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Enhancing RCAF Security for the Future: The Need for an RCAF Air Infantry

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**ENHANCING RCAF SECURITY FOR THE FUTURE:
THE NEED FOR AN RCAF AIR INFANTRY**

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ENHANCING RCAF SECURITY FOR THE FUTURE: THE NEED FOR AN RCAF AIR INFANTRY

AIM

1. Airfields are high value targets (HVT) from an adversarial perspective. Attacking air resources has a direct effect on strategic and operational air capabilities. Hangars, control towers, and runways are all crucial for aircraft; and without these air resources and infrastructure, the RCAF would not be able to conduct air operations. Despite having defensive capabilities in the air, aircraft are extremely vulnerable when they are grounded, and are unable to defend themselves unless they are airborne. The aim of this service paper is to make an argument for the RCAF to create and adopt a specialized ground force, to provide security and force protection (FP) to RCAF forces domestically or deployed. This new force, the RCAF Air Infantry Regiment (RASIR) would be similar to the RAF Regiment and would conduct similar roles with regards to security and FP in support of air operations. This new RCAF generated ground FP regiment, would reduce the requirement on other elements, like the CA, which provides land forces to augment RCAF deployments for security and FP in support of air operations.

INTRODUCTION

2. RCAF operations are unlike those conducted by the CA and RCN. While all CAF forces require security and FP to protect personnel and key infrastructure, the requirement for airfields exceeds those of land and maritime forces. While CA forces and RCN warships have an intrinsic security and FP elements, it is not the same for RCAF aircraft. Aircraft are fragile, costly to replace, and vulnerable when grounded. They are unable to use defensive capabilities on the ground and require FP to protect them when they are hangared. Since the RCAF has a finite number of aircraft available to conduct operations, losing aircraft capacity as a result of a successful attack would be devastating due to the limited number available within the RCAF. The security and FP required to protect all air resources must be a priority for RCAF leaders as the air force modernizes for the future. There is a need for the RCAF to create a ground security force, especially with the newly announced nineteen-billion dollar investment of eighty-eight new F35's¹.

3. Currently the RCAF does not generate a dedicated ground-based security to provide FP to defend airfields, aircraft, key infrastructure, and personnel in support of Air Operations. In order to provide security to air operations, the RCAF requests personnel augmentations from other existing forces within CA or the Military Police (MPs). Domestically, in order to provide security forces for emergency situations RCAF Wings task non-operator personnel (i.e., clerks, maintainers) on a part-time basis to comprise a temporary Wing Area Security Forces (WASF) to provide security forces. RCAF modernization focused on the capabilities, platforms and people needed to meet the future needs of Canadians, our commitments to NATO and NORAD allies². The RCAF's mission "generate relevant, responsive and effective air and space power at home

¹ Murray Brewster, "Federal Government Signs Deal to Buy Fleet of F-35 Fighter Jets," News Releases, CBC News, January 9, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-f35-fighter-jet-deal-1.6707769>.

² Canada. Dept. of National Defence, "Royal Canadian Air Force Strategy," February 8, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/air-force/corporate/reports-publications/royal-canadian-air-force-strategy.html>.

and abroad³” can only be done if it considers the security of those assets and people equally as important as the aircraft needed to conduct future operations. Which is why the RCAF should consider self-generating a specialized ground force to protect airfields, aircraft, infrastructure, and personnel. To make this argument, this paper will explore the need for the RCAF to generate an Air Security Infantry Regiment or RASIR, as a means to provide self generated specialized, joint, multi-role ground force to contribute to air operations. To demonstrate this security requirement, this paper will discuss why the RCAF should generate its own security forces and will also use the six RCAF Functions as a means to communicate what roles and responsibilities RASIR forces could perform as a security and FP force contributing to the RCAF mission and spectrum of air operations.

DISCUSSION

4. RCAF modernization is structured around people, the RCAF’s ability to conduct operations, the modernization of the force, and partnering for success⁴. However, RCAF modernization should endeavor to include security as a strategic objective so that there is a mandate to address the FP requirements needed to protect the RCAF’s air power. An agile RCAF must be able to defend its resources during operations. Security and FP concerns for the RCAF are not limited to aircraft on missions, but around the airfield, and all the components required to execute air operations. This is why as part of modernization the RCAF should develop a specialized ground force to provide security and force protection (FP). A RASIR, would be akin to those that exist within the RAF Regiment and would specialize in ground airfield defense, in an AOR defined by the RAF Regiment as the ‘Complex Air Ground Environment’⁵ (CAGE).

5. As noted above, airfields are HVT’s for enemy action. An attack by a small enemy force can have significant impact on air operations; for example, the attack on Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. Camp Bastion was a large British and United States air base in southwest Afghanistan⁶. On 14 Sept 2012, “two Marines died, and six Harriers were destroyed⁷” in a sapper attack conducted by small enemy force using small and light arms⁸. The aircraft were vulnerable because they were grounded on the airfield; despite being an aircraft that specializes in ground support to land operations. US Marine and RAF security forces were able to minimize losses, but those allied forces have an inherent security component nested within their organizations. If the same type of attack had happened with RCAF personnel, the Air Detachment (Air Det) would have to rely on the arrival of a land force QRF or WASF to assist in camp or base security. The latter of those forces would be RCAF personnel who form WASFs periodically and are not proficient in airfield defense. To put the attack at Camp Bastion in a Canadian/RCAF perspective; if the RCAF had lost six F35 fighter aircrafts to a similar small arms attack after it had procured them in 2035, it would lose 7% of the F35s. This would equate to a loss of

³ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, “Royal Canadian Air Force Strategy Overview,” February 8, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/air-force/corporate/reports-publications/royal-canadian-air-force-strategy-one-page.html>.

⁴ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, “Royal Canadian Air Force Strategy.”

⁵ “Royal Air Force,” Royal Air Force, accessed February 23, 2023, <https://www.raf.mod.uk/>.

⁶ Dick Camp, “The Taliban Attack on CAMP BASTION,” *Leatherneck* 100, no. 3 (March 2017): 18–23.

⁷ Shannon W. Caudill et al., *Defending Air Bases in an Age of Insurgency: Volume 2 — Detailed Case Studies of Iraq War and Afghanistan, World War II, Ground Attacks on Airpower, Vision for 2040, Dissipating the Fog of War*, vol. 2., Book, Whole (Pacific Grove, California: Smashwords Edition, 2019).

⁸ Caudill et al.

approximately one billion three hundred thirty million dollars for the 6 aircraft under the currently purposed cost.⁹ As stated in *Defending Air Bases in an Age of Insurgency: Volume 2*: regarding the impact attacks on air bases can have on allied forces and political will, “First, the enemy will attempt to destroy critical, high-value assets. Second, it will attempt to temporarily suppress sortie generation when aircraft are needed most in a conflict or crisis. Third, it will aim to generate a “strategic event” that alters public or political support¹⁰.” If the RCAF had a dedicated security force like a RASIR, it would be able to address security concerns without having to rely on WASFs or QRFs, much like the US Marines and RAF Regiment.

6. To explore the potential advantages of establishing a distinct security ground force within the RCAF, the six functions found in RCAF doctrine: Command, Sense, Act, Shield, Sustain, and Generate, will be used as a framework to illustrate the potential benefits. This framework will elaborate on potential roles and responsibilities that a dedicated RASIR force could offer the RCAF domestically as a replacement for WASF forces; and as an expeditionary security force that specializes in airfield defence and force protection.

7. Command. Across the spectrum of air operations, command and control (C2) of RCAF forces is crucial to operational effectiveness¹¹. Wing Comds, Squadron Comds, and Air Detachment Comds (Air Det Comd) must exercise the RCAF C2 functions (Monitoring, Assessing, Planning, Directing and Coordinating) in order to organize air operations and “project air power¹²”. RASIR specialists could assist C2 at the tactical level by providing oversight of the CAGE, to enable air operations without interdiction from security threats or adversaries. Comds would have direct authority over RASIR teams, creating an efficiency in reporting of information and unifying RCAF action. Additionally, RASIR forces would specialize in air to ground operations, and be able to provide pertinent information to the common operating picture (COP) with regards to the CAGE and develop appropriate FP protocols to provide security and deter and defend air operations from the ground.

8. Sense. Comds require data to ensure they have the most accurate information for decision making. Having a clear picture of the CAGE, and how the ground environment could affect air operations, allows Comds the knowledge needed to inform the COP¹³. RASIR forces would contribute to the Sense function by gathering intelligence on potential ground based threats to provide mitigation strategies to Comds to reduce the risk to air operations. For example, RASIR forces would be specialists in MANPAD defence, and could provide specific patrols to counter enemy launch sites during expeditionary operations. Unlike aircraft that conduct ISR, RASIR forces could provide a prolonged Sense gathering functions within the CAGE that would be specific to airfield operations.

9. Shield. As noted above, airfields are target rich environments for enemy forces. Airfields are obviously impossible to disguise and do not require a sophisticated surveillance capability to determine where they are located, or what activities they conduct. As target rich environments

⁹ Brewster, “Federal Government Signs Deal to Buy Fleet of F-35 Fighter Jets.”

¹⁰ Caudill et al., *Defending Air Bases in an Age of Insurgency: Volume 2 — Detailed Case Studies of Iraq War and Afghanistan, World War II, Ground Attacks on Airpower, Vision for 2040, Dissipating the Fog of War*.

¹¹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, “Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine,” 3rd ed. (Trenton, Ont.: Canadian Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre, 2016).

¹² Canada. Dept. of National Defence.

¹³ Canada. Dept. of National Defence.

for enemy forces, airfields require an enhanced level of protection unlike normal garrisons, due to the fragility of air resources. As noted above, small arms sapper attacks can have an immediate impact over the course of a conflict¹⁴. As air theorist Giulio Douhet stated, “it is easier and more effective to destroy the enemy's aerial power by destroying his nests and eggs on the ground than to hunt his flying birds in the air¹⁵.” To this end, the protection of airfields and their assets would be the priority for a RASIR force. As noted in Sense, RASIR force could proactively defend against threats posed by enemy forces that could interfere or disrupt friendly force operations during patrols. In more dire situations, these forces would be the first line of defence for air personnel and air resources, instead of tasking non-operator personnel to provide security as part of a WASF. RASIR forces would be the appropriate response to any enemy or security threat due to their specialized training that would be tailored to defensive combat operations around key infrastructure like Aviation Petroleum (AvPOL) depots, ammo depots and control towers. Additionally, RASIR forces would be able to conduct defensive operations within hangar spaces; mitigating damage to aircraft. This specialisation is necessary to protect our current fleet but will become even more crucial in the preservation of future platforms like the F35, and the critical infrastructure needed to conduct air operations.

10. Act. As noted above in Shield, RASIR forces primary responsibility is in FP and the defense of airfields and air assets. While these forces train within the CAGE of an airfield, they are not a replacement for land forces. However, within Act there are specialized roles that RASIR personnel could perform as SMEs embedded within CA, which are similar to the functions that RAF Regiment forces provide to their land component. The first specialist function that RASIR forces could fulfill within ACT is as Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC)¹⁶ for officers, and as Forward Air Control (FAC)¹⁷ team members for NCOs; providing support to the CA¹⁸. As Air power SME's, RASIR JTAC and FAC personnel could integrate within land units and assist in the coordination of close air support (CAS) within an AOR creating “strategic effects¹⁹” during land battles. The second SME role that RASIR forces could provide under ACT is as QRF Aircraft recovery teams. These forces could retrieve or rescue downed aircraft or personnel; this is a similar role that is conducted by RAF Regiment Gunners²⁰. As stated above, RASIR forces are not a replacement for land forces, but could contribute to overall joint combat power due to shared similarities and training required for RASIR forces to work within a CAGE.

11. Sustain. The RCAF must provide trained personnel, materiel, infrastructure and services in order to conduct operations and to project air power²¹. To assist the Sustain function, RASIR

¹⁴ Caudill et al., *Defending Air Bases in an Age of Insurgency: Volume 2 — Detailed Case Studies of Iraq War and Afghanistan, World War II, Ground Attacks on Airpower, Vision for 2040, Dissipating the Fog of War*.

¹⁵ Giulio Douhet et al., *The Command of the Air*, Book, Whole (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

¹⁶ “Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC),” in *Wikipedia*, February 20, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Joint_terminal_attack_controller&oldid=1140590917.

¹⁷ “Forward Air Control (FAC),” in *Wikipedia*, August 23, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Forward_air_control&oldid=1106125870.

¹⁸ *Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) & Forward Air Control (FAC) Roles and Responsibilities*, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/>.

¹⁹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, “Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine.”

²⁰ “RAF Recruitment | RAF Regiment Gunner | Royal Air Force,” accessed February 28, 2023, <https://recruitment.raf.mod.uk/roles/roles-finder/force-protection/raf-regiment-gunner>.

²¹ Canada. Dept. of National Defence, “Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine.”

forces would contribute by providing the personnel required to protect each sustain component. By providing a qualified security force, air personnel would have some security functions alleviated from their duties. This would provide other crucial RCAF trade the time and space needed to regenerate forces and allow those personnel the opportunity to focus on primary duties instead of contributing forces to WASFs²². Having a dedicated RASIR force would provide a key service that would “bring the other three components of sustainment together at the right place and time²³”.

12. Generate. The RCAF requires personnel to be trained, properly equipped, sustained, and protected in order to conduct air operations effectively²⁴. RASIR forces can contribute to Generate in two ways. The first way a RASIR force could contribute to Generate is through recruitment of new forces. RASIR forces could offer recruits an opportunity to become operational within the RCAF outside of flying operations. Also, unlike traditional CA infantry, RASIR ground specialists may operate in less austere conditions due to the nature of working in close proximity to an airfield. The second way a RASIR force could contribute to Generate is through annual training of RCAF personnel. For example, RASIR forces could provide weapons handling or CBRN training as part of annual readiness training. Additionally, RASIR forces could also provide training tailored to airfield and personal defense, thus reducing the requirement to request support from CA to provide personnel to conduct pre-deployment training. In doing so, this would allow Comds to have C2 over combined training for deployed operations.

CONCLUSION

13. In conclusion, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) should consider adopting and establishing an Air Infantry Regiment (RASIR) in order to effectively address security needs associated with air operations. This proposed specialist force would provide the RCAF an inherent force protection capability that would understand specific air-defence requirements that must be addressed, as part of air operations within a CAGE and on an airfield. RCAF commanders would have C2 and authority over these forces and could leverage their ability to contribute to the six RCAF functions of Command, Sense, Shield, Act, Sustain and Generate. Furthermore, the proposed RASIR forces could facilitate improved joint operations by integrating with land forces to provide JTAC and FAC capabilities. Lastly, RASIR forces provide a unique recruiting avenue for new members who would aspire to join the RCAF.

²² Canada. Dept. of National Defence.

²³ Canada. Dept. of National Defence.

²⁴ Canada. Dept. of National Defence.

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