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Exterior of the Mess at Collège militaire royal, Saint-Jean.

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN: 10 YEARS LATER

by Richard Carrier

February 1994 Decision

The closing of Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean was announced in the February 1994 federal budget as part of a series of cost-cutting measures that extended to all government departments and agencies. As a result, the Department of National Defence (DND) was forced to make substantial budget cuts involving a number of bases and research centres.¹

Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean closed its doors in the summer of 1995. The institution had been conceived and designed as a pathway for French-Canadians and Quebecers to enter the Canadian officer corps. It was largely successful in achieving this goal throughout its existence, especially by giving young francophones, as well as many Anglophones, the opportunity to become bilingual officers.²

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The Search for a Solution

The closing of the Collège had immediate consequences. Quebec high school graduates were unable to apply to the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston (RMC), due to a one-year gap between the Quebec secondary system and the Ontario university system, which only those having completed a year of college in Quebec could bridge. This did not go unnoticed, and a number of institutions saw an interesting opportunity resulting from this situation. For the time being, Saint-Jean officer cadets were transferred to Kingston to complete their studies. But the future remained a concern, with Canada’s only surviving military college now possibly on the way to becoming an institution with an ever dwindling presence of francophones from across the country.

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In the days following the announcement of the closing, the Dean of Academic Affairs and Services of Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ), and the Dean of Science of RMC agreed on the need to create a preparatory year for young Quebecers and anglophones from other provinces who were unable to apply directly to Kingston. Although this proposal was supported by both the Principal and the Commandant of RMC, a number of political issues had to be dealt with before it could become reality.

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A five-year agreement, signed on 17 February 1995, created a local entity, the Corporation du Campus Fort Saint-Jean, to provide a year of college education to 100 officer cadets, and also language training to a number of civil servants every year. The Cégep de Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu would be responsible for the college courses offered on campus.³ This agreement met the aims of DND as well as those of RMC, which could now undertake the transition toward a bilingual institution, since it was assured of receiving, year after year, a substantial number of francophones, mostly from Quebec.⁴

It took almost a year before discussions yielded a result. The Quebec government decided, in early 1995, to transfer management of talks with the federal government to the local Conseil économique du Haut-Richelieu. This depoliticized the issue to some extent. Indeed, local leaders wanted mostly to insure the survival of the former Collège militaire royal site. For its part, the federal government was looking for a way out of the media and political fiasco created by the closing. Specifically, DND and the Canadian Forces were looking for any solution that would guarantee the participation of francophones, and especially Quebecers, in RMC.

The Preparatory Year and the Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean: a Simple and Effective Solution

Under the new system, two distinct entities effectively came into being in the summer of 1995: the Preparatory Year and the Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean. The former Principal of Collège militaire royal was designated to head the Preparatory Year, and former professors of the Collège were appointed to deliver the courses. Formally, the administration and faculty now came under the jurisdiction of the Cégep de Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, since students in the Preparatory



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Aerial view of the Collège militaire royal in Saint-Jean, Quebec.

Year were to receive college credits. The Preparatory Year offered two specially designed general streams in science and social sciences. The Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean was placed under the command of an officer seconded from the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School. The Compagnie was housed at the Saint-Jean garrison,⁵ while the cadets took their courses, out of uniform, on the former campus of the College. Although somewhat convoluted organizationally, the structure created in August 1995 proved to be simple and effective.

The following tables chart the complement of the Preparatory Year and the Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean (renamed Escadron Richelieu in 1999-2000) since 1995. Table 1 iterates the number of francophone officer cadets enrolled in the Preparatory Year and those who followed credit courses during the Fall session.⁶ Table 2 shows the proportion of graduating officer cadets in Saint-Jean from provinces other than Quebec.

Enrolment of francophone officer cadets and percentage of total complement		
1995-1996	65	68% (95)
1996-1997	62	70% (88)
1997-1998	93	72% (129)
1998-1999	78	62% (124)
1999-2000	50	51% (97)
2000-2001	65	60% (108)
2001-2002	74	56% (132)
2002-2003	67	47% (142)
2003-2004	38	31% (121)
2004-2005	43	36% (118)
2005-2006	53	53% (100)

Table 1

The following comments apply to the preceding tables.⁷ The first table shows the francophone presence in the Preparatory Year. Since 1995-96, 1254 students were enrolled in at least one session, of whom 688 (54.8 percent) were francophones, for an average of 62.5 percent per year.⁸ Without a close review of their specific academic (or military) files, it is difficult to determine exactly how many came from Quebec. However, it can be assumed that most Quebec candidates were francophones, and that English-speaking Quebec candidates were generally from Montreal. Other francophones came primarily from New Brunswick.⁹ Over the first seven years, francophones (and therefore Quebecers) exceeded 60 percent of total enrolment on five occasions. Until 2001-02, francophones always represented over half of the officer cadet corps on campus.

The second comment highlights some specific facts about candidates originating from other provinces since 1995. Until the end of the 2001 academic year, the majority (64 percent) of these candidates – almost all of the anglophones – came from the Atlantic provinces, with Newfoundland in the lead (49 percent), followed by New Brunswick (47 percent) and Nova Scotia (40 percent). During the same period, only 38 cadets came from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. This reality largely reflects the situation of the former Collège militaire royal, which hosted mainly anglophones from Eastern Canada, while Royal Roads, situated on Vancouver Island, was the natural choice for candidates from Western Canada.

The case of Ontario deserves special mention. Until 2001, 41 Ontario candidates completed the Preparatory Year, an average of 6.8 cadets per year. In absolute numbers, this places Ontario in fourth place among provinces supplying candidates to Saint-Jean, behind Quebec, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick, although the Ontario numbers were actually negligible, given the population of the province, and that Ontarians were, in fact, virtually absent from the Preparatory Year. However, the number of Ontario candidates in Saint-Jean more than tripled between August 2001 and May 2006 – from 41 to 134 – with major increases occurring in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.¹⁰ During the same period, by contrast, the number of Newfoundlanders increased by only 17, to 66 cadets.

Finally, it can be seen that francophone enrolment starts to decrease in 1999-2000. Recruiting authorities apparently changed selection standards at that time, with applications being assessed on an absolutely

Number of graduates from provinces other than Quebec since 1995							
Provinces	Total 1995-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	Total 1995-2006
BC	12	9	3	9	7	5	45
Alberta	6	2	7	13	8	4	40
Saskatchewan	13	3	4	6	4	0	30
Manitoba	7	4	4	2	1	1	19
Ontario	41	11	13	22	23	24	134
NB	47	1	15	11	8	3	85
Nova Scotia	40	13	18	16	15	6	108
Nfld	49	6	0	4	7	4	70
PEI	7	0	0	3	3	0	13

Table 2



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Officer Cadets taking Second Language training in CMR classroom, campus Saint-Jean.

uniform basis, regardless of the province of origin, i.e. an Ontario Grade 13 graduate was assessed on the same basis as a Quebec candidate with only a Grade 11 qualification. That system – now abolished – probably created a serious imbalance in the selection process, to the expense of Quebec candidates. The number of francophones climbed again in 2000-2001, but fell once more in 2002-2003, and fell even further in 2003-2004. In addition to the new application assessment system, which may have played a major role, this can be attributed to three other specific elements.

The first factor is attributable to the Canadian Forces recruitment system. Quebec candidates for the Preparatory Year are drawn from high schools. Recruiters must therefore focus their promotional activities upon students in Secondary IV and V levels, or even earlier.¹¹ Until 1995, the number of applications was always very high. The presence of the Collège on Quebec soil, as well as the institution's reputation, were probably important factors. Following the closing of the Collège, recruitment and promotion activities were reduced, and they became irregular. The majority of Quebecers assumed that no attempt had been made to mitigate a bad decision, and that the demise of the Collège militaire royal was final. This assumption was widespread, and, indeed, many Canadian Forces recruitment centre managers did not know about the Preparatory Year. Even though the new system fulfilled the same mandate as the Collège, it did not enjoy the latter's prestige.

The second factor is perhaps related to the very success of the program created in 1995. Some have viewed the Preparatory Year as more than an opportunity for Quebec francophones and promising candidates from other provinces to complete the requirements for admission to Kingston. Thus, over the years, and especially since 2001-02, Saint-Jean received a growing number of anglophone candidates from outside Quebec (British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Ontario), whose applications were complete but weak, in the hope that an extra year of

academic application would help them pull up their marks. However, others feel that it is counterproductive to admit candidates from outside Quebec with weak high school records into the Preparatory Year. Many believe that the major purpose of the Preparatory Year is to allow Quebec candidates to fulfil the Grade 12 requirement and to give the best candidates from other provinces an opportunity to enhance their applications.

The third factor is technical in nature. The disappearance of Grade 13 in Ontario had a major effect on the Ontario and Canadian universities. The number of excellent or very good applicants from Ontario Grade 12 and Grade 13 graduating classes automatically doubled. RMC absorbed the best candidates to the extent possible, but, as Table 2 demonstrates, several were sent to the Preparatory Year, which reduced the opportunities for admission of a sizeable number of francophone candidates from other provinces who would normally have been admitted.¹² It is difficult to tell for how long the effects of this transition will be felt.

The closing of Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean deeply affected the visibility of DND in Quebec. For years, the Preparatory Year remained little known, which seriously hindered efforts to recruit Quebec high school graduates. Promotion and recruitment activities were unfocused and inconsistent. Recently, however, the RMC authorities have taken measures to correct this situation, including the appointment of a liaison officer for Quebec, whose sole task is to focus upon promotion and recruitment. After years in the shadows, the Preparatory Year is now a full-fledged component of RMC, and its faculty is on the DND payroll.

Opportunities for Expansion

The Preparatory Year has fulfilled its mandate up to this point in time, but there remain many possibilities for expansion. The program is designed currently to host 140 officer cadets every year, but there would be no major obstacles preventing Campus Saint-Jean from hosting 175 or 180 cadets, except for the limited capacity of the Kingston campus to absorb graduates. If RMC truly is to train a larger number of officers, the Preparatory Year and Campus Saint-Jean will have to be used to their full capacity. The idea of a quota applicable to francophones should be carefully examined.¹³ Recruitment in Quebec must be consistent, well thought out, and highly visible. The future of the notion of a bilingual officer corps is at stake.

With a little imagination, one can even go further. Campus Saint-Jean could host, not only a year of pre-university studies, but also first-year RMC courses. Two options are possible: either successful graduates of the Preparatory Year could stay in Saint-Jean for the first year, and perhaps even the second year of their university program – this is the most economical and most easily implemented option in the short term – or else, (and this is at first glance a more ambitious proposal) all cadets admitted to Kingston could spend their first academic year in Saint-Jean. There is no major obstacle to the feasibility of either scenario in terms of curriculum or adjustments to faculty complement. The key is to ensure that these possible scenarios have an overall positive effect, i.e. sending more second-year officer cadets (and especially more francophones from Quebec) to Kingston, and – indirectly – fostering a promising expansion of master’s and doctoral programs. In other words, the future expansion of RMC could involve the Saint-Jean campus just as much as the Kingston campus.¹⁴

Some might view these proposals as a disguised attempt to promote a reopening of Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. They are no such thing. Giving the campus a broader academic mission is not only relevant but also desirable. Saint-Jean will always have a huge advantage for anglophones in that it offers a truly francophone setting, a form of immersion that cadets directly admitted to Kingston do not experience. The Canadian Forces and RMC will be better able to reach stretched bilingualism objectives by sending more officer cadets and other ranks to Saint-Jean, for whatever programs are required.

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The Preparatory Year has been solidly in place since 1995, and has had indirect benefits by making DND visible once again in Quebec. During the summer of 2001, the Canadian Forces Management Development School left the Saint-Jean garrison to set up shop on the former Collège campus. The Continuing Studies Office of RMC opened an office in Saint-Jean in September 2001, where it continues to administer both classroom and distance education, as well as guidance services. Finally, the Canadian Defence Academy chose the site for its professional development centre for other ranks. Language training for officer cadets has also been offered every summer since 1995. Thanks to all these activities, DND is the largest client of the Corporation du Fort-Saint-Jean, the site management entity. Other projects are apparently about to be implemented. The sleepy, low-profile years for Saint-Jean may be coming to an end.

Conclusion

Some believe that the decision to close Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean was a mistake. This article does not address that issue, but rather, it seeks to highlight the college’s accomplishments since 1995. Those nostalgic for the past will say that these successes will never make up for mistakes made and injustices committed, and will never restore the site’s former prestige. Others, who look to the future, hope that the Preparatory Year and its staff provide even more services to RMC, just as the other entities undoubtedly can provide more services to the Canadian Defence Academy.



NOTES

1. It should be noted that Royal Roads Military College was closed at the same time as Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean.
2. On the topic of Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, see Jacques Castonguay, *Le Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. Une université à caractère différent*, Éditions du Septentrion, 1992.
3. The situation changed in 2000 with RMC, through an associate dean, resuming control of academic training offered during the Preparatory Year.
4. On the issue of bilingualism in Canadian military colleges, see Serge Bernier, “Le Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean : la mise en marche du concept du corps d’officiers bilingues avant l’heure”, in Yves Tremblay, Roch Legault and Jean Lamarre (eds.), *L’éducation et les militaires canadiens*, Athéna Éditions, 2004, pp. 141-154.
5. Starting in 1998, the Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean was transferred to the command of the lieutenant-colonel in charge of the Canadian Forces Management Development School.
6. Some of the figures presented in these tables include a margin of error, due to a distortion between the figures from the military unit (Compagnie Fort-Saint-Jean/Escadron Richelieu) and those from the Preparatory Year. The military figures include those enrolled in the Canadian Forces, whereas the academic figures only take into account those who were registered formally in the program’s courses. The gap is generally limited to a few individuals per year, perhaps a few tens of individuals since 1995-1996.
7. Beyond these comments, the recruitment of officer cadets for the Preparatory Year (and perhaps for the RMC as a whole) deserves an entire sociological study.
8. Prior to its closing, Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean hosted on average over 200 officer cadets, including 75 percent francophones, in its Preparatory Year.
9. Francophones from Ontario were also enrolled on several occasions.
10. The year 2003-2004 was the year of the double cohort in Ontario, following a decision to abolish Grade 13. The trend seems to be continuing, since 23 Ontario candidates were registered in the Preparatory Year at the beginning of the 2005-2006 academic year.
11. On this topic, see an unclassified internal paper by RMC associate dean Pierre Laviolette entitled *Le recrutement de francophones et l’Année préparatoire*.
12. In 2003-2004, the year of the double cohort in Ontario, 22 candidates from that province were enrolled in the Preparatory Year.
13. Some believe that the quota should be 66 percent.
14. It is undeniable that the Kingston campus has reached its full capacity at this point in time. Given this, Saint-Jean offers an escape valve by offering a potential secondary campus.