

**Relentless Struggle: Saving the Army Reserve 1995-2019**

by C.P. Champion

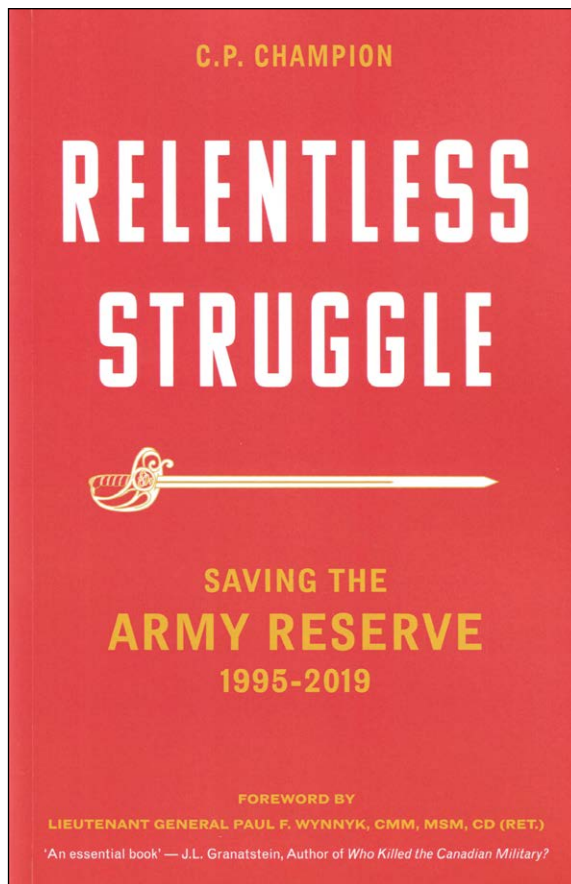
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Reviewed by Wolfgang W. Riedel

For most of Canada's history, its army was one predominantly made up of part-time reservists assisted by a small group of full-time soldiers dedicated to training them. That structure changed in the early-1950s when Canada formed a total of four full-time brigades dedicated to countering the Communist threat in Europe. Then-Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds insisted that if Canada was to fight in Europe, its soldiers needed to be there at the start of hostilities. As Canada's full-time force expanded dramatically to its peak in 1963, its part-time force declined both in numbers and in equipment holdings. Thereafter, insufficient funding issues caused decline in both



components to the point that by 1995, there were two camps with decidedly-different viewpoints about what the future of the Army Reserve should look like.

This is the point where Champion takes up his narrative. Outraged by unilateral, detrimental initiatives by the then-commander of Central Area effecting his Army Reserve units, a group of retired officers, reserve unit honorary colonels and lieutenant colonels and other influential individuals, banded together to develop a strategic response. This group, located primarily, but not exclusively, in southern Ontario, would quickly become the nucleus of Reserves 2000, an organization that would spend the next two-and-one-half decades seeking to influence the Canadian Forces and the Government with respect to Army Reserve issues.

Champion, a former senior policy advisor to a Minister of National Defence and the current editor of *The Dorchester Review*,

took the unusual step of joining the reserves as a Guardsman, and then completing infantry training while writing this book. Commissioned by Reserves 2000 as a part of their information

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campaign, it is a history of the organization and—as the title indicates—documents their relentless struggle to save the Army Reserve during the period from 1995 to 2019. But, the book is also much more than that. Champion has augmented the very considerable archives that he was provided with numerous interviews and other material from both sides, which delve deep into the issues and personalities that shaped this fight. He ‘names names,’ and he ‘points fingers.’

The ‘struggle’ has two factions: on the one hand is Reserves 2000 and the supporters of those on part-time reserve service—the majority of the Army Reserve; on the other hand, there is the Regular Force leadership and their adjuncts, the reservists on full-time service at administrative headquarters. Funding is at the root of the issue. Funds allocated by the government are controlled by the Regular Force, which leads to inequities as to how those funds are distributed. Full-time reservists, working at Regular Force jobs, are allocated a disproportionate share of those funds; seriously undermining part-time reservists’ numbers and training. Compounding that is that the Regular Army frequently treats Army Reserve funding as a slush fund that it draws from for other projects when desired. Moreover, the Regular Force, in general, spends defence dollars poorly allocating an inordinately high amount on Regular Force and civilian pay and benefits, as well as for the administration of an ever-expanding bureaucracy, rather than on equipment and training.

The book’s main premise is that for the much of the time, the Army made plans for the Army Reserve’s future without consulting with part-time reservists, and without a larger vision for the Army Reserve’s future. Champion delves into the attitudinal differences between these two groups as they progressed over the years, and how, from time-to-time, Reserve 2000’s intervention at a political level saved the Army Reserve from serious harm from *indifferent*, or even *hostile* actions or plans generated by various Regular Force commanders or staff. However, this is not a one-sided view. The author provides explanations for why some

of these plans came into existence, and provides due credit to several politicians and Regular Force commanders who, in fact, stabilized and improved matters.

One weakness in this work is that, like Reserves 2000 itself, Champion does not deal with the fact that the Army Reserve, as constituted, is neither a *lethal* nor a *credible* military force and cannot be fixed by mere ‘fine tuning.’ Dedicated funding and larger numbers alone will not cure the inherent problems that have plagued it for over a half-a- century. Neither will Regular Force attempts to amalgamate into ‘tactical groupings’ nor will assignments to such make-work capabilities as ‘Light Urban Search and Rescue.’ Those initiatives have failed in the past. A much greater vision for the Army Reserve and the Army as a whole is needed.

Champion’s book stands alone in its field. In large part, he exposes us to how ‘sausages are made’ within the halls of various Canadian military headquarters, and on Parliament Hill. I spent many of the years in question on the Chief of Reserves and Cadets Council, and while I could see the end result of the problems we faced, the reality of why much of that happened was hidden behind a bureaucratic curtain. Champion has torn much of that curtain away. More importantly, he exposes us as to how fragile an organization the Army Reserve is and how its well-being is too often dependent upon serendipity, or the vagaries of a single politician, commander, or even a single staff officer. It is an excellent, well researched and well written volume that ought to be mandatory reading for all officers.

Colonel (ret’d) Wolfgang W. Riedel, OMM, CD, QC *has served for forty-four years in the ranks and as an officer in the Regular Force and the Reserve Force in the artillery, infantry and as a legal officer with the Office of the Judge Advocate General. As Deputy Judge Advocate General - Reserves he was Canada’s Senior Reserve Force Legal Officer and was a member of the Chief of Reserves and Cadets Council.*