

# TWICE THE CITIZEN - TWICE THE EMPLOYER

by Sergeant J.A. Hudec

**11** September 2001 will always be remembered as one of those days about which one can ask a friend, a relative or an acquaintance – “Where were you?”... or... “What were you doing when...?”

It was a bright day turned tragic, one that shocked the world, turning it in a whole new direction. In Canada, it produced a snowball effect – the Government reviewing its homeland security policies, taking a new look at the state of the nation’s armed forces, and then reacting to the pressure for increased operational commitments for a renewed war on terrorism.

Canada lost 25 citizens through the terrorist attacks perpetrated on that tragic day, and now, nearly 2100 Canadian service personnel are deployed abroad in the cause of peace, the vast majority of whom are serving in the Arabian Gulf region and southwest Asia, particularly Afghanistan. Among that dedicated group of deployed professionals are a significant number of soldiers from our Reserve Force, who are sacrificing a year of their lives to help fulfil Canada’s operational and international commitments. For these reservists, it means not only extended time away from family, but also absence from their regular civilian jobs.

## Twice the Citizen

Winston Churchill once categorized reservists as being “twice the citizen,” and that comment certainly holds true today, because Canada’s citizen soldiers make an extraordinary commitment to Canada’s international security responsibilities. Today’s Reserve Force is made up of a diverse cross-section of Canadians from every walk of life, dedicated men and women between 16 and 60 years of age, who normally volunteer to serve part-time in the Canadian Forces. But with today’s increased operational tempo, and reduced number of Regular Force soldiers available to do the job, many reservists are also volunteering to serve on a full-time basis for specific contracted positions.

## Volunteering for Military Service: A Canadian Legacy

The first militia units (now the Army Reserves) in Canada were born of operational necessity, organized by the French in 1673 in an effort to bolster the colonies’ sparse defences. All men between the ages

of 16 and 60 were ordered to report periodically for basic military training. These citizen soldiers were farmers, millwrights, shoemakers and shop owners, neighbours and family members. This was a form of conscription or mandatory service established to ensure that all available manpower was on hand to combat the enemies of New France.

By contrast, *volunteering* for military duty became an established Canadian practice during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; one that proliferated during the Boer War at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is now an integral part of our Canadian military legacy. One fine example of this trend is embodied in the Battle of the Atlantic, waged from 1939 to 1945. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) began the Second World War with 3500 personnel and 13 vessels, only six of which were destroyers. At war’s end, Canada proudly boasted the third largest navy in the world with 373 fighting ships and more than 110,000 members, each and every one of them a volunteer.

There has been no *legislated* call-up of reservists in Canada for many years. During peacetime, our reservists volunteer one or two nights a week, a weekend a month, and, during the summer, a usual two-week concentrated training period. Furthermore, some members can elect to serve for up to four months for courses and training. Now totalling some 26,000 men and women, the Reserve Force has participated in our greatest endeavours over the past century’s conflicts, as well as in the numerous UN peace support and peacekeeping operations of the last 40 years. In the latter case, some reservists have given up their civilian employment, or postponed university education, in order to put their life on the line and fulfil a commitment to their country. They feel this commitment so strongly that they, at times, are prepared to sacrifice their own financial security, and time away from family and friends, to help Canada’s global neighbours in need.

## Job Protection

However, a new understanding between Canadian employers and their personnel who serve the country in military service has been in the making for the last few years, and is slowly evolving into a team alliance between employer and employee.

Some countries with reserve forces have a process that accommodates reservists who have a full-time

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civilian job, and it provides legislated protection for their jobs and seniority whilst called away on active service. Over the years, Canada's voluntary approach has worked well in lieu of legislated job and seniority protection, but it has not eliminated the fears many Reserve Force members face when deciding to commit to any operational requirement lasting longer than 14 days. There have been many questions raised over the years about job protection legislation in Canada, mainly from the media and employers with American affiliations. The answers to all these questions to date have been that Canada does not utilize a mandatory call-up system such as that of the United States. Reserve Force service in our country remains voluntary. Thus, employer support is also voluntary.

### Twice the Employer

Many Canadian employers may not be aware that some of their employees are Reserve Force members, and they may not have even considered a requirement to support time off for these men and women so engaged. However, in the past 10 years, increasing numbers of Canadian businesses are becoming "twice the employer" through their recognition that Canada's citizen soldiers need crucial time off in order to master the requisite military skills to do their part in the renewed war on terrorism, and to represent their country in today's rapidly evolving and dangerous world. The Canadian Forces Liaison Council (CFLC) administers Canada's reserve force employer support programme. And the number of supportive employers registered with CFLC has grown from a mere 16 to 4435 in the last 10 years.

Canada's largest employer, the federal government, has been leading the way in this area, and it has thrown its weight behind the Reserve Force by formally signing a Statement of Employer Support. On 9 May 2003, 30 Reserve Force members, who were also public service employees representing 21 different departments and agencies, assembled on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They were there to witness the signing of a statement of support reiterating the federal government's

commitment to give members of the Public Service of Canada time off for military duty.

The next day, 10 May 2003, was marked with another ceremony, the 2003 National Employer Support awards. This was an occasion for celebrating the outstanding Canadian businesses and employers from across Canada who have answered the call in recognizing the value and importance of Canada's Reserve Force, and those contributions are now acknowledged through the Ottawa ceremony every two years.

Canadian businesses that have granted their employees time off for military service are quickly realizing that military training of their personnel brings return benefits for their own companies or departments. Reserve force training provides employers with a well-trained and skilled individual who can communicate, think, apply knowledge, and learn rapidly in a high-pressure environment. Reservist attributes often include a highly developed sense of loyalty, dedication and teamwork, and many return from operational deployments with a newfound sense of self-esteem, confidence and integrity, which, in turn, permeates the civilian workplace.

The Department of National Defence is very grateful that many Canadian employers have answered the call to support our citizen soldiers, and it encourages and welcomes inquiries from business leaders and employers with respect to how they may also become "twice the employer" in the ongoing campaign to support our Reserve Force's proud heritage and record of service.

For more information on Canada's employer support programmes for the Reserve Force, call the Canadian Forces Liaison Council toll free at 1-800-567-9908, or visit [www.cflc.forces.gc.ca](http://www.cflc.forces.gc.ca)

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