



OPERATIONALIZING THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES OPERATIONAL SHOOTING PROGRAM

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Service Paper

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OPERATIONALIZING THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES OPERATIONAL SHOOTING PROGRAM

AIM

1. In 2022 a draft copy of the updated Canadian Armed Forces Operational Shooting Programme (CAFOSP) was circulated for Canadian Army (CA) field force input before being finalized. Two years later the publication remains in draft status. While this draft contains many positive developments, significant gaps should be addressed. This represents an opportunity to reframe how the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) looks at the shooting program, to improve training effectiveness and to better support an operational mindset.

INTRODUCTION

2. During the current period of personnel shortages and reconstitution, shooting proficiency within the CA as well as small arms knowledge among non-commissioned members (NCMs) has degraded significantly. The current Canadian Forces Operational Shooting Program (CFOSP) is dated 2007. Technology has changed significantly over those 17 years, and the geopolitical environment and type of conflict the CAF is preparing for are entirely different. The CAF is also in a resource-constrained environment, and training effectiveness has suffered from a lack of management structures and informed prioritization.

3. While the CAF rightly focuses on acquiring expensive, high-technology capabilities for the future battlefield, it is failing at basic warfighting skills that only require aligning the approach not significant expense. Updates to the CAFOSP and related Canadian Army Orders (CAOs) can address these challenges while seeking to align with higher doctrine and employment concepts in building the foundation of 'combat effective, multi-purpose land forces' with an 'operational culture'.¹ The CAFOSP is not offered as a panacea to readiness challenges and addressing shooting proficiency will also require changes to resource management, policy documents, and institutional attitudes. But proficiency with service weapons is a foundational warfighting skill and it is a retention issue. This service paper will focus primarily on readiness and proficiency by looking at how the CA resources, sequences, and thinks about training with the service rifle. It will minimize comments on theories of coaching, instruction, or specific drills as these would be better discussed with NCM involvement.

¹ Department of National Defense. B-GL-310-001/AG-003, Close Engagement: Land Power in an Age of Uncertainty. (Kingston, Army Publishing Officer, 2019), 9., Department of National Defense. Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in a Dangerous World. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2023), 7.

DISCUSSION

4. In terms of scopes for the CAFOSP two viable approaches could be considered. The first is following the existing model that includes in-service weapons in the small arms category at the personal, individual, or crew-served level. A second approach would be to separate personal weapons, specifically the service rifle and pistol, under a stand-alone order that defines training progression, currency, and reporting requirements as well as additional command guidance similar to the USMC model.²

5. The current draft CAFOSP generally follows the old CFOSP model in that it is rifle and carbine centric. The main issue is a significant gap related to machine gunnery and weapon systems that are absent from the document. The document allocates significant attention to theories of shooting but does not cover theories of machine gunnery. As drafted, the publication contains the C6 General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) but does not discuss theory and does not contain the C9 Light Machine Gun (LMG), .50cal Heavy Machine Gun (HMG), or the C16 40mm Automatic Grenade Launching System (AGLS).³ The C9 LMG and .50cal HMG are both in the current CFOSP, which raises questions as to why they were removed.⁴

6. These are all in-service weapons within the CA. The CFOSP serves as the authoritative document that governs individual training progression and currency requirements prior to collective training. With a refresh already underway, broadening the scope to include theories of machine gunnery as well as range applications for all in-service personal, individual, and crew-served weapons is worth strong consideration. While proficiency with the C7/C8 Rifle has degraded in recent years, the deterioration of machine gunnery skill and knowledge is equally concerning.

7. A second approach could be a USMC model that covers the service rifle and pistol under a separate stand-alone order defining expectations, training progression, currency, and reporting requirements. In this approach, the CAFOSP would be the authoritative document for all other in-service weapons. The primary benefits of this approach would be in supporting an operational culture through a separate order that emphasizes and distinguishes the individual service rifle. A single order would be a powerful message to receptive CA junior leaders and soldiers outlining institutional expectations. The current structure has Individual Battle Task Standards (IBTS) and annual readiness requirements detailed across multiple publications and Canadian Army Orders (CAOs). These documents suffer from a lack of clear intent as they overlap in some areas, treat all training as equal, and assign problematic authorities regarding

² Headquarters United States Marine Corps. Marine Corps Order 3574.2M, Marine Corps Combat Marksmanship Programs. (6 Apr 2022).

³ Department of National Defense. B-GL-382-001/FP-001, (DRAFT) Canadian Armed Forces Operational Shooting Program. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2024).

⁴ Department of National Defense. B-GL-382-001/FP-001, Canadian Forces Operational Shooting Program. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1 Apr 2007), vii.

waivers and reporting. A stand-alone order would be easier to update than a publication, would increase clarity, and could include command intent and additional guidance on training during a period of personnel shortages and resource constraints.

8. Concerning current personnel shortages and resource constraints, the CA has not effectively reconciled two converging challenges and their impact on training. The first is that mid-level leaders between Master Corporal and Captain remain heavily over-tasked. The second is that the CA tends to privilege ammunition towards collective training (CT) over individual training (IT). This creates a dangerous situation where soldiers are routinely re-grouped based on available leadership before CT events where little cohesion exists and proficiency with individual weapons is needlessly low. An overarching order prioritizing ammunition towards IT would enable junior leaders to maximize local opportunities in the training calendar rather than waiting on unit deployments for CT events. This would put the focus on improving small arms knowledge among junior leaders and weapon proficiency among soldiers, enabling safer and more effective CT.

9. Directed ammunition prioritization would represent a departure from current practice and could be construed as micromanaging the field force. Tactical-level leadership has traditionally had the freedom to develop their training plans within loose arcs, however, a course correction is required. Tactical-level leaders will tend to overestimate their skill level, especially when developing training plans amid high personnel tempo. A field force response to high tempo and budget cuts has been a dangerous tendency to treat CT events as a box-checking exercise to be completed as quickly as possible. Reorienting on the basics and promoting excellence in core warfighting skills is a retention issue. Soldiers know when training is half-hearted and rushed. When that becomes the norm, it affects morale. Being good at the basics generates the pride and confidence that are essential to an operational mindset. However, the CAF needs to reorient on the basics and ensure time is available for junior leaders.

10. Cumbersome waiver mechanisms and awkward authorities also erode institutional credibility, highlighting a significant challenge to an operational mindset. The current year CA Operating Plan (Op Plan) lists the generation of “combat-effective, multi-purpose land forces” as its mission.⁵ CAO 24-04 Foundation Training Policy also defines foundation training as training that field force units are “mandated to conduct to maintain their core skills, particularly warfighting skills”.⁶ The problem begins as this policy also assigns responsibility to waive training standards to unit Commanding Officers. In practice, this results in mandated training remaining incomplete each year for far too many members and waivers typically not staffed at all. Waivers are supposed to be distributed to the Canadian Army Doctrine and Training Centre (CADTC) G3, but it is for information only and the process is not followed. Training deficiencies are visible to

⁵ Department of National Defense. Canadian Army Operating Plan Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Chapter 0: Commander’s Direction and Guidance. (Mar 2023), 3.

⁶ Department of National Defense. Canadian Army Order 24-04, Foundation Training Policy: Individual Training for Land Operations. (Sept 2019), 2.

higher headquarters through Monitor Mass and pressure is applied to improve. However, little actual accountability or consequence follows. It is also problematic that CAO 24-04 treats all mandated training as equal. Firing the service weapon and conducting media awareness training are both annual requirements under CAO 24-04.⁷ If maintaining core warfighting skills is the objective, then these two requirements are not the same and the authority to waive training should not be the same either.

11. By contrast, the USMC model ties currency periods to the fiscal year rather than the unfixed 12-month period the CA uses.⁸ The implication is that there is no fixed deadline and no report due on the status of incomplete training. The USMC model also describes specific circumstances and mitigation required for a waiver to be considered. In dramatic contrast to the CA, the USMC authority to waive annual marksmanship training is held by the “first general officer in a Marine’s chain of command.”⁹

12. A further institutional challenge requiring further analysis is the lack of a formalized ammunition management system integrated with CAF systems such as Monitor Mass. Neither a refreshed CAFOSP nor a stand-alone order can address this challenge, but it is related and worth commenting on. Ammunition management currently relies on ad-hoc processes led by the Strategic Joint Staff (SJS) in coordination with each element. Rough estimates are required months ahead of tactical-level fiscal year planning using manual entry and guesswork as training plans haven’t been developed. Initial allocations are assigned by SJS. G34 staff at the CA, division, and brigade levels then have a constant back-and-forth throughout the year to prioritize ammunition and resource their training plans as estimates were predictably inaccurate. Digitization is an ongoing priority for the CAF; however, this level of manual entry and the associated error should not wait on that process. Through programs such as Monitor Mass the CA knows exactly how many people must be trained. A computer program could be easily developed to digitize resource demands from CAFOSP, standardize resource packages for mandated IT and CT levels, and automatically pull personnel numbers from Monitor Mass to arrive at aggregate ammunition requirements. This would not be the whole picture, and room should be left for tactical-level leadership to develop additional training plans, but it would be a start and it would ensure the essential is resourced.

13. The draft CAFOSP does increase ammunition requirements which was raised as a concern when soliciting field force input. While training requirements cannot be divorced from reality, the doctrine publications should not be tailored to current CAF ammunition availability, especially with something as core as the service rifle. The CAFOSP as drafted does a good job delineating core, supplemental, or optional applications that local commanders can pick based on resource availability and training requirements. As previously mentioned, the field force can help mitigate this increase in ammunition by

⁷ Canadian Army Order 24-04, Annex A, 1.

⁸ Marine Corps Order 3574.2M, 2.

⁹ Marine Corps Order 3574.2M, Enclosure 1-5.

committing more of the resources already available to individual training at the unit level over CT.

14. Soldiers, for example, do not need 5 or more magazines to make a section, platoon, or company attack feasible. When CT ranges are over-resourced, the return on investment or overall training value drops. Without a focus on fundamentals, soldiers tend to practice little-to-zero fire control. CT ranges will go better when soldiers have focused on the basics prior. Reducing ammunition allocated to CT would promote better habits related to rates of fire and team mentality related to winning the firefight. To train as we fight, soldiers must practice preserving ammunition as they will not know when the fight ends in real life.

15. The draft CAFOSP also raised increased time commitments as a consideration when soliciting field force input. Like increased ammunition requirements, this should not be a primary concern for the publication. Time and people are generally solvable problems for the field force as the range applications within CAFOSP are essentially day training. What the field force needs is direction to focus on the fundamentals and ammunition allocated to do it. The updated rifle and carbine applications are going in a positive direction, the changes are on the field force to implement. If the CA genuinely wants to enable its soldiers to be more proficient, than the CA must be better at enabling the basic resources to do so.

16. Where the CAFOSP rifle and carbine applications should be improved is specific to night training as well as immediate action (IA) drills. The rationale for this argument is the 17 years since the document was updated. Technology is changing rapidly, and the geopolitical environment is very different than 2007. Today, the CA must prepare soldiers for a different type of conflict against a more technologically advanced adversary which will involve increased operations at night and in urban areas.

17. The draft publication is broken down into Program Stages corresponding with basic, intermediate, and advanced range applications. Under the current structure, applications with night vision goggles (NVGs) are only included as supplementary applications at the advanced level.¹⁰ There are no range applications involving movement with NVGs which is concerning as soldiers can progress immediately from individual static applications to CT ranges involving maneuver with a fire team partner by day and then night. The emergency reload is also the only IA drill completed, and only by day. Perhaps some of these applications are best to remain at the advanced level, however, more applications are required at the intermediate level. Training with NVGs must not be considered an advanced skill on the modern battlefield. Current applications at the intermediate level should be considered for repetition with NVGs. All IA drills should be completed by day and by night at the intermediate level. Advanced applications with NVGs should also be broadened to include some form of individual movement. Not

¹⁰ (DRAFT) Canadian Armed Forces Operational Shooting Program, 31.

every trade within the CA needs this increased training. But soldiers in combat arms units certainly do if they are to master the service rifle they are expected to fight with on the modern battlefield.

CONCLUSION

18. During the current period of personnel shortages and growing geo-political competition, the CAF remains challenged in instilling an operational mindset among its members. Significant focus and resources are being fairly dedicated to acquiring high-cost, advanced capabilities for the future battlefield against a peer adversary. However, a lack of focus on fundamental warfighting skills during the same period is eroding institutional credibility and is a retention issue for many members, especially junior leaders.

19. The ongoing review of the CAFOSP offers one approach to address this challenge and to start matching words with deeds. Recommended adjustments are not offered as a replacement line of effort for ongoing modernization initiatives. Recommendations are offered as a reminder to focus on the fundamentals that are being overlooked. Regardless of how the future battlefield evolves, warfighting skills involving proficiency with the service rifle will remain essential. If an operational mindset is the desired end-state, where soldiers have pride in their profession and the fighting cohesion required for a credible military force, then being better at the basics is not an optional endeavor.

RECOMMENDATION

20. The draft CAFOSP should be expanded to include all personal, individual, and crew-service weapons that are in service within the CA. The publication should also be expanded to include the principles and theories of machine gunnery.

21. Publish a separate Canadian Army Order specific to Individual Weapons Training providing clear details, expectations, and authorities. This order is recommended to elevate waiver authority to the Division Commander level. Training requirements should be explicitly tied to the fiscal year with overall IBTS reports due to CADTC no later than 1 April.

22. This order should include command guidance on training philosophy and ammunition prioritization that privileges unit-level IT. This would support basic resource availability and enable junior leaders to leverage day training opportunities when they arise.

23. The training progression specific to the C7/C8 rifle and carbine applications should be expanded within CAFOSP. Applications should be included at the intermediate and advanced levels to include additional training with NVGs and IA drills that will better prepare soldiers for the modern battlefield.

24. Ammunition management systems within the CA should be examined to reduce required staff effort and improve prioritization. Automation should be explored using current systems of record and standardized training resource packages as a near-term strategy. Improved efficiency and enabled foresight through standardization could also drive improved synchronization with the business planning cycle at the tactical level.

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