



Canadian Armed Forces members compete with other nations in tribute to the Invictus Games held in Sydney, Australia at the International Peacekeeping and Security Centre in Lviv, Ukraine during Operation UNIFIER on October 22, 2018.

## Is the Term “Warrior” Suitable for the Canadian Armed Forces?

by T. Kent Gregory

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**T**here is an ongoing debate whether or not all Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members can be described as warriors, given that they are first and foremost members of the profession of arms.

There are historical, positive and invigorating aspects of being a warrior, and this may resonate more with certain sub-groups within the CAF. However, a strong argument can be made that this term does not define all CAF members today because they are part of a modern military profession

with a wide range of occupations and ranks that perform a wide spectrum of tasks from institutional staff-work to war fighting. In addition, a case could be made that warrior identify causes more harm to the military than good.

Although a warrior is defined primarily as a person engaged or experienced in warfare<sup>1</sup>, it is also more popularly understood as a person who demonstrates great vigour, courage, or aggressiveness, as in business or athletics. Because it has this second, much broader and therefore accessible definition outside the field of military conflict, it has been adopted by many different groups, such as first responders, to suit their particular circumstances. It has also been widely used in popular media in varying contexts. As well, other military forces view and experience it differently.

If the term warrior is to make its way into official doctrine in a positive manner, it needs to be critically defined, and these gaps of perception will need to be bridged, so it becomes an encompassing term that resonates with everyone who wears the Canadian military uniform.

## CAF Environments and Doctrine

There is no unanimity within the CAF regarding the use of the term warrior to define themselves. While warrior appears to strongly resonate within some in the combat arms trades within the Canadian Army (CA) and Special Operations Force (SOF); the connection is more tenuous with those in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), as well as those in support occupations across the military environments.<sup>2</sup>

The ongoing fascination with warriors and the desire to use this term to describe oneself or a specific group is not a new concept. Interestingly, the appeal of the word warrior appears centred on those who traditionally fight on the land, namely the CA and SOF. These two organizations rely on teamwork but place greater emphasis on the individual's skills to carry the day when necessary. The PPCLI's stand on Hill 677 during the Korean War serves as but one example of this emphasis on skill and individual performance affecting the battle. After seeing the adjoining Royal Australian Regiment suffer from the assault of numerically superior Chinese forces, the Canadians knew they were next to face this overwhelming force. Through both group effort and individual achievement, the Canadians managed to stop the Chinese advance through heavy all-night fighting on 24 and 25 April.<sup>3</sup> Individual actions by Private Wayne Mitchell and Private Kenneth Barwise, both taking action single-handedly against their Chinese opponents, did much to secure the Canadian victory at Kapyong. They personified the best qualities lauded as the hallmark of the modern warrior.

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Interestingly, the RCAF and RCN do not place as much importance on being warriors. Though the individuals from both of these elements need to be skilled in the art of war, the emphasis is more focused on the team than the individual carrying the day. Within the RCAF, one could argue that “aces” are warriors as they have to use particular skill and daring against enemy aircraft. Lieutenant Colonel William (Billy) Bishop, Canada's most notable air ace from the First World War, was never identified as a warrior even though he individually shot down 72 German aircraft.<sup>4</sup> The RCN places even less emphasis on the individual warrior, as a ship cannot fight with just one individual. It requires the entire crew working together, using both individual and collective expertise, to fight a ship and win battles effectively.

With this divergence on how fighting is conducted across the four elements of the CAF, it would be challenging to land on a single term that would resonate across the entire spectrum of individuals that make up the CAF. However, all elements share common values and expectations, which are necessary for the well-being and professional conduct of everyone who wears a CAF uniform. Terms already exist that identify what CAF members do as members of each environment: soldier, sailor, aviator and operator. These terms describe the unique aspect of the force they belong to without running the risk of being grandiose and are already part of our accepted doctrine.

In its foundational doctrine, the Canadian military espouses a warrior culture. *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (DwH), attempts to frame the warrior term in a positive light. However, DwH does not give sufficient treatment of the term warrior. The term is not defined and is used only twice within the publication. DwH specifically states that “military professionals today require the abilities not only of the soldier-warrior, but also of the soldier-diplomat and the soldier-scholar.” Only in the final instance of the chapter on ethos, does DwH directly equate living the military ethos to the highest professional standards to achieving a warrior's honour.<sup>5</sup> In essence the 2009 DwH equates warrior status to living the ethos to the best of one's ability.

The Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy, Appendix 2, Annex A (2015)<sup>6</sup> describes the concept of the Canadian Army warrior culture. Other than simply replicate the Army's motto “strong, proud, ready”, this warrior concept offers little more than what is already espoused in the 2009 DwH ethos, and that which is further expanded in the *CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve* (2022) (TTS).<sup>7</sup> The warrior ethos, to be the ideal fighter in times of war, is easily linked to the military value of excellence and professional expectations of duty, fighting spirit, readiness, and unlimited liability found in TTS. More broadly, the ethical principles and military values in TTS serve to connect the ideal warrior to society while espousing virtuous character traits. With these ethical principles, military values and professional expectations already describing idealized warrior status, it would appear redundant for any environment to repurpose them yet again in another doctrinal publication.

## International and Academic Perspectives

There is no consensus on the perception and effects of a warrior identity across military forces and academic research. There is indication however that historical and national contexts exert direct inference on how the warrior identity is experienced.

The New Zealand Army (2020) subscribes to the notion of warriors as a single, unifying group guided by a set of core values by which they serve. In their *Way of the New Zealand Warrior*,<sup>8</sup> the role of the Maori warrior and the British soldier are front and centre, as is the modern New Zealand warrior. The historical reasons why the notion of warrior works for their national context are beyond the scope of this article, however their more homogenous indigenous nations and the single colonial entity contribute to a narrower and possibly positive understanding of the concept.

Pedersen's (2017) research into the Danish Army indicates that the notion of warrior is experienced positively by their members. Anthropological fieldwork suggests that Danish warriorhood was revived with Denmark's military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan. Danish troops who sought out war in Afghanistan as an existential window of opportunity for following their desires to become ‘true warriors’ and thereby regenerate themselves as

authentic individuals.<sup>9</sup> This draws on their history as Viking warriors and a largely homogenous population. Pedersen's article demonstrates that the pursuit of a warrior ethos can be a powerful attraction for self-growth, and sheds light on why people may want to pursue such a path.

In the American context, Christopher Coker (2007) acknowledges that the warrior myth, skepticism of warriors by civil society, and technological threats to warrior agency serve to erode a much needed rejuvenation of the warrior's ethos in the face of a global long war on terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Notably, Coker's delineation of a warrior's ethos in his final chapter is entirely virtuous and excludes critical discussion of operant warrior culture and its effect on the organization.

Vanessa Brown and Alan Okros (2019) advance our understanding of the Canadian military context.<sup>11</sup> Their research reveals that the CAF have an operant hegemonic masculine culture that assimilates and marginalizes rather than integrates women and minority groups. This militarized masculinity is focussed on a warrior culture that has the potential to cause harm to the various minority out-groups within the military. As an antidote to this hyper-masculine warrior identity they suggest a critical analysis of masculinity to fully understand the implications of this operant warrior ethos. Their analysis recommends that the CAF move away from a tight culture narrowly focussed on masculine interpretations of how warriors should act, and to move towards a loose culture of flexible social norms where nobody imposes their own norms values and standards on others. This loose culture would allow for the full expression of gendered warrior identities and better facilitate integration of women and minority groups into a recreated warrior ethos.

H. Christian Breede and Karen Davis (2020) research highlights a failure in the CAF to critically define the warrior ethos within DWH which has led to contemporary conceptions of the warrior to be based on assumed hegemonic masculinity. They assert that those who espouse a warrior ethos consider themselves superior to non-warriors creating in/out-groups and setting the climate for hostile interactions between the two.<sup>12</sup>

Breede and Davis indicate that negative aspects also encompass the possibility that the military member will be more emotionally invested in the mission and will personalize combat



Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Eric Poissant, CWO of Canadian Joint Operations Command, addresses the members aboard HMCS MONTREAL during their deployment on Operation REASSURANCE, in Catania, Italy, on March 06, 2022.

Cpl Braden Trudeau, Canadian Armed Forces

(as opposed to a being professionally distanced). Warriors may eschew civil-military relations and subscribe to a culture that requires persistent testing among team members which leads to exclusionary behaviours, even within the warrior team. The authors also reinforce Brown and Okros' assertion that women and minorities are assimilated rather than integrated into the CAF operant warrior ethos in that the warrior ethos allows for female masculinity rather than male femininity. Though the authors contend that many of the personnel issues that the CAF faces today stem from this operant warrior ethos, the authors allow that a recreated warrior culture with a broader and more inclusive interpretation aligned with that of a professional soldier has potential for use within the CAF. In discussing the "Return of the Professional", the authors offer a summary table illustrating competing military identities where factors such as motivation, culture, application and focus are shown on a spectrum from warrior to professional to bureaucratic identities.<sup>13</sup> A comparative analysis of the table elements, especially the professional ones, indicate that they are highly aligned with those of TTS (e.g.: inclusion and diversity, use of judgement, etc).

Deanna Wilson's (2021) critical analysis of the CAF indicates that gender-based violence has been perpetuated for decades because of a CAF masculinist culture that has an embedded warrior identity. This persistent masculinist culture has maintained power and dominance over others, primarily women and minority groups.<sup>14</sup> Wilson's analysis is anchored in both quantitative and qualitative data and offers an in-depth appreciation of the cause and widespread deleterious effects of gender-based violence. She rightly contends that ensuring the wellbeing of one's subordinates is a leader's highest priority. She highlights the normative and generational issues related to perpetuating this masculinist cul-

ture that need to be overcome and recommends the adoption of a transformational style of leadership focused on compassion as an antidote to gender-based violence. This combined with changes to the CF and DND Code of Values and Ethics (addition of equality as a value) and the CAF Ethos (addition of inclusion as a value) are offered as remedies towards changing the masculinist culture. Wilson's recommendations have been largely reflected in the renewed CAF ethos (presented in TTS), namely the addition of inclusion as a military value and a discussion of the importance of equality for institutional leaders. Given its importance, the notion of equality is incorporated throughout the TTS publication.

### Popular Culture

If the divide between the military and academia regarding the use of the term warrior and how it is interpreted fails to achieve a consensus, how then will current popular (pop) culture references affect how the general public perceives its use?

Pop culture references affect how the general public perceives the notion of a warrior. The CAF is a volunteer armed force drawn from society. It is reasonable to presume that even the youngest recruits have been exposed to pop cultural references in the form of movies, video games, discussion with peers. The world of entertainment has probably done the most to influence the general perception of the term warrior through such blockbuster movies and television shows as *Troy* (2004), *300* (2006), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), *Vikings* (2013-2020), and *Warrior* (2019-present) to name but a few; and in sports, we have the NBA's Golden State Warriors.

The warriors presented popular culture were not always ones that current proponents would like us to believe a warrior is today. The movie *Troy* gives us a glorified version of Achilles as played by Brad Pitt. For many, this may be the only exposure they have had to the warrior described in Homer's "*Iliad*." We are given a heroic figure, highly skilled in individual fighting and revered by those around him who are willing to follow him into battle. We are exposed to an individual who battles not only the Trojan enemy but King Agamemnon over how the war is being conducted. In the end, he fights not for Agamemnon and the Greeks but for himself and his own personal reasons. The television program *Deadliest Warrior* gave us a large selection of warriors to choose from: Apache vs. Gladiator, Pirate vs. Knight, Yakuza vs. Mafia, Green Berets vs. Spetsnaz, Irish Republican Army vs. Taliban, SWAT vs. GSG 9, Nazi Waffen-SS vs. Viet Cong, Navy Seal vs. Israeli Commando, U.S. Army Rangers vs. N.K. Special Operations Forces, French Foreign Legion vs. Gurkhas; the list is far-ranging. The ubiquitous availability of such programs to the general population will undoubtedly have contributed to their understanding of what constitutes a warrior based upon which depiction coincides with their personal beliefs or desires. Combatting these perceptions will continue to be problematic at best.

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### Warrior Culture Examples

When discussing the use of the term warrior, particularly the negative qualities of warriors, most examples cited are those from the ancient past like Achilles. Current proponents for using the term warrior, like Christopher Coker, are quick to point out that the examples are outdated and that the modern warrior does not resemble these traits. They further argue that if we debate the use of the term warrior, then we must do so using modern examples to keep the discussion within the contemporary context.

There can be no doubt, on either side of the debate about the term warrior, that all military forces need highly capable fighters within the context of fighting an actual war. People need to be skilled in the art of fighting and possess a tenacity and relentless determination to carry the day. Canada has a proud history of individuals and groups stepping forward to fulfil this role when called by our nation to fight. During the First World War, Canada, and by extension, the CA, came into its own at the battle of Vimy Ridge. That this comparatively small army was victorious in capturing strategic objectives that larger, more experienced armies had failed to achieve became the birthplace of the modern Canadian warrior. Even then, Canadian soldiers were not exempt from falling prey to a warrior's excesses in that many unarmed German combatants were savagely bayoneted.<sup>15</sup>

This legacy of a strong warrior spirit continued during the Second World War. The creation of the First Special Service Force in 1942 gave rise in Canada to an elite fighting force. Although this force was a combined American and Canadian organization, Canadian participants remained part of the CA. The First Special Service Force would distinguish itself and cement its fighting reputation in the Aleutian Islands, Italy, Anzio and France. All Special Forces in Canada can trace their lineage back to the First Special Service Force.

The Canadian Airborne Regiment (CAR) was formed on 8 April 1968 in Edmonton, Alberta, with the primary role of providing a quick reaction force in support of national security.<sup>16</sup> Although never officially designated as such, the CAR, with their distinctive maroon berets, were never reluctant to advertise their status as Canada's elite warriors.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, by identifying themselves as elite, the CAR set itself up for the development of powerful in-group/out-group attitudes,<sup>18</sup> one of the major pitfalls of the warrior identity. This in/out-group mentality didn't just separate the Airborne Regiment from the rest of CA units; it also developed schisms between the various Commandos within the Regiment itself. 2 Commando (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) invested itself in a strong sub-culture, rooted in a rebel identity, separating themselves from the society they were designed to protect.

Hindsight shows us that it was inevitable that disaster would befall this Regiment. On 16 March 1993, this elite warrior culture came to a crashing end. MCpl Clayton Matchee and Pte Kyle Brown tortured and killed Somali teenager Shidane Arone that day. The very idea that members of the CAR considered themselves superior to others allowed for this crime to occur. The in/out-group mentality of the warrior allowed Somalis to be dehumanized in their eyes, making them constant legitimate targets, not just when engaged in direct hostilities. This is another negative feature of the warrior mentality; when no direct enemy is provided to fight, warriors seek out an enemy of their own.<sup>19</sup>

With the death of Shidane Arone known to Canadian authorities and Canadians, the Regiment went into defensive mode. The warrior culture closed ranks and protected the Regiment. Even those members of the CAR who knew that what had happened was wrong were required to maintain the wall of silence<sup>20</sup> while investigators tried to find out about this and other serious breaches of discipline.

The CAR was disbanded in November 1994 by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and a public inquiry was established to investigate the growing scandal.<sup>21</sup> This investigation discovered that military officers tried to conceal information by altering releases to the media. Several senior officers were found to have misled the inquiry in an effort to protect these elite warriors. The public inquiry was shut down in 1996 and released its report in 1997. However, this report was incomplete as the Prime Minister unfortunately closed the inquiry before it could investigate the warrior culture that existed within the CAR.

Canada is not alone in experiencing difficulties associated with an operant warrior culture. The Australian Defence Force encountered many of the same issues within their Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) during its deployment to Afghanistan between 2007 and 2016.<sup>22</sup> Like the CAR, the SASR considered themselves warriors and embraced and fostered a warrior culture, particularly among the non-commissioned officers.<sup>23</sup> Creating an organization where members were made to feel superior to other forces, particularly the Afghan people, allowed for the worst aspects of warrior culture to take hold. This warrior-hero mentality embraced the notion that being designated “special” justified exceptionalism from ordinary rules and oversight.<sup>24</sup> Unimaginable to most militaries, the investigation revealed that subordinate NCOs within the SASR acted as the gatekeepers in the selection of junior officers, favouring those who would be compliant with the NCOs’ operant culture. This resulted in a lack of leadership, particularly at the junior officer level, to the point where these junior officers became disempowered and therefore failed to restrain the negative impulses advocated by their subordinate NCOs. Those officers who fought against this operant warrior culture were ostracized and, in many cases, did not receive support from superior officers at the cost of a Special Forces career.

Eventually, this warrior culture led to the unlawful killings of 39 Afghans<sup>25</sup> during the SASR’s deployment. Much like the CAR, when discovered, the members of the SASR closed ranks and created a wall of silence around their activities in Afghanistan. Many took deliberate steps to conceal behaviours and actions from their officers. The Australian Defence Force convened a formal inquiry under Major General Brereton to investigate rumours of unlawful conduct concerning the Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan. While conducting the investigations, MGen Brereton’s team was able to determine that unlawful conduct by the SASR had occurred and that this conduct extended to the committing of war crimes.

Unlike the Canadian inquiry, MGen Brereton was able to investigate not only the war crimes rumoured to have happened, but also conduct a comprehensive review of the warrior culture contained within the SASR.

Although the warrior culture was initially founded on virtuous qualities, vices eventually became manifest and overtook the virtues. Under the leadership of those who propagated the worst acts, the established warrior culture was left unchecked, as it grew apart from virtuous military culture. The report determined that the warrior culture in itself led to the atrocities committed and concluded that members of the ADF needed to be re-educated in their virtuous core beliefs and values.<sup>26</sup> Key to their conclusion was that this type of criminal behaviour can happen to anyone when vices are permitted to take root and subvert the virtues.

## Conclusion

The term warrior remains problematic for use within the CAF because it was never critically defined in Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada. In the absence of such definition, it allowed the dominant male fighting culture to infuse it with meaning. Research has demonstrated that this operant expression of warrior identity has caused considerable harm across the CAF, and yet despite this, Canadian academics advocate for the use of the term warrior, but only if it is recalibrated.

When Canadians enroll in the CAF, they have already been exposed to popular culture’s interpretation of a warrior. Depending on their references, whether movies, television etc., these experiences will significantly affect their understanding of the term’s uncritical use within doctrine. In short, they will be required to not only learn a new definition of a warrior but will need to unlearn their preconceived notions. Additionally, the lack of unanimous acceptance of the term across CAF environments creates another hurdle regarding the use of the term.

The CAF was shaken by the findings of the Deschamps (2015) report and most recently by the Arbour (2022) report. Both of these reports validate many of the insights surrounding the academic

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research on the topic of warrior culture and its attendant harm. In particular the Arbour report is quite damning:

They now need to adapt to a new reality – the women warriors are here to stay. And they will stay on their terms, seeking the substantive equality to which they are entitled. Women should no longer feel like guests in the CAF.<sup>27</sup>

The long-established way of doing business in the CAF is anchored in operational imperatives that are often nothing more than assumptions. One of the dangers of the model under which the CAF continues to operate is the high likelihood that some of its members are more at risk of harm, on a day to day basis, from their comrades than from the enemy.<sup>28</sup>

Canadian operant warrior culture is gendered towards a masculine and exclusionary identity, and is best left relegated to the past and to popular entertainment. It has the potential to promote fragmentation and tear at the fabric of teamwork. Such a warrior culture requires constant vigilance on the part of leadership to ensure that sub-groups and elitism over perceived non-warriors is consistently held in check.

If the CAF sees the need to recalibrate a warrior culture, it will need to take stock of the current operant culture and its failures, come to terms with its hegemonic masculinity and look towards the adoption of a more loose culture to allow the full expression of a gendered warrior. Similarly, if such an attempt is to succeed in making meaningful change, this new warrior culture must be anchored in professionalism, based upon the new CAF Ethos.



## NOTES

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