

## The Cheapest, Quickest Fix for the Canadian Forces J.L. Granatstein

What would a shareholder say to a high-tech corporation that retires its expensively trained personnel at an early age and, despite knowing that it might need them in a future corporate crisis, completely fails to keep track of them? Shareholders would likely call for the CEO's head and shout until they got action. Unfortunately, this is precisely the way the Canadian Forces deals with those regular and reservist servicemen and women who leave the military.

What we have in Canada is a huge resource of trained personnel going to waste for want of imagination and a few dollars. In Britain, every person who leaves the services is automatically on the British equivalent of what we in Canada call the Supplementary Reserve [SR], and liable to be called back to the colours in an emergency. Here, enrolment in the Supplementary Reserve is not automatic, and no serious effort is made to encourage Canadian Forces retirees to join. No effort is expended by National Defence Headquarters to keep SR lists up to date for want of the will to do so.

Even so, the SR has 48,859 personnel in its ranks (or so a website, called "Canada Ally", maintained by the Canadian Embassy in Washington says). That number is almost equal to the regular forces 52,000 effectives and double the Canadian Forces' reserve strength. If that sounds good, it isn't, not really. Unfortunately, as there are no requirements for Supplementary Reservists to report regularly and no incentives for members to keep the Canadian Forces informed of their whereabouts and physical condition, National Defence Headquarters in all likelihood could not locate more than a fraction of these men and

women in a crisis. As a result, the Canadian Forces and the Canadian people must rely on them to come forward voluntarily in emergency. Almost all of those who served in the Canadian Forces are patriotic individuals; most would want to help if their nation or their service was in peril. But relying on chance and goodwill is no guarantee of finding the critically-needed personnel at the right time.

This matters. With the Canadian Forces stretched very thin, with trainers being drafted into units deploying overseas, it will be tough to get new recruits, the 13,000 regulars and 10,000 reservists the Conservative government says it will enlist, into fighting shape. Supplementary Reservists might be able to help. Why not ask if some might be prepared to pitch in? A voluntary appeal to the SR might serve the military's present purposes.

But not all Supplementary Reserve service should be voluntary in nature. With Domestic Operations a high priority in a country under threat of natural disaster and facing the possibility of terrorist attack, it simply must be a critical Department of National Defence priority to upgrade the SR and make it real. All new enlistees in the Canadian Forces must have as a condition of their employment that they will go on the Supplementary Reserve when they leave after five years or 25 years in the Regular or Reserve forces—but only if the military so chooses to enroll them. A fixed term of SR service, say five or seven years, would allow for the obsolescence of skills to be taken into account. In a crisis—an earthquake in British Columbia, say, or a biological terror attack in Montreal--the Supplementary Reservists could be called up to assist in rebuilding a shattered society.

But it is not just those who enlist tomorrow who should be obliged to join the SR. All present serving Canadian Forces members, on leaving the military, should be urged strenuously to join the Supplementary Reserve and offered a small cash

inducement (say \$300) to report once a year to the nearest military base and to keep their contact information updated. Enough support staff at Defence headquarters must be devoted to this. Could it take more than two sergeant clerks operating two computers to do this? Keeping close tabs on tomorrow's retirees is especially important for specialists and technical personnel. In fact, specialists who retired in the last three to five years should be contacted and offered an inducement to join the SR, as well.

The Supplementary Reserve is arguably the most important component of Canada's reserve forces because it contains so many skilled and highly trained personnel and, frankly, because it costs almost nothing to maintain it. This component of the Reserves needs to be treated as if it matters by the Canadian Forces, the Minister of National Defence, and the government. It is frankly a disgrace that this is not done, an indication that Canadians simply don't give a damn. They must do so. Our military resources are too scanty to permit the waste of so many useful and trained men and women.

(J.L. Granatstein writes for the Council for Canadian Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Free use of this article is permitted providing credit is given to CCS21 and to its website: [www.ccs21.org](http://www.ccs21.org)).