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REDEFINING THE ARMY RESERVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Dan Doran

In 2008, the Director General of Land Reserves validated the Chief of Defence Staff's functions of the Reserves as: (1) augment the Regular Force on Canadian Forces (CF) operations; (2) expand the CF in response to natural and man-made emergencies and crises; and (3) form the permanent connection between the CF and Canadian society.¹ Having been issued these directions, Reserve commanders and planners were tasked with creating a training strategy that effectively achieves all three of these objectives while continuing to support operations and activities within their respective areas and brigades, all while staying within an ever contracting annual budget. A Sisyphean task to say the least, made further daunting by the high turnover and limited availability inherent to the majority of its members. These Reserve functions serve well in illustrating a noteworthy disconnect between the Regular Force and the Reserves within the Canadian Army, and the lack of understanding of what actual attributes reservists have to offer the CF and Canadian society.

The Canadian Army's less-than-complete understanding regarding its Reserve component is best illustrated by the first core function noted, that is, augmenting the Regular Force on

CF operations. As any Reserve unit CO will assert, only a little less than ten percent of his or her unit has ever deployed. This can be misleading when Army Reserve units are seen on parade, and many of those present sport campaign and tour medals. These images ignore the high turnover within the Reserves, where the average reservist career extends to only four years of part-time service. Further reinforcing the myth is the fact that those who do deploy also tend to be those with a higher level of commitment to the organization, and who thus not only stay longer, but parade more often, and therefore 'show up' in media photos. The invisible majority of Army reservists simply parade one night a week and one weekend a month while attending summer courses, and taking their release upon completing school and entering the civilian work force. To tie the primary function of the Reserves to a task that is performed by only one-in-ten of its members is akin to renaming all the Combat Engineer Regiments 'Dive Regiments,' because each 350-person unit has a dive troop of 35: it misses the point.

Further, the Army's first priority for the Reserves can be construed as being, at least in part, redundant. This is due to the conservative approach the Army has taken in training

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reservists for deployments. At its longest, pre-deployment training for reservists lasted nearly 18 months prior to deployment. Upon volunteering to serve on an overseas mission, reservists are given Class C contracts and integrated into Regular Force Army units to accompany their new colleagues in every facet of training, from individual battle tasks, up to battle group level collective training. Given this practice, what role do the Reserve units really play in training their members to deploy if said training provides no benefit to members who volunteer to deploy overseas?

Woodstock, Ontario have of the Notre-Dame-de-Grace borough of Montréal? This lack of expertise by the Regular Force member would be compounded in the context of a natural disaster, such as an ice storm, where fallen power lines and trees would make navigating the 'urban jungle' of Montréal's numerous boroughs nearly impossible without intimate local knowledge. This applies to language as well. Many boroughs in urban centres are home to a mosaic of immigrants, whose command of English or French may be very limited. The diverse ethnic make-up of reservists, compared to their

Regular Force counterparts,³ makes them ideally suited to leading operations in these areas, and to tailor humanitarian assistance to the ethnic majority of the region being assisted.

It should also be noted that the Army falls short with respect to properly leveraging the innumerable complementary skills of its Reserve members associated with their civilian jobs. These vary greatly, from heavy-equipment operators, to doctors, engineers, project managers, and architects. It seems odd that no method has been put in place to be more aware of what 'civilian' skills these members could bring to bear, should they be required.⁴ Instead, reservists are saddled with unrealistic military course

requirements that make it impossible to marry military and civilian professional success.⁵ Jointly, these factors serve to discourage many reservists, and lead frequently to their release from the organization. One wonders whether some of Canada's most notable former reservists, such as General Andrew McNaughton – a McGill student, researcher, and future Chief of the General Staff of the Canadian Army – would have been able to sustain such a heavy commitment of course time leading up to the First World War. How well would the Canadian Corps have fared at Vimy Ridge without his counter-battery oscillograph technology⁶ had he left the Militia as a result of not being able to spare enormous amounts of time to be trained within a Regular Force paradigm?

The solution to these challenges requires Reserve brigades to take a three-pronged approach to training their members to be employed in the context of assistance in natural or man-made disasters. The first priority must be at the unit level, where Commanding Officers and Regimental Sergeant Majors must integrate themselves into their local communities and establish firm and deep ties with local governments.⁷ This task has been best exemplified by Reserve units in smaller communities, such as 9 Field Engineer Squadron in



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As for the second and third stated functions of the Reserves, these remain 'spot on' in *theory*, but misunderstood and poorly applied in *practice*. These outcomes are a corollary effect of the de-streaming of the Army that has succeeded in conditioning the leadership of the Reserves to ignore its members' greatest strengths: (1) intimate knowledge of regional terrain; (2) capacity for long-term strategic planning; (3) potential for retention of corporate knowledge; and (4) potential for strong links with, not simply the community, but professional organizations and businesses. It is these strengths that truly define the Army Reserve, and which should serve to frame its functions within the context of the CF, as opposed to the current paradigm of templating watered-down Regular Force functions and capacities on an organization ill-designed to achieve them. As such, the second and third functions of the Reserves remain valid,² but must be redefined in a manner that is best tailored to what strengths can be brought to bear by reservists that their Regular Force counterparts are unable to provide.

A salient example of the first strength previously noted would be disaster assistance in an urban environment. What knowledge will a Royal Canadian Regiment corporal from

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Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec. In small communities such as this, units are intimately connected to the community; the experiences of these units should be leveraged among the urban units where establishing these links has been less successful. The second priority must be at the brigade level, where liaison has to be made with other disaster management bodies at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels, so as to facilitate interoperability when an emergency occurs. The aim at this level should be to pre-empt the ‘forming’ and ‘storming’ stages of group development,⁸ so as to optimize operations in the event of a real emergency. The *final* priority for training to achieve the two CDS priorities for the Reserves must be in-situ training. More often than not, brigade level training is conducted within military training areas – worse than that, in training areas outside the region of the brigade. This type of training provides *challenging* but ultimately *impractical* experience to planners, logisticians, and operators within the training body. The planners and logisticians hone their skills in coordinating large rail and road movements over long distances, while operators conduct training in artificial FIBUA mock-ups, or in more traditional forested training areas. At best, this training has only peripheral application to the challenges of conducting humanitarian operations in built-up urban zones, such as Montréal or Toronto. In these contexts, the difficulty of road moves, for example, is not managing the size and spacing of vehicle convoys, but in establishing and maintaining short-distance routes through congested urban landscapes made worse by debris and hazardous obstacles, such as downed power lines and trees. Further, through this training, operators do not develop and hone their knowledge of local terrain, which has been established as a unique and key capacity that reservists bring to the operations space. So when it comes to the current training model for reservists, what is really being achieved?

In order to achieve meaningful training that will have direct application to what tasks will actually be done, the ‘where’ is as important as the ‘what.’ Reservists have to train,

not just *how* they will operate, but *where* as well. This manner of training will be complex to plan, as it will require coordination with municipal bodies to temporarily close roads and publish notices that military personnel will be operating in an area over a given duration. This is as much a coordination challenge as it is logistical, and, given that municipal staffs are experts in circulation planning and public affairs as a result of regular municipal disruptions, such as road work and snow removal, they would be ideal to mentor and assist military staff in coordinating such training.⁹ At its core, military training must become, not only interesting, but relevant to reservists. Currently, Army Reserve brigades

engage in a circular pattern of work-up training that ends up right where it began. It does not take long for reservists to become disenchanted with the training and no longer feel like



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they are achieving professional growth. Moreover, this type of training fails to underscore the unique skills that reservists bring to operations. Reservists must not only be given a clear mission, but must train in a manner that supports said mission. This is currently not the paradigm in several Army Reserve brigades, and it must change to prevent further attrition of members as a result of loss of interest.

In so far as changing the amount of training required by reservists, the Army has achieved some recent success. The Primary Leadership Qualification course has been adjusted to incorporate both distance learning and unit-based learning components. In addition, the course residency has been cut into two three-week modules, as opposed to the former six-week module (Module 6), which was not feasible for many members who worked full-time. The reality, however, is that more will have to be done in order to streamline training, most notably for officers, if the Army is to successfully and more rapidly train its Reserve members before they simply leave the system, due to an overabundance of course requirements.

Fundamentally, the paradigm of how the Army Reserves are viewed by the Regular Force Army and the public-at-large

must shift tremendously if the organization is to remain relevant through the 21st Century. In opposition to Jack English's assertion,¹⁰ the days of mass mobilization for war are long gone, or, at best, highly unlikely to reoccur.¹¹ Further, the notion of piecemeal support of the Regular Force is no longer valid, as it simply represents a capability of the Reserves – *not* a core function. Simply put, if reservists are to continue to be considered as 'twice the citizen,' both Regular and Reserve components have to work harder and in closer partnership to understand the Militia for what it *is*, and, more importantly, what it has the potential to *become*.

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NOTES

1. Jack English, *The Role of the Militia in Today's Canadian Forces*, Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute and Canadian International Council (2011), p.2.
2. *Ibid*, p. 17
3. David Pratt, *Canada's Citizen Soldiers: A Discussion Paper*, Canadian International Council (2011), p. 34.
4. Jack English, *The Role of the Militia in Today's Canadian Forces*, Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute and Canadian International Council (2011), p.3.
5. *Ibid*, p. 31
6. Pierre Berton, 1986. *Vimy*. McClelland and Stewart Limited (1986), Ch. 7, Sect 2.
7. J.L. Granatstein and C. Belzile, *The Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves*, Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (2005), p. 20.
8. Bruce Tuckman, Developmental Sequence in Small Groups in *Psychological Bulletin*, 1965, Vol. 6(63), pp. 384-99.
9. Jack English, *The Role of the Militia in Today's Canadian Forces*, Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute and Canadian International Council (2011), p.33.
10. *Ibid*, p. 34
11. David Pratt, *Canada's Citizen Soldiers: A Discussion Paper*, Canadian International Council (2011), p. 31.