



DND Photo, ISC94-2160

A Canadian soldier visiting an orphanage adopted by the Canadian contingent in Rwanda during Operation "Lance", September 1994.

ARTICULATING THE VISION OF THE CANADIAN OFFICER CORPS OF 2020: UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES

by Brigadier-General Charles Lemieux

The purpose of this article is to report on how the operational experiences of Canadian Forces (CF) officers in the past decade have contributed to the development of the vision for the Canadian officer corps of the future, a project known as Officership 2020. It will also outline briefly some of the activities that are being initiated to bring Officership 2020 from being a strategic vision to a project with practical results.

To begin, I would like to relate three incidents from my personal experience in the former Yugoslavia that illustrate the types of leadership and ethical challenges that have confronted the Canadian Forces since the end of the Cold War.

On 1 March 1994, I was advised by the J3 Operations at National Defence Headquarters that I was required to be in Sarajevo in seven days to begin a year-long assignment as Chief of Staff Operations of the United Nations Protection Force Headquarters (UNPROFOR HQ) in Sarajevo. A few days earlier, the Canadian officer I was to replace had been seconded to the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary

General in Zagreb. This is perhaps typical of how CF members were sent on short notice as individual augmentation to operational missions, and it is illustrative of the tempo, scope and intensity of operations that characterize the post-Cold War period.

I arrived in Sarajevo on 21 March 1994. Six weeks earlier a single 120mm mortar shell had killed 68 people and injured another 120. This 'Marketplace Massacre', as it came to be called, was the bloodiest single incident of the war up to that time, and it led to the warring factions acceding to a NATO ultimatum to put their heavy guns under UN control. NATO and UNPROFOR both now had a share in the response to agreement violations, which was an obvious leap in the complexity of the situation.

Six months later, and only a few days after my arrival as the UN Commander in the Bihac Enclave in western Bosnia, Serb forces denied access into and out of the enclave. It was 60 long days before the

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Carter-negotiated cease fire partially ended this siege.¹ It was like being ‘dropped into the unknown’, and I struggled with the challenge of trying ‘to make a difference’ to the nearly 140,000 Bosnians who were surrounded and being attacked by Serb forces. There was nothing to which I could relate that could help guide me through this difficult situation — other than my values

The operations conducted over the course of the last decade are filled with similar stories of Canadian Forces members performing their duty honorably, and at times achieving near miracles in support of the people they were assigned to help.

For the Cold War generation of officers and NCOs, the leadership and ethical challenges posed by these ambiguous missions were significant. Conditioned by an environment where all possible contingencies and

occupied the attention of a pressured CF leadership, who were supported by shrinking headquarters while the tempo and ambiguity inherent in the post-Cold War operations increased enormously. Not surprisingly, much more had to be done with considerably less, with the result that the traditional divide between headquarters and the field grew ever wider. At the same time, the proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia revealed that there were serious leadership deficiencies in the CF.

It was against this background that General Baril, then Chief of the Defence Staff, created the Office of his Special Advisor on Professional Development, whose task was to define the professional development requirements of the CF leadership of the future and develop an implementation strategy to transition from philosophy to results. It was the CDS’s belief that the CF needed to

produce a new generation of leaders who would reflect the values and attributes essential for the future. The result of the work, closely guided by the CDS and members of his Armed Forces Council, is *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century: Strategic Guidance for the CF Officer Corps and the Officer Professional Development System* or *Officership 2020*. This will soon be followed by a sister document on the NCM Corps of 2020, developed using the same methodology and with the same high-level commitment. These strategic guidance principles and ideas will affect every aspect of CF leadership development — training, education, self-development and experience — from entry to retirement.

A major component in the development of *Officership 2020* was the “Debrief the Leaders” project.³ This was initiated with the specific purpose of extracting and analyzing the important command, leadership, ethical and moral experiences of officers so they could be exploited in the development of officer education and training. The project’s conclusions and recommendations were needed to assist in defining the ‘capability gap’ that would exist between the qualities required of the officer today and those needed in the future if nothing were done to bridge the difference. This gap analysis was central to the development of the *Officership 2020* strategic objectives.

The “Debrief the Leaders” project gathered the experiences and views of over 800 officers, from second lieutenant to general. All operational environments were included, and gender and bilingual factors were accommodated in a statistically valid manner. The research model also addressed the full range of operations conducted in the 1990s at home and abroad. The project consisted of three components, the first being an elicitation study, where focus groups identified substantive issues and themes. These were then investigat-



Author's Photo

Residents of the town of Bihac, Bosnia, cut wood used for heating and cooking.

their generally agreed responses had been rehearsed in detail, they had been plunged into chaotic operations which traditional doctrines had not foreseen. General Shinseki, the Chief of Staff of the US Army spoke of his command experience in Bosnia in the following terms, “It’s the most difficult leadership experience I have ever had. Nothing quite compares to this.”² The message was loud and clear. It appears that no one had anticipated the challenges and demands of the post-Cold War security environment.

At home, governments and institutions, and particularly the Canadian Forces, were faced with unprecedented scrutiny and demands for increased accountability, transparency and effective governance, all the while being subjected to large reductions in financial and personnel resources.

Managing the deep cuts necessitated by the government’s debt and deficit reduction initiatives fully

ed in greater depth through a survey questionnaire and an interview programme. The issues addressed included training, leadership, coping with the media, dealing with cultures, decision-making and communications, both on the ground and with headquarters. The Somalia Report was also used as a primary source of information about the personal qualities deemed essential for CF officers, especially in the context of peace support missions.

MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 1990s

It is not surprising that a study of this magnitude would discover both the deficiencies and the strengths of the Canadian officer corps. There were a number of elements where there was a general consensus among the officers interviewed. They felt enormous pride for what they and their units had achieved under very difficult circumstances. There was pride in the high ethical standards they brought to their respective missions, and in the high level of tactical competence that had been imparted through rigorous training programmes throughout the CF. They were proud of their professional work ethic that combined physical and moral courage, perseverance and commitment, and there was a genuine desire to make a difference personally and professionally. Many lessons were derived, several of which are discussed below.

THE NATIONAL CHAIN OF COMMAND

One officer expressed his frustrations with the chain of command by saying, "It was always difficult to get NDHQ to understand the situation on the ground." Indeed, almost 50 percent of officers surveyed expressed serious reservations about the chain of command, and especially with National Defence Headquarters.

The lack of responsiveness of the chain of command can be explained in part by its lack of robustness at the operational and strategic levels of command, a consequence of the NATO command arrangement during the Cold War years, when NDHQ played only a minor role. At NDHQ, strategic- and operational-level functions had become inextricably mixed. In time, the addition of a robust National Command Element, independent of the in-theatre mission chain of command structure, separated these functions, and provided a dedicated and responsive in-theatre national command structure to deal with operational-level matters.

A clear division of responsibility between the operational and strategic levels of command was further developed during the national contingency planning conducted for the year 2000 transition and other large domestic operations. The Joint Operations Group was created to provide a rapidly deployable operational-level command and control capability. It now includes a Theater Activation Team deployable at 48 hours notice into a

new mission area to provide the advance capability required for mission start-up. This Joint Operations Group element is progressively replaced within approximately 40 days by permanent National Command and National Support Elements for the remainder of the time Canadians participate in the mission.

THE PRINCIPLE OF 'MISSION – OWN TROOPS – THEN SELF'

In discussing the ambiguity of situations that placed his troops in danger, one officer stated, "it was a real dilemma how to preserve the mission while preserving my troops..."

The principle of 'mission – own troops – then self' is embedded in doctrine, and it remains the core element of military professionalism. This trinity of priorities is linked to the unlimited liability to sacrifice in defence of the homeland, Canadian values and national interests. "Debrief the Leaders" brought this issue to the heart of the challenges of the 1990s, and presumably of the future.

In conventional military doctrine, there is an expectation of clarity in the missions assigned, and at every level of command an effort is made to further reduce any level of ambiguity. So, although missions may be difficult to execute, their purpose is nonetheless intended to be easy to understand. However, in conflict-resolution operations, mandates which are delicately negotiated at the highest political levels affect the entire operation: they are invariably ambiguous and they generate ambiguous missions. For example, the UN mandate to



A Bosnian Croat brigade commander shows the author the destroyed Catholic church in Zavalje, west of Bihac, recaptured the day before by Bosnian government troops, February 1995.

protect the population of six designated 'safe areas' in the Bosnian conflict demonstrated this dilemma: it was not backed with adequate force levels or appropriate rules of engagement, and this permitted the Serb attack on Srebrenica and the subsequent brutal treatment of the population to take place.

The military intervention authorized by the UN Security Council resolution in response to the November 1996 refugee crisis on the border between Rwanda and Zaïre is illustrative of the capacity of the international community to design and undertake a mission with extremely limited objectives. The mandate deliberately excluded the task of creating safe corridors for the return of the refugees, limiting the

experienced extreme frustration; it was impossible to set one standard among diverse contingents.”

Unit and formation cohesion is without question the single most important contributing factor to readiness for operational deployment. In this study, the most important personnel issue that emerged was the propensity to raise or assemble ad hoc units, which significantly reduced cohesion, increased stress, and adversely affected morale and operational effectiveness.

Several policies are now in place to ensure unit cohesion before deployment. They aim to ensure that contingents assemble early enough to develop the essential personal bonds, mutual trust and confidence that alone can stand the strains of long and dangerous deployments.

In terms of international formations, the problems of cultural, doctrinal, tactical and structural differences often make mission cohesion very difficult, if not impossible. This reality must be mitigated by means of heightened cultural awareness, with specific focus on the diversity of military cultures alongside which the CF must operate. These skills can only be acquired through comprehensive education and training that must be part of pre-deployment activities.

Those assigned as individual augmentation to UN mission headquarters confront the same cultural and ethical challenges, and they too must have the benefit of cultural awareness training to enable them to function effectively within multinational headquarters.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

One officer concluded his interview by saying, “You cannot gain the initiative or maintain the momentum essential for the successful pursuit of your mission if you are out of touch with the nuances, the customs, the subliminal messages being passed around you with impunity by the co-belligerents.”

The majority of officers surveyed rated a lack of knowledge and understanding of the culture in which they were operating as their greatest deficiency. This cultural dimension applies not only to effective interpersonal relations with the local population, but also with other military forces and organizations. ‘Cultural interoperability’, as opposed to technical interoperability, with other countries’ armed forces and agencies may be one of the major challenges of the future. Patience, social understanding and tolerance for cultural differences will be essential to operational success. Officership 2020 will promote the intellectual development of officers beyond battlefield skills, to include also a knowledge and understanding of the political, social, cultural and economic factors shaping diverse societies and the international order.

THE ETHICAL CONTEXT

One officer summarized the ethical challenges he faced in the following terms: “There is no black and white in peace operations. There is a heck of lot of gray.”



Author's Photo

Some of the more than 20 thousand refugees returning to Rwanda from eastern Zaïre in November 1996. An Ottawa resident from the Canadian International Development Agency was assigned as humanitarian advisor to the commander of the Multinational Force.

mission to facilitating the immediate return of humanitarian organizations and the delivery of relief supplies, and to facilitating the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Once that was achieved, the mission was over. Resolving political differences in the region was not part of the mandate.

These examples are not unique, and at the tactical level they result in a daily regimen of issues that lead on-scene commanders to question the doctrinal ranking of ‘mission – own troops – then self’. These stressful situations result in a deep moral dilemma about invoking the unlimited liability contract, and changing the order of priorities to ‘own troops – mission – then self’ often appears to be more appropriate to the situation.

The concept of ‘mission first’ in the context of complex multi-disciplinary conflict-resolution operations merits further reflection. It may be that there is no solution to these dilemmas, and that we must shift the focus from creating a set of rules to developing officers capable of dealing with these dynamic questions. Officership 2020 aims to develop these qualities in officers by emphasizing critical thinking, sound leadership and high standards of professionalism.

UNIT AND FORMATION COHESION

The difficulties engendered by the lack of cohesion in deployed formations and units have led to some heartfelt comments by officers: “ad hocery is bad.” “I

Frequently the problem at hand has not been one of victim and aggressor, but simply man's inhumanity to man. Because of a limited operational mandate, tight rules of engagement or lack of resources, CF members have often been forced to observe repugnant situations, and even atrocities, and not be able to do anything about them. Given the determination of our soldiers to 'make a difference', the effect of their ethical dilemmas has been profound.

Operations in the 1990s exposed CF members to the tragic extremes of the human condition. They witnessed famine, disease, violence, war, unspeakable atrocities, and genocide. Maintaining emotional balance in the face of such adversity requires maturity, hardiness, balance, adaptability and the ability to cope under the most numbing stress. In that context, an under-emphasized competency required of CF officers is the ability to resist the stressful effects of ethical dilemmas, or the need for increased emotional competency. Very little understanding exists about how best to achieve this competency, and it must be explored through the multi-disciplinary approach that is being advanced by Officership 2020.

THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Officers spoke of the changing nature of conflict in the following terms: "I am constantly dropped into the unknown. Running a war is easy. What is difficult is dealing with the complexities and ambiguities of multinational peace operations. You can't train for the level of stress encountered."

These thoughts bring to the forefront the complexity, ambiguity, tempo, danger and frustrations of modern operations.

Central to the leadership challenges faced by CF officers is the evolution of the role played by the UN in virtually all the operations of the 1990s. In the past, the UN had helped to manage brushfire conflicts on the periphery of the superpower confrontation. As reported by Ambassador Brahimi, Chairman of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, "When the focus shifted to conflict resolution, the Security Council assigned very ambiguous mandates to a totally unprepared Secretariat that had no experience, little expertise and practically no politico-military staff structure to deal with the problem."⁴ This situation was exacerbated by the UN's reliance on military forces contributed by nations with sometimes dubious agendas, who often provide troops completely unprepared and ill-equipped for the task at hand. Too often the result has been confusion and ambiguity on the ground, and international action which seemed totally inadequate in the face of brutal conflict and large-scale

civil wars. This is the cauldron into which units and individuals of the CF have been dropped in the past decade. In his August 2000 report, Ambassador Brahimi concluded that, "Over the past decade, the UN has repeatedly failed to meet the challenge and it can do no better now."

One of the factors underlying Canadian Forces involvement in peacekeeping missions through the 1970s and 1980s was the assumption that the ability of officers to cope with the complexities of NATO high-intensity operations would more than adequately prepare them for the lesser demands of peacekeeping operations. This assumption was based on operational experience with UN missions in the Middle East and in Cyprus, but, as we have seen, modern-day peace support operations have been quite different.

CF officers who were trained in the context of the Cold War and focused on tactical level operations did not readily grasp the political, strategic and operational dimensions that have transformed how, when, and to what purpose military force is used in the context of conflict resolution. Many officers were simply not comfortable in this new environment, where they did not know who the main actors were, whether they were nation-states or international organizations. Clearly, the role of military forces in international relations was changing and, in the early 1990s, the CF was unprepared for this new level of complexity.

The conventional model of conflict that assigns differing functions to the levels of strategy, operations and tactics remains relevant and coherent in the new global environment. But now, the strategic, operational and



Canadian soldiers keeping a watchful eye on the West Bridge in Mitrovica in Kosovo, the scene of violent protests by Albanians and Serbs living in the city, February 2000.

tactical levels, indeed the entire military framework, is most often subordinated to diplomatic, economic, humanitarian and even cultural factors. External elements such as international organizations and non-governmental organizations are now always present in con-

flict-resolution operations, and commanders at all levels must understand them, cooperate with them, and appreciate their contribution to the overall goal. It is also important for officers to realize that the effects of a tactical decision, at any level, may have strategic and political ramifications of considerable consequence. This is the intricate and politically charged 'CNN' environment that has produced the 'strategic corporal', where individual soldiers, sailors and air personnel have to make decisions and act with a full awareness of the potential results of their actions, often in full view of the media who are reporting events as they are unfolding.

In the context of these modern international security operations, tactical commanders must be able to fight. However, fighting is not the primary task assigned. Rather, the rationale for applying military force is the cessation of violence, not military victory. A challenging requirement for the officers of the future is the need to develop a military ethos that retains the concept of the soldier as a 'warrior', complemented by a view of the soldier as a 'diplomat and scholar'. The enhanced education component of Officership 2020 will help deliver that soldier.

INCORPORATING THE LESSONS INTO OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The findings of the "Debrief the Leaders" project were of significant assistance in identifying the qualities and interpersonal and cognitive skills officers will need to meet the operational challenges of the future. The Officership 2020 development process incorporated these conclusions, and the net was cast even wider to produce an Officer Professional Development system that will better prepare generations of leaders for future demands

The strategic objectives selected to deliver the vision of the Canadian officer corps of the future are

being achieved through a number of key initiatives to 'kick-start' implementation and provide visible momentum. The professional development system will be provided with strong centralized governance that will give it authority, guidance, oversight, resources and continuity through the establishment of the Canadian Defence Academy.⁵ The activities coordinated by this institution will add further rigor to professional military education, advance the profession of arms in Canada, enable CF members to fully realize their intellectual potential, support life-long learning and, finally, ensure that CF educational processes are coherent, with education effectively integrated with training and career development.

Existing Canadian Forces institutions will begin to emphasize their role as centres or cells of excellence, which consists of creating, acquiring and sharing knowledge in support of learning across the CF. A long-term advantage to the professional development system will be to increase its agility, responsiveness and timeliness to anticipate and adapt to the changing security environment.

CONCLUSION

The "Debrief the Leaders" project was a key element in the development of Officership 2020. It is on the basis of such detailed research that Officership 2020 recognizes that today's officers must augment their existing qualities and competencies to meet the operational challenges of 2020. It establishes a better balance between education, self-development, training and experience to ensure that the officer corps of the Canadian Forces continuously anticipates future requirements.



NOTES

1. The term 'Serb forces' refers to ethnic Serbs from the immediate region of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, and also includes the rebel Bosnian Abdic forces who attacked and re-entered the Bihac Enclave at Velika-Kladusa in early December 1994.

2. Howard Olsen and John Davis, "Training U.S. Army Officers for Peace Operations – Lessons from Bosnia," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, 29 October 1999, p. 1.

3. The "Debrief the Leaders" Project (Officers) was published in May 2001. Lieutenant-Colonel Bill Bentley coordinated and guided the debriefing process and wrote the report. The elicitation study was conducted under the leadership of Mr. Ron Dickenson with the assistance of Mr. Bob Babin. The survey questionnaire was designed and its results analyzed by Major Jane Adams-Roy from the Directorate of Human Resources Research and

Evaluation.

4. Mr Lakhdar Brahimi, "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations – A far reaching report by an independent panel," United Nations Brahimi Report, 17 August 2000.

5. The Canadian Defence Academy comes into existence on 1 April 2002. The name of the institution is still under review.