm and not the exception, creating the situation where CA elements will need to operate based on their understanding of the situation, personal initiative, and their commander's intent. As the primary training events that the typical CA soldier participates in, each IBTS/BTS training iteration must be challenging enough and with the expectation of a high level of individual performance to develop these critical skills and the confidence to operate under the demanding conditions of the future operating environment. The CA attitude towards IBTS/BTS training must transition from where it is considered a check-in-the-box event to a true opportunity for soldier development and a critical part of the instruction and maintenance of crucial warfighting skills. While some members of the CA would argue that IBTS/BTS training in its current incarnation maintains the standard that a CA soldier requires to be effective in their battlefield role; those assumptions are outdated and do not represent a good understanding of how demotivating and uninspired much of the current IBTS/BTS training events truly are throughout the CA.

7. If the CA is to remain capable of fighting and winning in the future operating environment despite the challenges associated with potential adversaries being able to achieve overmatch in combat capabilities it must produce agile, decisive, and tactically sound commanders. This can be achieved by having to defeat an active and freethinking opposing force during the conduct of tactical training events. However, many current CA commanders have had little opportunity to test their skills and tactical knowledge against an opposing force or in scenarios where victory is not assured barring some major display of incompetence. This is despite the strong recommendation within the CA training publication that mandates commanders be confirmed as operationally ready only after completing a force-on-force training event.⁹ The CA is seemingly currently satisfied with a level of training where the performance of the basic mechanics of tactical activities is deemed sufficient at demonstrating an acceptable level of competency and readiness for operations. This leads to leaders who are accustomed to making tactical decisions that if

⁸ John Gordon et al., *Army Fires Capabilities for 2025 and Beyond*, 7.

⁹ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*, 6-4-7.

they were made in the presence of a modern peer adversary, could lead to the total destruction of their force. However, if provided the opportunity of training against an active and intelligent opposing force, commanders at all levels can gain immensely valuable experience and begin to appreciate the casualties that could be sustained when making tactical errors or the consequences of incorrectly integrating enablers such as artillery or not allowing time for ISR assets to develop situational awareness. This awareness and these skills will be necessary if CA leaders are to have the ability to defeat a modern peer adversary who will be quite capable of defeating a poorly handled CA element.

8. To maximize the value derived from force-on-force training, investments into modern weapons effects simulators will be necessary beyond what is currently available at the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre (CMTC). Systems that can simulate the effects of attacks beyond direct and indirect fire, such as electronic or cyber attacks, are critical. This would enable the provision of accurate feedback on the effectiveness of the conduct of a tactical task under the most extreme circumstances, providing an opportunity for true learning and the development of tactically sound leaders through repeated practice. Some members of the CA argue that live-fire training should be used as the primary confirmation activity, but live fire has major limitations as safety requirements often limit tactical decision-making opportunities and do not allow for opposing force engagement effects to be experienced.¹⁰ Only through the repeated practice of solving tactical problems against a real and thinking opposing force will CA leaders gain experience with encountering the worst and still finding ways to succeed, a skill that will be required for success in the future operating environment.

CONCLUSION

9. With the return of a multipolar world and the capacity of our possible adversaries to achieve overmatch and superiority in many of the warfighting domains, the effectiveness of both individual and collective training is critical if CA elements are to remain effective on the modern battlefield. The CA, like all land forces, achieves mission success from the efforts of highly motivated and intelligent soldiers who are well-trained and possess the will to win.¹¹ However, for the CA to maximize the value derived from its investment in the training of its members, it must make some changes. Firstly, the CA must reinvigorate the effectiveness of IBTS/BTS training and transform these exercises into opportunities to develop and maintain critical skills. Secondly, as “war remains adversarial...[and] a reciprocal contest of wills against opponents that think, react and adapt,”¹² the use of force-on-force training as a confirmatory activity must be integrated at all levels of training. Should the CA fail to adapt and modernize the way it trains, it could very well lead to decisive defeats on a future battlefield. The following three recommendations are intended to offer realistic and actionable measures that can be considered for implementation by the CA to increase the CA’s readiness for the challenges to come in the future.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*, 6-4-6.

¹¹ United Kingdom, *UK Land Power* (Swindon: Joint Forces Command 2008), 29.

¹² *Ibid*, 19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. It is recommended that the currency period for IBTS/BTS tactical activity qualifications be increased from the typical 12 months to 18 months. This will provide flexibility to CA units to focus on increasing the overall training value of these events and minimize the burden of conducting these activities on an annual basis. This will assist in transforming what is considered check-in-the-box training into valuable training events that can raise the overall level of CA readiness for operations in the future operating environment.

11. It is recommended that the CA reinvigorate the adherence to its current training doctrine and enforce the rule that all collective training events from Level 2 to Level 7 require a “minimum of one force-on-force iteration”¹³ for the CA element to be considered having completed the confirmation stage of the respective collective training activity. This force-on-force confirmation activity should be against an independent opposing force element operating with a certain measure of freedom of action within the exercise scenario boundaries. It is understood that this recommendation will substantially increase the complexity and resource requirements for some CA collective training, but is deemed essential if the CA is to develop leaders at all levels with the skills and tactical acumen require to be capable of operating in the modern operating environment against a highly lethal adversary.

12. It is recommended that the CA invest in establishing the capability to provide modern weapons effects simulation systems that can simulate the full spectrum of capabilities that can be expected to be encountered in modern operations. Each CA field force division should have access to a weapons effects simulator system at the main division training base to allow for continuous force-on-force training within the CA. The possibility of the creation of a CA training unit that can be used to support unit-level training events with realistic exercise designs and facilitation of force-on-force training activities should also be considered. This could be achieved by rerolling CMTC from focusing on formation-level training to supporting unit and sub-unit level training events.

¹³ Department of National Defence, *Training for Land Operations*, 6-4-7.

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