
THE NEW REGIMENTAL SYSTEM

Major Harry Bondy

“Soldiers and organizations will do in war what they do in peace. Tactical organizations that have not lived and trained together before they deploy cannot be transformed overnight on the basis of a single exercise into a fighting force.... These comments apply with equal force to logistics.”

Colonel (USA) Douglas A. Macgregor,
*Breaking the Phalanx*¹

WHY ARMY TRANSFORMATION?

In post-Cold War security operations, often described as fourth generation warfare, Anglo-Western armies engage in high-speed interventions, irregular warfighting, autonomous deployments in hostile regions, and more frequent political-military operations.² Forces must be balanced and flexible for a broad spectrum of conflict ranging from conventional warfare to asymmetric attacks to stability engagements.³ Colonel Macgregor argues that the battle group and combat team best exploit the flexibility and balance available from all-arms co-operation, improved information, and precision targeting.⁴ Advances in doctrine and technology “must be exploited at lower levels of command...”⁵ and with “higher level battle group cohesion and training readiness...”⁶ The US Army’s Objective Force’s Future Combat System, for example, is based on the brigade as its “unit of action.”⁷ Macgregor goes further, recommending combat and logistics formations of about 4000 to 5000 persons with no *branch-pure* sub-units. He describes how combined arms formations have become smaller over the decades as doctrine and technology improve. Functionally specialized units became an anachronism as early as the end of WWII.⁸ Macgregor warns against attempting “to graft large-scale technological change onto old thinking and old structures”⁹ and adds that “new organizations—not just technology—will revolutionize warfighting.”¹⁰ British Major General J.F.C. Fuller, who helped develop armoured warfare, wrote that the fighting power of an army lies in its organization.¹¹

Unconscious cultural assumptions shape and limit the thinking on doctrine and technology

Since WWII, the Canadian Army’s smallest tactically deployable formation has been the combined arms battle group. Every operational deployment since 1992 has been an all-arms team. Although the *branch-pure* regiment has not been deployed as a self-sufficient formation except for classical peacekeeping rotations, it dominates the order of battle of the Canadian Army. It is time that we restructured for the full range of post-Cold War security tasks.

Many assume that Western armies are in a revolution in military affairs affecting doctrine and technology.¹² There is a compelling argument, however, that military culture determines the pace and ultimate success of army transformation.¹³ Unconscious cultural assumptions shape and limit the thinking on doctrine and technology. This culture is largely sustained by personnel policies underlying the selection, promotion, and posting system. Posting and promotion lists, controlled by regiments, branches, and occupations, lead to personnel turbulence, distrust, and careerist ticket-punching. Research has shown that individual performance appraisal and

selection systems are inaccurate, unscientific, and prone to factionalism.¹⁴ More than half of any appraisal variance is due to “idiosyncratic rater effects,”¹⁵ such as how much the ratee likes the rater; similarities in their personality; their personal views on performance; stereotypes on gender, race, and ethnicity; self-interest; unit politics and unit factionalism; and wide variations between deployments and unit climate. The annual promotion “tournament”¹⁶ shifts people between units, as if robbing Peter to pay Paul, primarily to reward the winners. Since individuals do not have a measurable effect on productivity,¹⁷ this method only undermines unit cohesion and performance. Legitimacy and commitment also suffer because most not promoted to senior officer and senior non-commissioned ranks are dissatisfied.¹⁸

This paper proposes a new regimental system (NRS) built on the battle group and combat team and new personnel policies aimed at cultural transformation. This NRS draws upon the traditional sources of Western military strength: *cohesion, discipline, organization, and professionalism*. These strengths arise from deep-seated Western social habits: *social capital, societal discipline, modern bureaucracy, and innovation*. Social capital is the quality of human relationships that generates trust and makes possible modern, large-scale military forces, corporations, and market-oriented, democratic societies. Individuals develop reputations for reliability within stable communities that stretch short-term self-interest into longer term co-operation.¹⁹ This environment leads to the trust and co-operation essential for social cohesion and task cohesion in military units.²⁰ Cohesion strengthens primary group morale and combat effectiveness.²¹ Social capital and military *cohesion* depend on stable relationships, informal communication loops, and realistic, repetitive training.²² Today's battlefield is no place for “transient strangers.”²³ The complexity of post-Cold War joint military operations requires skilled, experienced military professionals. Former Vietnam War commander Richard D. Hooker Jr. argues that “perhaps the only way, [sic] to build the kind of morale, esprit and cohesion needed to employ manoeuvre warfare is to stabilize soldiers and leaders in units through a working regimental system.”²⁴

The NRS, at the same time, must avoid *dark side social capital*, which is trust and co-operation limited to self-interested factions.²⁵ Any large organization—especially an army, where trust is essential—must control for counter-productive behaviour by government, executive category officers, and the rank and file.²⁶ In Anglo-Western armies, this behaviour results in unsustainable operational tempo, politicized equipment acquisition, service and branch factionalism, careerism, and reduced retention and commitment.²⁷

Former US Army Chief of Staff, General (ret) Sullivan, and Colonel (ret) Harper, his chief strategic planning officer, recommend “in-depth, serious thinking by a leader and his or her team—that results in the creation of an intellectual framework for the future.”²⁸ They advise “not to be surprised to be surprised [sic]... when the unexpected occurs...”²⁹ After recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, another US Army Chief of Staff, General Peter J. Shoomaker, warned, “We must be prepared to question everything. What is best for the Nation? What must endure? What must change?”³⁰

THE NEW REGIMENT

The New Regiment (NR) is a combined arms, brigade-sized battle group, including logistics and administration, and is the smallest tactically viable and sustainable formation in the Canadian Army. Sub-units vary in size from battalions to sections that are custom-sized for taskings, training, and detachments. For multi-year requirements to rotate all-arms, self-supporting

battalion-sized peacekeeping contingents, for example, a group this size remains intact for as long as necessary. At the same time, company-sized combat teams or section-sized building blocks remain for minor deployments and small unit exchanges. Smaller groupings also remain intact over the longer term for specific capabilities, such as parachuting, UAV teams, and aid to the civil power. New Regiments provide troops for national and international joint forces and their headquarters and contribute formation commanders to the rank of Lieutenant General. Teams of officers and soldiers, whatever the size, are kept together as long as possible before re-grouping.

Officers and soldiers belong exclusively to the NR. Each regiment is known by a single name, one set of insignia and regalia, and a unified history. The NR sub-groupings can bear temporary names for a tasking. A battalion-sized peacekeeping contingent, for example, may be identified by the deployment's name, such as Task Force Palladium. Company-sized groupings may be called Combat Team Alpha, and so forth. There are no permanent units, branches, corps, occupations, or other affiliations to subdivide the NR. There are no units based on branch or corps specializations, such as infantry, armour, artillery, engineering, signals, logistics, and so forth. This will reduce resistance to doctrinal and technological change arising from permanent, lionized units tied to an historic role or weapons system. Although our military history should strive to record the truth, warts and all, the new names of the NRs should recognize Canada's growing diversity and home-grown identity and traditions.

Officers and soldiers spend their entire service lives with the same NR. They are recruited from the surrounding region to take advantage of existing social cohesion and to reduce moves for personal reasons. Although Canadian regions may be vast (such as a region based on the Western provinces), it remains worthwhile to build upon regional psychological similarities and reduced travel time. Officers and soldiers do not follow the generalist's route of rotating at regular intervals inside or outside the NR to accumulate credentials without fully mastering any role. They remain in key positions, especially command, longer than is currently the case to ensure a reasonable period of optimum performance and to allow enough time to train successors and complete improvement projects.³¹ Officers and soldiers do not take tours within the civilian bureaucracy or at non-operational headquarters. Everyone is deployable and civilians provide all non-deployable bureaucratic and technical support. Vacant positions and promotions are filled through internal competitions open only to members of the same NR. New Regiment officers and soldiers enjoy uninterrupted service of field training and operational deployment. In the NR, the profession is clearly focussed on the "organized application of coercive force (war, peace enforcement, peacekeeping)."³²

This stability enables everyone to master skills, tactics, and theatre operations and to maintain state of the art currency. The NR also adopts the rigorous thought process developed at von Moltke's *Kriegsakademie*.³³ This includes a culture of "independence of thought and freedom of decision" in accordance with a broad outline of a commander's objectives, now known as *mission command*.³⁴ This way of thinking facilitates multi-purpose deployments and continuous innovation. The stability and unity of the NR also build social and task cohesion and reduce sub-group exclusivity and factionalism. Trust among peers and the relationship between follower and leader solidify. Individuals make, lose, and regain personal reputations within long-standing, intimate markets of reputation.

Conditions of service are enhanced to compensate for the rigours of full deployability. These

enhancements include richer deployment allowances, limits on perstempo, guarantees for quality of life, and additional pension credits toward earlier retirement. Distinctions between executive category officers and others disappear except for rank-based pay ranges. Everyone in the NR shares the same psychological contract supporting the soldier's life.

US Army analysts, such as Vandergriff, Hooker, Macgregor, Kagan, and Laquement, and former Chief of Staff General Shinseki have argued for units similar to the NR. They want “unbreakable units” that implement lessons learned from US cohesion experiments, such as COHORT, General Gray's efforts in the USMC (United States Marine Corps), General Meyer and Lieutenant General Ulmer's reforms at III Corps, Fort Hood, and other Inspector General and TRADOC (training and doctrine command) projects.³⁵ The Australian Officer Professional Effectiveness Strategy advocates similar specialization by military role and improvements to personnel stability.³⁶

NEW SPECIALIST CORPS AND THE NEW GENERAL STAFF

To complement and support the NRs, a series of new specialist corps (NSC) are formed around traditional professions and the social and human sciences. A separate NSC exists for military law, chaplainry, complaints and inspection, personnel selection, social work, social science, counselling, family services, medical and dental care, bioengineering, and so forth. NR commanders continue to discipline their troops in the traditional military sense, while the NSC focus on acculturating officers and soldiers using the old and new “social” and “human” professions. These professions greatly increased societal discipline in the West and facilitated the rise of modern armies. The chain of command would perform kit and dress inspections, for example, while social work and medical staff would sensitize and rehabilitate troops with issues related to psychological motivation, operational stress injuries, family violence, or substance abuse. Independent specialist corps contribute to the military and contextual discipline of the soldier's life.

To highlight the fact that their cultures differ, the various NSCs use separate rank structures, and wear badges and accoutrements that distinguish them from the NR and the new general staff (NGS). Each corps adopts a unique hierarchy, with or without insignia, to mark professional standing and other gradations, such as medical assistant, nurse, surgeon, barrister, magistrate, monsignor, bishop, and imam. They avoid military terms for appointments, like commanding officer, in favour of existing, specialized titles such as commandant, superintendent, judge advocate general, chaplain general, and surgeon general. They develop customized compensation systems and terms of service to compete with civilian counterparts and reinforce their unique professional identification. By marking the divergent culture of these professions as clearly separate, the NR can focus its culture on the soldier's life.

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Specialist corps do not include technical expertise related to combat, combat support, communications, logistics and other forms of technology and administration. Specialist corps are restricted to the human and social sciences and professions that support and acculturate the soldier. Specialists applying technology and administration directly to tactical and theatre

operations remain full members of the deployable NR. Experts in technology and administration who are not deployed become part of the civilian bureaucracy. NSC that deploy on operations with the NRs, such as the medical corps, remain under the control but not the command of the NR.

The new general staff (NGS) is a small cadre of officers responsible for strategy, civil-military relations, and for building the army as an institution and a profession. It develops and implements policies to adapt technology, doctrine, and culture to evolving security needs and societal change. It is the army's primary point of contact with the civilian bureaucracy, government, and the host society. It advises elected defence executives, negotiates with the government's central agencies such as the Treasury Board Secretariat, and directs the army and the supporting civilian bureaucracy.³⁷ In effect, the NGS performs headquarters' duties to allow NR members to remain in manoeuvre units.

The NGS also wears badges distinct from the NRs to avoid misdirected loyalty to former regiments and factionalism

Jans and Schmidtchen describe how officers well suited for manoeuvre units are bewildered by the culture of national headquarters. Others, with potential as institutional strategists, are held back by the operations-centric career track.³⁸ NR

personnel cannot be expected to build and maintain all of the expert knowledge required for a contemporary army. Instead, the NGS adopts the professional responsibility to shape organizational culture, define the army's security jurisdiction, and sustain an ethical social contract.

The NGS also wears badges distinct from the NRs to avoid misdirected loyalty to former regiments and factionalism. Officers serve on the NGS in traditional military ranks from major to general. They do not serve in operational theatre control centres and operational headquarters and do not perform bureaucratic functions in national headquarters. Instead, the NGS exercises a form of mission command over the NRs and to guide the civilian bureaucracy responsible for infrastructure, procurement, comptrollership, and so forth.

THE NEW PERSONNEL STRATEGY

Jans and Schmidtchen suggest that the familiar slogan "our people are our greatest asset" should become "our personnel systems are our greatest asset."³⁹ Personnel policies shape army culture more effectively than lists of espoused "virtues."⁴⁰ The new personnel strategy centres on service-life streaming; training and education; selection, promotions, and other conditions of service; personal and professional development; and the management of the whole.

SERVICE-LIFE STREAMING

Every officer and soldier in the Army begins service with the NR, and most stay there for the remainder of their service life. The first ten or fifteen years in the regiment are the "muddy boots" phase of army training and acculturation. This is the best way to make everyone a soldier first. At the mid-point of their service, however, selected individuals have the opportunity to permanently stream into three other roles. They may join one of the NSC, the NGS, or the civilian bureaucracy. Alternately, they may choose to leave the defence community and pursue another way of life. There are no streams or military occupations below these four broad roles. The development and management of specialized competencies and capabilities within the regiment are discussed below.

The NSC for personnel selection manages the streaming process, which becomes one of the prime personnel policies shaping army culture. Streaming channels people according to personality type, ambition, physical and psychological endurance, command talent, intellectual acuity and agility, strategic vision, and other characteristics. Streaming is critical to the formation of different cultures for the NRs, NSC, NGS, and the civilian bureaucracy.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

People in each stream are trained and educated to achieve the depth, experience, specialization, and state of the art currency required for the post-Cold War environment. Officers remaining in the NR receive further tactical and operational theatre training at staff colleges. They focus on the thought process necessary for successful *mission command*. Senior non-commissioned members receive similar training at leadership and battle schools. Officers and soldiers selected to join a specialist corps or the civilian headquarters' bureaucracy pursue the qualifications and credentials of their professions and fields. Those who leave the defence community receive benefits for retraining or education. Officers selected for the NGS apply for graduate, inter-disciplinary programs at civilian universities related to the theory and practice of organizations and professions, military-civilian relations, geopolitical grand strategy, and cultural studies related to the host society.

SELECTION, PROMOTIONS, AND STREAMING METHODOLOGY

Selection and promotion are also prime personnel policies shaping army culture. The current counterproductive selection system⁴¹ must be replaced with one that builds social capital, discipline, and professionalism. The new selection and promotion system fills vacancies, with or without a promotion, by holding competitions open only to persons currently serving in that regiment, corps, or general staff. Transfers and promotions do not occur in sequence from a central selection list, do not involve transfers from one NR to another, and do not stream persons between the four defence roles. Rank structures for each of the three military streams are engineered to obtain equitable ratios for promotion.

The NSC for personnel have sole authority over streaming, competitions for vacancies, and the decision to select a candidate. Internal and external observers, inspectors, and independent advocates representing the Army and the candidate closely monitor streaming decisions and competitions. These monitors have veto power for a streaming and competition outcome. The chain of command, however, is only one source of information among many and has no vote, veto or otherwise. This reduces the likelihood that insiders can subvert the selection system according to unit politics, self-interest, personality type, and other prejudices.⁴²

The specialist corps collects information throughout a members' service life within a stable market of reputation and a 360-degree view.⁴³ Information comes primarily from the superiors, peers, and subordinates at the candidate's sub-unit. Supporting information may also be gathered from stakeholders at other units, from various NSCs, the civilian bureaucracy, the military community, and elsewhere. The information is not limited to opinion surveys or performance appraisals but includes a wide variety of indicators applicable to the individual, their sub-unit, regiment, corps, or staff. This data does not directly determine a score or a streaming and selection decision. Instead, personnel selection specialists are free to select, weigh, and interpret complex and detailed data according to professional standards, the char-

acteristics of the vacancy, and the circumstances at the unit. Written examinations are not recommended as a key qualification to avoid creating an artificial event that may interfere with the true goal of education. Local competitions should be less costly than the current, centralized, selection, and posting system.⁴⁴

OTHER CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Other conditions of service must support the new force structure and personnel strategy. Compensation and benefits, terms of service, perstempo, liability to deploy, universality of service, and pension and severance arrangements must be reformed to build good social capital, acculturate recruits to adopt the ethos of the soldier's life, and reward military professionalism. The Canadian Forces pay range structure, for example, has a limited number of annual increments with no overlap between ranks. It is based on the journeyman job rate and comparability with the Public Service. Neither has been fairly and consistently applied and are only partially relevant to military service. In the new personnel strategy, pay ranges remain stratified by rank but overlap to provide annual increases for as long as necessary to reward accumulated military experience and prolonged commitment. Compensation literature suggests that this policy is feasible, effective, and perceived as equitable by employees.⁴⁵

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personnel specialists manage a local system for each NR designed to match the supply of individual skills with the demand of unit requirements. The supply side consists of the individual's tangible competencies developed as much as possible according to individual interests, aptitude, and personality. The demand side is driven by NR requirements for specific capabilities within the broad categories of sense, act, shield, sustain, and command.⁴⁶ The new personnel strategy would only inventory tangible skills directly based on qualifications and experience. Intangible competencies are not inventoried and are only assessed for specific competitions for vacancies, streaming, or personal development. Individuals can acquire a wider range of competencies without concern for the current "one-size-fits-all" occupational career paths and corps/branch "turf." The NR can be easily re-grouped and re-tasked according to evolving operational requirements rather than regimental or corps tradition. A competition makes the final link between supply and demand by matching the candidate's unique competencies to the unit's requirements for a specific vacancy.

Here is how the competency approach relates to capabilities and streaming: recruits begin Army service with infantry tactics and only later specialize by skill and role, whether combat or support. Officers and soldiers with talent and interest to *command*, for example, acquire competencies related to personal leadership, tactics, and theatre operations. At the mid-point of their service-life, if they have demonstrated superior ability and ambition and their unit has forecasted vacancies, they likely remain as commanders in their regiment. Meanwhile, those interested in *sensing* capabilities, such as surveillance drones, can acquire competencies related to sensing technology, the tactical and theatre applications, the *sustaining* logistics, and so forth. They, too, can remain with the NR, specializing in sensing related roles, or stream to the civilian bureaucracy. They may even choose to work for a private sector supplier. Likewise, individuals best suited for tactical manoeuvre, (the *act* capability), can specialize in crewing a major weapons platform, such as armoured fighting vehicles. They may serve with the NR until retirement or stream to the civilian bureaucracy as an item life-cycle manager. Other officers

and soldiers may stream out of the NR into the specialist corps or the NGS. The permutations are almost endless.

The idea of personnel management by competencies is well established in the literature. Lieutenant General (ret USA) Walter F. Ulmer recommends a form of competency management for the US Army.⁴⁷

MANAGING THE NEW FORCE STRUCTURE AND THE NEW PERSONNEL STRATEGY

The NR can assume a great deal of responsibility for its own success and failure under the new force structure and personnel strategy. The effectiveness of an NR is measured over the long term by rates of recruiting and retention. Readiness and operational effectiveness are measured at manoeuvre training centres and on deployments. The NGS can select well led and well managed NRs to absorb increases in strength, test new doctrines, receive new equipment systems, and embark on difficult deployments. Chronic problems with morale, strength, or competency/capability matching, meanwhile, become helpful symptoms for analysis and reasons for intervention. The leaders of problematic NRs can be held accountable and their units would receive remedial attention and easier deployments for as long as necessary. Commanders cannot escape difficult situations with short tours, and problem soldiers cannot be passed on to infect other units.

The NGS manages individual and collective training, doctrine, and material policy to achieve adequate commonality and interoperability among NRs. A fair degree of divergence is desirable, however, to customize regiments according to regional differences and for specific operational roles. Cautious differentiation can increase the range of capabilities, recruiting appeal, and *esprit de corps*. It is important that the NGS and the NRs not interchange personnel to accommodate promotions, fill urgent vacancies, or to keep headquarters "in touch with the field." NGS candidates will be chosen for their ability to combine dedication to the Army with the objectivity and emotional detachment necessary to shape Army culture as a continuous evolution and not as an ad hoc, belated response to frequent crises. More importantly, both NR and NGS officers must master and remain current in their very different professional roles and build cohesion, trust, and reputation among their peers.

CONCLUSION

Military operations in the post-Cold War era cover a wide spectrum of capabilities. Military strength in the West depends on social capital, discipline, organization, and professionalism. Accordingly, forces must be all-arms, cohesive, adaptable, and manoeuvrable on the scale of the battle group and combat team. The new regimental system provides the social and task cohesion, the stability, the experience, and the focussed professional role required for contemporary missions and doctrine. The Canadian Army must operate as all-arms, all the time.

Only an abrupt change to the army force structure and personnel policies can initiate meaningful cultural transformation. This paper recommends the formation of stable, unified NRs to master tactics and theatre operations. A few officers and soldiers stream at mid-service life into a series of new specialist corps and a new general staff so the New Regiment can maintain a distinct and cohesive culture. New personnel policies for selection, postings, and training build social ties, trust, reputation, and unique personal competencies.

General (ret) Sullivan warns that “The leader must change the critical processes within the organization if he wishes to effect true change. Working upon the margins, in increments, will not effect substantive and enduring transformation.”⁴⁸

About the Author...

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