

# Women in the Canadian Forces: Past, Present and Future

by

Captain Suzanne Simpson,

Major Doris Toole,

Ms. Cindy Player

## ABSTRACT/RESUME

*Les recommandations de la Commission royale d'enquête sur la situation de la femme ont été publiées vers la fin des années soixante-dix et ont été acceptées par la suite par le Gouvernement canadien. En ce qui touche les*

*sujets se rapportant directement aux Forces canadiennes, la Commission recherchait l'uniformisation des critères d'enrôlement et des conditions de service, l'égalité des prestations de retraite pour les hommes et les femmes, l'accessibilité des femmes aux Collèges militaires canadiens et l'autorisation de servir dans toutes*

les classifications et tous les métiers. Le Conseil de Défense décrétait, en 1971, que les femmes pourraient être employées dans tous les secteurs des Forces canadiennes, à l'exception des postes avancés de combat, des postes isolés et des affectations en mer. Les femmes ne pourraient être admises aux Collèges militaires, mais pourraient par contre suivre, aux frais des FC des cours dispensés par les universités civiles. Cette attitude est devenue et demeure encore la politique des Forces canadiennes pour ce qui est de l'emploi des femmes.

La Loi canadienne sur les droits de la personne a été proclamée le 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1978. Il y est prévu, entre autres dispositions, qu'un employeur peut restreindre l'accessibilité à l'emploi compte tenu seulement d'"exigences professionnelles de bonne foi." Cette disposition est venue renforcer une nécessité qui se faisait sentir: une révision des restrictions imposées à l'embauchage des femmes dans les Forces canadiennes. Une directive d'étude a été émise en avril 1978; nous nous appliquerons à en décrire la portée dans le présent document. Il y sera exposé, plus particulièrement, les résultats de sondages d'opinions destinés à évaluer les répercussions qu'aurait sur le public et les militaires un changement apporté aux politiques d'emploi du personnel féminin. On y met également en lumière les problèmes et les

situations qui pourraient résulter de l'emploi illimité des femmes dans tous les secteurs des FC. Il y est enfin question de futurs programmes de recherche ainsi que de politiques d'emploi qui pourraient être adoptées ultérieurement à l'égard des femmes.

Morris Janowitz writes in his book, The Professional Soldier: "The military establishment is a reflection of civilian social structure." (Janowitz, 1960) Since this is to a large extent true, the limited role of women in the armed forces of the late 1800s is not surprising. The industrialization of the early 1900s led to women being employed in a variety of endeavours outside of the home. This was mirrored in the military in the two major conflicts of this century. The total war effort required during World War II led to the institutionalization of women's military service. The leaders of the allied nations fortunately did not subscribe to Hitler's opinion of the role of women during war which was summarized in one of his addresses at Nuremberg in 1934: "Woman has her battlefield. With each child she brings to the nation she fights her fight for the nation." (Baynes, 1942) According to Albert Speer (1970), the Allied policy of employing women in all fields in the military, short of combat, and in all sections of industry and agriculture afforded the

Private Cathy Jubenville, air weapons technician with 417 OFTS, installs the bolt on a 20 mm cannon on a CF 104 during Exercise Maple Flag, 1978

Courtesy, National  
Defense Headquarters





Corporal (W) DL McPherson works with a sander  
on a UN vehicle in the Middle East, 1978

Courtesy, National  
Defense Headquarters

Allies their single most strategic advantage over the Axis powers.

In Canada during World War II, the sole purpose for uniformed women was to release men to combat duties. Their employment was primarily in the communication, administrative, logistic and medical support roles. At the end of the war and with the passing of the crisis, women were demobilized.

Despite women's success in many fields traditionally considered to be the preserve of men, the twenty-five years following World War II were characterized by uncertainty about the future of women in Canada's Armed Forces. The ebb and flow of women in uniform was determined by the increased or diminished requirements for manpower--last hired, first fired.

After near extinction in the immediate post war years, impetus was again given to employing women in our military forces with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Enrollment of women was authorized in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1951, the Canadian Army (Regular) in 1954 and the Royal Canadian Navy in 1955.

Changing defence policy and the introduction of more automated equipment in trades in which women were concentrated sharply reduced the need for women in the early 1960s--and, for a few years, retention of any women in the Force

was in doubt. In 1965, it was decided that women would continue to be employed in the Regular Force with a fixed ceiling of 1500. They were to be assigned primarily to administrative support role duties. This policy continued through the unification of the three services in 1968 and on into the early 1970s.

#### The 1970s

For the Canadian Forces, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women sought standardization of enrollment criteria; standardization of terms and conditions of service; equal pension benefits for men and women; opportunity for women to attend Canadian Military Colleges; and the opening of all occupations to women. While there was no question concerning the validity of the egalitarian principle embodied in the recommendation, that is, to open all employment areas, the practicality of doing so, while at the same time maintaining an effective military force, required careful examination.

In July 1971, the Defence Council directed that there would be "no limitation on the employment of women in the Canadian Forces, other than in the primary combat role, at remote locations and at sea. Women would not be admitted to military colleges but would be eligible for subsidized training at civilian universities." In very loose terms primary combat role means service as a combat soldier,

as a sailor on a warship and as air-crew in fighter aircraft. This became the policy on the employment of women. The limitations were imposed in 1971 because of the prevailing views and mores of Canadian society in relation to the employment of women. These reflected, in general, the views and practices of the majority of other nations. Even today no modern industrialized nation utilizes women in combat units during hostilities.

Action was taken to implement the Defence Council direction. Enrollment qualifications (such as age and education) and terms and conditions of contracts were standardized. Marital status is no longer a criteria for enrollment and servicewomen who marry need not be released. A servicewoman during pregnancy may continue to serve or take her release. When continued service is her choice, maternity leave and full medical benefits are available to her. With the amendment of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act in 1975, pension contributions and benefits are now the same for men and women.

Early in 1978, the Minister of National Defence announced that the admission of women to the military colleges would be considered and two women were appointed to the advisory board of the colleges. There is already one female post-graduate student at the Royal Military College in Kingston. Women also now attend the Canadian Forces Staff Col-

lege and the National Defence College. These institutions are the centres of graduate studies in military science and are generally considered as prerequisites for advancement to senior levels.

From limited employment opportunities in 1970, roles have expanded so that 81 of 127 classifications and trades are open to women. In 1970, women represented 1.8% of the Canadian Forces. They now represent 5.9% of the total strength, a larger percentage than any country but the United States. Moreover, this increase has been achieved over a period when the total strength of the Canadian Forces has been reduced. Of similar significance has been the entry of women into the non-traditional work areas--firefighters, vehicle technicians, machinists, plumber gas fitters, electrical generating systems technicians, ammunition technicians. Women receive training on the standard rifle and other small arms. Many women serve in the groups that are assigned to defend our Canadian Forces bases should that need arise. Married and single servicewomen are working with their male counterparts in the Canadian contingent of the United Nations Middle East force in Egypt where the Canadian Forces provide communications and logistic support.

In summary, then, aside from the prohibitions relating to combat, to employment at sea, isolated posts and

the military colleges, it is the policy of the Canadian Forces to recruit, train, employ, assign and pay women in the same way as men. Women are no longer viewed as an auxiliary resource. They are an integral part of the Canadian Forces.

In a military force which is limited in manpower but often required to respond to unexpected tasking, it is essential that maximum flexibility be retained in the management of our personnel resources. Policies which provide for retention after marriage and maternity leave can have limiting effects on mobility and unit readiness. The number of service marriages has risen as more women have moved into the military. Approximately 25% of all servicewomen are married and 78% of these are married to servicemen. This creates problems for career managers who strive to arrange joint assignments. When joint assignments are not possible and separation is not acceptable, it often results in a voluntary resignation of one or both spouses, thus, increasing unexpected personnel shortages.

With the increasing number of married military women, there are an increasing number of pregnancies. Skilled replacement personnel possessing security clearances are often not available from manpower resources inside or outside of the service. This could mean that the servicewomen's co-

workers must absorb the extra workload while she is on maternity leave. The impact of increased marriages and pregnancies on defence capability must be taken into consideration in any future expansion of the role of women.

In recognition of these concerns; in view of the determination of the Canadian Forces to respect the intent of the Human Rights Act; and, in order to take full advantage of the available recruit pool, the Minister of National Defence directed that a study be undertaken to determine the best course of action for the Department. What follows is a discussion of certain aspects of that study.

#### Future

On 1 March 1978 the Canadian Human Rights Act was proclaimed. Among other things, this Act prohibits discrimination in employment practices on the basis of sex. The Act does state, however, that ". . . it is not a discriminatory practice if . . . any restriction . . . is based on a bona fide occupational requirement." (Bill C-25, 1978) The proclamation of this Act, coupled with a periodic need to review personnel practices, triggered a review of the employment policies for women in the Canadian Forces.

#### Individual Rights and National Security

While the Canadian Human Rights Act is

explicit in what constitutes discrimination in employment, it leaves "bona fide occupational requirement" undefined. In the strictest sense, a "bona fide occupational requirement" could be limited to physical capabilities required to do a job. In the broader sense of the term, individual rights for equal opportunity could be in conflict with the collective good of society--for instance, the overall performance of a defence force.

In the sense where employment opportunity is limited to physical grounds only, it is doubtful whether women as a group could be excluded from any role in the Canadian Forces. In the broader sense, there are concerns about the employment of women in combat. Would the deterrent effect of the Canadian Forces be changed by the introduction of women into combat? In spite of our changed attitudes towards women's roles, attitudes held by other cultures could diminish the deterrent value of our force. Would our NATO Allies depreciate our contribution to the alliance if our combat forces were composed of women as well as men? Again, this could arise because of disparate views of the role of women. Would mixed male-female forces be as effective in combat as all male forces? The sociological impact of mixing units is yet undetermined. These questions are difficult ones because there is no empirical base upon which to make an evaluation. The experience of Israel is often cited; however, the last time

women were deployed as combatants was in 1948 during the War of Independence. (Hazleton, 1977) Moreover, the Israeli government does not now employ women in a combat capacity.

From the above it can be seen that there are risks to deterrent value, to alliance credibility and to predictability of response in combat. These risks must be taken into account when individual rights for employment in the Canadian Forces are being considered.

#### Operational Considerations

Under the heading of operational considerations are the views of the operational commanders. These officers are responsible for the functional aspects of the Canadian Forces. They must be prepared for war or any other national emergency. They maintain the training and operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces at a high level and they, therefore, can be expected to express concerns about any change that might reduce that effectiveness. Due to the uncertainties of employing women in non-traditional roles, particularly in combat, these senior officers have reservations about expanding employment opportunities for women too quickly. There is very little knowledge about women in combat; however, potential problems have been identified by combat experts. This has led to the belief that the use of women may reduce the odds of survival



Courtesy, National  
Defense Headquarters

Private DL Monkhouse op-  
erates a winch and tow-  
bar on a wrecker, 1978

Lieutenant Susan Savard,  
of the Ottawa Service  
Battalion, adjusts equip-  
ment prior to a para-  
jump at Cobden, Ontario,  
1978

Courtesy, National Defense  
Headquarters



in battle; thus, operational commanders feel that women should not be assigned to combat units in the Canadian Forces before more knowledge is gained.

Commanders of the sea element of the Canadian Forces have the following concerns:

- a. Women might not be able to perform all of the tasks on board ship.
- b. A warship is a closed community with limited privacy. The introduction of women may upset group cohesiveness, thus, affecting morale and reducing the operational capabilities of the ship.
- c. Alterations necessary to provide privacy in sleeping and personal hygiene may result in less living or fighting space on board ship.

Insofar as land combat is concerned, women are not now employed forward of the divisional boundary--that is, where there is an unpredictable degree of contact with the enemy. In those forward areas, regardless of an individual's assigned trade, he or she must be capable of carrying out the duties of a combat soldier and be able to provide for his or her own self-protection. Employment of women forward of this boundary evokes the following concerns among field commanders:

- a. A high rate of women casualties might sap the nation's determina-

- b. Women prisoners of war could increase the leverage the enemy has on Canadian male prisoners of war. Also, this could enhance the enemy's psychological warfare efforts.
- c. A serviceman's reaction to the presence of women on the battlefield might adversely affect his behaviour under these high stress conditions.
- d. Field commanders feel that privacy cannot be guaranteed in war or during peacetime manoeuvres. Troops sleep, exist and fight in tactical groups.

Few people argue that women have the capability to function effectively as pilots and aircrew in all types of aircraft. The commanders of the air element are concerned, however, that unless women aircrew serve in all types of craft including fighting aircraft, there will be a reduction of flexibility in employment. Flexibility is fundamental, due to the small size of the Canadian Air Force with a production capacity of only 121 pilots per year. If women were employed in all aircraft types, except combat roles, reverse discrimination could occur.

#### Attitudes of Service Members, Spouses and the Canadian Public

In May 1978, approximately 4500 servicemen, women and spouses were surveyed about their attitudes towards

the employment of women in combat and at isolated posts. (Directorate of Personnel Development Studies, National Defence Headquarters) (See Table 1) Also two Gallup Polls of Canadian public opinion on this subject were conducted in November 1977 and in May 1978.

A majority of those polled believed that women should be given the opportunity to serve as aircrew. A majority was opposed to women serving in land combat, although, for the most part, there was acceptance of women being introduced into combat support units. Most were in favour of introducing women into support ships. Opinion was split on allowing women to serve in destroyers and the consensus was against allowing women to serve in submarines. Except for spouses of service members, the majority of those questioned believed women should have the opportunity to serve at isolated stations.

The majority of the sample of airmen did not feel that the operational effectiveness would be changed with the introduction of women in aircrew. Soldiers felt that efficiency would be degraded with the introduction of women into combat and that there would be some impairment with women in support units. The sailors thought that there would be a detrimental effect on operational capabilities of destroyers and submarines with the introduction of

women but that on support ships they would not degrade and, indeed, might even improve effectiveness. Generally, it was believed that the introduction of women at isolated stations would increase effectiveness and improve morale in those units.

On the question of potential problems arising from women in combat, physical capabilities, marital conflict, emotional suitability and women's impact on operational capabilities were judged to be the most serious. There were, however, differences of opinion on the seriousness of these problems. The soldiers were the least optimistic. The Canadian Forces women were by far the most optimistic. Only one area, marital conflict, was judged by a majority of servicewomen to be a difficult problem.

On the whole, the servicewomen felt more strongly about giving women the opportunity to serve in combat roles and at isolated stations than did the others. A majority of the women indicated that they would be willing to serve in most of these roles and they foresaw fewer and less severe problems with the unrestricted employment of women in the Canadian Forces than did the rest of those questioned.

#### Medical Considerations

The Surgeon General of the Canadian Forces reviewed the available information on anthropomorphic, anatomic,

COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES

TOWARDS

UNRESTRICTED EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN COMBAT ROLES AND ISOLATED POSTINGS\*

Should Women Be Employed in:	Answer	Service Women	Sailors	Soldiers	Aircrew	Spouses	Canadian Public
Support Ships	Yes	76	56				
	No	17	38				
	Don't know	7	6				
Destroyers	Yes	50	37			42	50
	No	37	57			50	44
	Don't know	13	6			8	6
Submarines	Yes	45	22				
	No	44	71				
	Don't know	11	7				
Combat Support	Yes	80		64			
	No	14		30			
	Don't know	6		6		45.5	49
Combat	Yes	45		25		45.6	45
	No	42		69		8.9	6
	Don't know	13		6			
Aircrew	Yes	87			56	62	58
	No	10			34	27	36
	Don't know	3			10	11	6
Isolated Posting	Yes	72	60	60	59	38	
	No	18	20	31	32	55	
	Don't know	10	20	9	9	7	

\*(All results in percentages)

(Source: Directorate of Personnel Development Studies, National Defence Headquarters)

physiological and other medical considerations pertinent to the employment of females in the full range of military occupations. The essence of his report is summarized in the following statement ". . . there should be no need to limit women from any trade or classification on a purely medical basis--simply select appropriately." (Haakonson & McKee, 1978) The report pointed to a need for the establishment of definitive selection criteria specifying the levels of size, muscle strength and endurance required for each occupation. These criteria should apply equally to men and women. The report also recommended that the design of future military machinery and equipment take into account the differences between average male and average female size and strength. Also, where working conditions are hazardous to a fetus, pregnant females should be afforded employment which protects them from these hazardous conditions. Certain aspects of female physiology were evaluated as not having relevance to combat. These included breast tissue, lower heat tolerance, menstrual irregularities and susceptibility to motion sickness.

#### Differential Costs

Experience in the United States Forces has demonstrated that the introduction of women into non-traditional occupations has resulted in higher attrition. (Use of Women in the Military, 1977)

This observation is borne out by our statistics over the past five years when women have taken on expanded roles within the Canadian Forces. The United States experience indicates that the further removed the new roles are from traditional female images, the longer the higher attrition continues.

In trades in which women have been employed for some time, women's attrition rates are the same as the men's, except in years of service four to ten. Presumably, the higher attrition rates during this period of service are due to child birth; however, this has not been verified and requires further investigation.

Experience in the United States indicates that women use medical facilities more frequently than men. (Fact Sheet: DOD Comparative Study, 1978) Available evidence in our case confirms this; however, women present fewer disciplinary problems, are less frequently absent without leave and show lower rates of alcoholism and drug addiction.

Another experience associated with the introduction of women into new occupations is the cost of materiel. This cost includes the conversion of facilities to ensure privacy in sleeping and personal hygiene; the introduction of suitable field uniforms for women; and, the conversion of some equipment for female use.

### Isolated Posts

The concerns and uncertainties about employing women in combat do not pertain to the employment of women at isolated stations. The concern here focuses on the impact such employment would have on the spouses who are left behind while the service member serves a six month isolated tour. While the environmental conditions are not parallel, the Canadian Forces have some experience here because women are already employed with men in the Middle East where family members are not allowed. Employment of women at isolated posts is an important consideration because, to ensure optimum use of personnel and equitable sharing of the less attractive locations, all service personnel should be equally liable for such work. As indicated, spouses of service members are concerned about this prospect. Any attempt to introduce women to isolated posts will have to be preceded by a program to prepare spouses for the change, if family problems, reduced morale and resulting higher attrition are to be minimized.

### Military Colleges

The exclusion of women from the three Canadian Military Colleges is based on the fact that the primary purpose of the colleges is to train officers for combat at sea, on land and in the air. Of an annual intake of approximately 630 cadets into the Regular Officer Training Programme, only 400 can be

accepted at the military colleges. The remainder are placed in the civilian universities. Two-thirds of the annual intake, approximately 425 positions, are allocated to combat occupations. Since combat and near-combat roles have been closed to women, and because the military colleges have a limited capacity, it has been felt that there is no need for women to attend. Complicating this rationale is the fact that the Canadian military colleges are open to some support occupations which are open to women. It could be argued that women are at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts in the same occupations because they cannot benefit from the expanded military education which they would obtain at a military college. Should women be introduced into near-combat roles the rationale would be further weakened.

### Competition for Personnel in the Future

Canadian population predictions indicate that the numbers of people of recruitable age will shrink by 20% for Anglophones and by 40% for Francophones during the period from 1981 to 1992. This is due to the passing of the baby boom through that age spectrum. (Rampton, Cotton & Pinch, 1978) It is magnified by a drop in the Canadian fertility rate. The fertility rate has fallen below replacement levels and the under-thirty population is forecast to be disproportionately low at least until the year 2030 A.D.

The Canadian Forces has traditionally recruited its non-officers from those who do not graduate from high school. The proportion of young people who fit into this category has decreased dramatically over the last fifteen to twenty years due to increased educational levels and expanded opportunities to acquire trade skills in the civilian community. In the past, the Canadian Forces was the one of the limited number of avenues through which one could obtain a trade skill. With the advent of community colleges, this is no longer the case.

In the future, the Canadian Forces will have a need to increase the quality and skill level of recruits to meet the rising technological demands of military equipment and jobs. At a time when the recruit pool will be low and personal expectations high, due to the level of education of young people, it may be difficult to attract sufficient numbers of high quality males to meet our needs. The alternatives are to recruit lower quality males or to increase our intake of high quality females.

#### Conclusion

From this discussion it can be seen that there is a need for the Canadian Forces to use the potential recruit resources to the fullest. While the Canadian Human Rights Act triggered a review of employment policies for women, an impending shortage of re-

cruits in the 1980s lent emphasis to the need for such a study. The Canadian Forces intend to expand employment opportunities for women but, due to the uncertainties of employing women in combat, it is essential that the expansion proceed gradually.

The Minister of National Defence has stated that he intends to tell the public in the near future how the Department will proceed in this area. He has reviewed the considerations brought forward by the recent study and there may be other factors, of which the authors are not aware; however, it cannot be said at this time what may be decided.

It seems apparent that the Department would be justified in proceeding with caution in view of the uncertainties and the risk involved in moving too quickly. Some of the uncertainties could only be resolved, it is believed, by properly planned trials over a period of several years. Others, such as the enrollment of women in the military colleges, would require a shorter period of adjustment.

Little will be gained for women or for the Canadian Forces if we move too quickly. This caution should not be construed to mean that the Department of National Defence does not support the intent of the Canadian Human Rights Act. It simply means that it is taking full cognizance of human nature. The military is for the most

part a traditional organization and significant adjustments will be required on the part of its members to make this venture a success.

**NOTE:**

Subsequent to the presentation, the Minister of National Defence on 29 Jan 79 announced five year trials with women in near-combat roles as aircrew, on a ship and in a land combat support unit. An isolated post currently closed to women will be opened on a trial basis, and Canadian Military Colleges will also be opened.

REFERENCES

- Baynes, N. H. (ed.) The Speeches of Adolf Hitler: April 1922 - August 1939. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Bill C-25, The House of Commons of Canada, 1 March, 1978.
- Binkin, M. & S.J. Bach. Women and the Military. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977.
- Defence Council 311th Meeting. Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 5 July 1971.
- Ewashko, T.A. & F.P. Donovan. Impact of Loss Rate and Female Enrolment On Experience Level. Ottawa: Operational Research Report (78/2), Department of National Defence, June 1978.
- Fact Sheet: DOD Comparative Study of Lost Time for Men and Women. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, May 1978.
- Haakonson, N.H. & V.A. McKee. Medical Considerations for Employment of Women in the Canadian Military. Ottawa: Directorate of Preventive Medicine, Surgeon General Branch, Department of National Defence, June 1978.
- Hazleton, L. Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977.
- Janowitz, M. The Professional Soldier - A Social and Political Portrait. Toronto: Free Press, 1960.
- Rampton, G.M., C.A. Cotton & F.C. Pinch. Military Manpower Trends In Canada: Attrition, Widening the Manpower Base, and Other Perspectives. Cambridge England: Paper prepared for TTCF(U) Technical Panel UTP-3, October, 1978.
- Report of the Admission of Women to the U.S. Military Academy: Project Athena I. New York: United States Military Academy, September, 1977.
- Report of the Admission of Women to the U.S. Military Academy: Project Athena II. New York: United States Military Academy, June, 1978.
- Report of the Attitude Surveys on Women in Combat Roles and Isolated Postings. Ottawa: Directorate Personnel Development Studies, Department of National Defence, June, 1978.
- Speer, A. Inside the Third Reich. (trans. by Wilson, R. & Wilson, C.) New York: Macmillan, 1970.
- Use of Women in the Military. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, May, 1977.
- Women Content in the Army: Reforger 77 (REF WAC). Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral & Social Sciences, 30 May 1978.
- Women Content in Units Force Development Test (MAX WAC). Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral & Social Sciences, 3 October 1977.