

▶ A CHANGING ROLE FOR THE RMC

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BACKGROUND

IN 1855 CANADA assumed full responsibility for its own defence. It passed the *Militia Act* in 1868, and in 1874 the Royal Military College (RMC, or ‘the College’) was established “for the purpose of providing a complete education in all branches of military tactics, fortification, engineering, and general scientific knowledge in subjects connected with and necessary to thorough knowledge of the military profession” In 1876 the RMC opened and was attended by 18 cadets, with the first class graduating in 1878.

A second college, the Royal Roads Military College operated in Colwood, British Columbia from 1940 to 1995. In 1952, Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent’s government determined the need for a bilingual college and later that year, le Collège militaire royale (CMR) St Jean-sur-le-Richelieu Quebec opened.

Women students were first admitted at the colleges in 1979.

Currently, women form 25% of the cadet population. RMC has a Commandant holding the rank of Brigadier-General, and a principal who is the Academic Head. RMC has a Board of Governors providing advice and recommendations to the Minister of National Defence, who acts as the College’s Chancellor. Since 2000, RMC has been administered by the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA).

Currently, RMC provides undergraduate and graduate degrees in both official languages to approximately 1,300 full-time students and 1,250 part-time students. Approximately 1,000 Officer Cadets are enrolled in the Regular Officer Training Plan (ROTP) at RMC representing the majority of full-time students.

A FUTURE OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

It’s a sad reality, but Canada’s military colleges might have outlived their usefulness as institutions mainly dedicated to the education and training of officer cadets for careers in the



Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as commissioned officers. Aside from athletics, exposure to a military training milieu, and bilingualism, recent external studies indicate that the Colleges do not provide adequate training in leadership and in the proper conduct expected of future officers. These studies have also shown that the RMC does not produce officers at a reasonable cost, and that there are significant weaknesses in military training. Additionally, there is no significant difference in career progression between RMC graduates and officers who entered the CAF through other officer entry plans.

These findings are made in a 2017 Auditor General Report about the viability of RMC, and are strongly echoed in a 2020 Statistics Canada report, as well as in the 2022 *Independent External Comprehensive Review* by the Honourable Louise Arbour.

Truth be told, RMC is no longer exemplifies the long-standing traditions of excellence to Canadians. The above-mentioned Reports which will be addressed further below, demonstrate that, contemporarily, many RMC graduates lack elementary military leadership skills, despite the inflated cost to the taxpayer in their training. Perhaps more concerning is that RMC is beset by a culture of sexual misconduct and academic dishonesty.

ABOVE RIGHT: Royal Military College cadets parade in the school’s main courtyard.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1998 WITHERS REPORT

In 1998, General (ret’d) Ramsey Withers lead a Study Group which produced a Report to the RMC Board of Directors titled *“Balanced Excellence Leading Canada’s Armed Forces in the New Millennium.”* This study was focused on ensuring that RMC graduates were fully prepared to undertake all responsibilities expected of newly commissioned officers.

In the report, General Withers concludes that of the four required pillars to be demonstrated to graduate from RMC (Academic, Bilingualism, Physical Fitness and Military), the ‘military pillar’ was unacceptably weak: *“the military program was not professionally developed nor professionally delivered.”*

At page 43 of his report, General Withers writes: *“Standards of behaviour must be set high, and their rationale clearly understood. They must be rigorously applied, and non-adherence consistently and firmly corrected. . . At RMC insufficient attention is devoted to this process. . . Duty and valour should be revealed in the daily routine of all cadets, where moral courage takes the place of the physical variety of the battlefield.”*

A quarter of a century has passed since the Withers Report made several sage recommendations to the RMC Board of Governors, none of which appear to have been fully implemented. Instead, the culture at RMC appears to have deteriorated even further and appears at a point of crisis.

2015 DESCHAMPS REPORT

In May 2015, the Honorable Marie Deschamps produced a report titled *‘External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment’* in the CAF. The Report makes shocking revelations about the sexualized culture at RMC, and reports that *“sexual harassment was considered a passage obligé at the college, and sexual assault was an ever-present risk.”* One officer cadet joked that *“they do not report sexual harassment because it happens all the time.”*

2015 OPERATION HONOUR

In response to the Deschamps Report, in August 2015 the then Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Jonatan Vance initiated Operation Honour, whose objective was to eradicate sexual misconduct in the CAF, including at RMC. General Vance is an RMC graduate. Following the retirement of General Vance, on allegations of sexual misconduct against him personally, Operation Honour was suspended in 2021.

Shortly after initiating Operation Honour, the national media reported that the RMC student body was not taking matters seriously. Instead, they took to mocking Op Honour, and nicknaming it a bastardized pronunciation of the French translation “Hop on Her” (Op Honneur).

That same year, a sex-assault prevention educator attended RMC to give a lecture to Cadets about Op Honour and sexual assault prevention. During her appearance before the student body, she was met with hostility, whistled at, cat-called, laughed at, and openly disrespected by the officer cadets in attendance. After filing a complaint, *she* became the subject of a military investigation. It took a remarkable five months for the RMC Commandant to issue this guest educator an apology. For at least three (3) years thereafter, she received nasty, abusive and harassing emails and tweets, some including death threats requiring her to hire a personal security detail.

2017 AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT

In 2017, the Auditor General (AG) of Canada’s Fall Report conducted a performance audit of RMC. *Inter alia*, the AG Report shows that the governance structure within the military colleges is ineffective, and that RMC *“did not suitably integrate military and academic objectives.”*

The AG reports that between September 2014 and December 2016 there were 87 reported incidents of academic misconduct at the RMC, plagiarism and cheating, mostly committed by third and fourth-year cadets. This finding is echoed by Justice Arbour in her 2022 Report (below) who finds that military colleges foster a culture of *“don’t blame your bud.”* Instead of learning truth, duty and valour, Officer Cadets report that they *“spend four years learning how to circumvent rules as a result of the immense pressure to succeed.”*

The AG Report goes on to conclude that RMC graduates generally lack leadership training, which is surprising considering that *“leadership”* is a core reason for having a separate military university. The AG Report concludes: *“RMC did not provide effective military leadership training, guidance, and mentoring to Officer Cadets ... this may have contributed to the large percentage of incidents of improper conduct among senior Officer Cadets.”*

The AG Report also notes that RMC Cadets lack the type of discipline expected of military recruits. It details fifty-four (54) *“serious”* incidents at RMC including findings of drunkenness, drug abuse and mental distress.

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On the academic side, the AG Report states that RMC has 192 full-time professors, which is one professor for every 8.6 students. In Ontario, the student-to-faculty ratio is 29:1 while the average in Canada is 20:1. In 2014, the RMC’s reported operating expenditures were about \$91.5 million. *“This is about \$55,000 per full-time-equivalent student and is the highest per-student cost in the country. This cost was two times the average cost per student at other small universities that had fewer than 2,500 full-time-equivalent students.”*

Despite there being questionable added value of attending military college, the cost to run military colleges is astonishing. The AG cites military colleges as *“the most costly way”* to educate future military officers, and *“almost twice as expensive as any other officer entry plan.”* The AG established the cost for a four-year degree at RMC to be \$403,288 per cadet – this compares with the cost of \$238,928 for training the same officer-cadet at a civilian university.

In parallel to the military colleges, the CAF provides alternatives to the RMC to obtain an officer’s commission for service in the CAF where the costs are significantly lower. This includes ROTP at civilian universities; the Continuing Education Officer Training Plan (CEOTP) the Military Officer Training Program (MOTP) etc. In respect of these alternate entry paths, the AG concludes: *“National Defence has an opportunity to increase the overall number of officers at a lower cost by increasing enrolment in the ROTP-civilian plan or recruitment through the Direct Entry Officer Plan.”*

2020 STATISTICS CANADA REPORT

In October 2020, Statistics Canada prepared a Report to determine the experiences of unwanted sexualized and discriminatory behaviours and sexual assault among students at Canadian military colleges. This Report was eye-opening and paints a real and unappealing image of the culture at RMC.

The 2020 StatsCan Report found that 68% of RMC students witnessed or experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours (nearly 80% for female cadets) and more than one in seven female cadets were sexually assaulted in the previous year (15%). That means, through a four-year degree, up to 60% of female cadets at RMC could have been the victim of sexual assault, which includes *“sexual attack”*, (defined as being held down or hurt during a sexual assault) and being *“unable to consent”* (including being drugged, manipulated or forced into sex).

2021 ANNUS HORRIBILIS

Since launching Operation Honour in 2015, the Canadian

media has reported on a steady parade of CAF of sexual misconduct by senior ranking officers, many of whom are RMC graduates. Since 2021 alone, more than a dozen generals and admirals have been sidelined, investigated, criminally prosecuted, or forced into early retirement because of alleged inappropriate sexualized conduct. This includes one retired and one serving CDS; two serving Chiefs of Military Personnel; and one serving Chief of the Army.

The crisis in military leadership has combusted to the point of creating a morale crisis, depriving the rank and file access to trusted leaders with moral authority. These leaders, who have become marred in scandal, can no longer hold the confidence to provide junior members with answers, guidance, action and hope.

The turbulence caused at high command has also deprived the rank and file access to those who should be best positioned to be role models for ethical standards and value-based decision making. Frighteningly, this leadership crisis, which is without precedent in the Canadian history, is occurring at a time of a significant broad and direct threat to world security and stability.

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2022 ARBOUR REPORT

In May 2022, retired Justice Louse Arbour produced her *‘Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review.’* In addition to confirming much of the above as it concerns the sexualized culture at RMC, the Arbour Report shows that there are major abuses of power within the student body at military college, where senior students are *“invested in responsibilities towards their junior peers.”*

Aside from the perception that this hierarchal structure results in the *“untrained leading the untrained”* it creates a problematic situation. Justice Arbour correctly writes that *“Immaturity in the exercise of authority and power over others, real or perceived, is unlikely to contribute to the eradication of sexual misconduct that has taken root in the culture of these colleges.”*

THE WAY FORWARD

Oversight is a core parliamentary function and a critical responsibility, particularly in times of crisis. Parliament is the pillar of democratic governance, with a critical role in spurring and sustaining national action to bring a crisis under control. If Parliament is serious about quelling sexual violence within the

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CAF, they must first impose strict measures to stop the sexual misconduct culture at RMC.

The richly endowed environment provided to the RMC – which is the birthplace of many Chiefs of Defence Staff (the current and the last four CDS’ are graduates of the RMC) – should be re-considered. Given the above, the time has come to recognize that RMC is no longer meeting its objectives as an undergraduate military training establishment. But this does not mean we need to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Parliament should consider removing the undergraduate degree granting component of our military colleges, and instead make the colleges exclusively an advanced degree granting, and training, institution. CAF members should not attend military college in their early formative years.

As a partial aside, a similar structure already exists within our allied militaries. The British Army runs by the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. At Sandhurst, 90 % of attending cadets already possess a university degree upon selection for training and undergo a 44-week course to develop character, intellect and professional soldierly skills. Australia runs the Royal Military College (Duntroon) which emphasizes military competence by providing a 18 month military training and leadership course. The Australian military also offers a three-year undergraduate degree in conjunction with military training to select cadets through a partnership with the University of New South Wales.

Going forward Parliament should have all prospective CAF officers complete their university studies, through fully subsidized education, at civilian universities under the existing ROTP. This is already the norm for lawyers, doctors, dentists, nurses, padres, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers and a near majority of other prospective officers who are recruited for service in the Regular Force.

Importantly, given that ROTP members attending civilian universities are members of the CAF (and receive a salary, benefits and vacation time during their studies - and whose tuition and all related fees are fully paid by the Crown) they should be considered to be “on duty” when attending class, and wear their CAF uniforms in class. Each ROTP candidate would be expected to maintain the deportment and uphold the ethical and behavioural standards expected of our military and in accord with the *Code of Service Discipline*. These ROTP members would continue to spend their summer months committed to military training, occupational training and second language training.

As a fringe bonus, having ROTP officers embedded within the student population at civilian universities would make possible a form of much needed ‘social recruiting’, with each ROTP student acting as a brand ambassador for the CAF. In so doing, much of the existing negative stigma surrounding military enrollment and indoctrination could be undone, at least in part, through the presence, appearance and manner of the ROTP officers in their midst.

In her Report, Justice Arbour starts her conclusion stating that “military colleges appear as institutions from a different era, with an outdated and problematic leadership model.”

If the military colleges are to remain, a modern approach is required which would result in the RMC being rebranded as a national training institution for graduate studies open to both military and civilian students from Canada and abroad. The focus of advanced degrees to be granted by RMC would necessarily be focused on military disciplines such as Strategic Intelligence, Strategic Security, Homeland Security, Diplomacy and Military Studies, Military Ethics, National Security, Leadership Studies etc.

CONCLUSION

Parliament has ultimate responsibility to make broad strategic decisions about the CAF, including its structure and organization, to ensure the mission success of its units. It also has a special responsibility to ensure that the CAF are led by a professional officer corps whose members are ingrained, at the start of their careers, with the foundational values of duty, honor, courage, loyalty and integrity. The current decline in values, particularly at the RMC, as outlined in the Arbour report, Statistics Canada Reports, and the AG Report makes Parliament’s intervention in this matter an urgent necessity.

Leaving such matter to the military is no longer an option. Parliament must act to both redefine the *raison d’être* of the RMC and to eradicate sexual misconduct within the military at large. As a minimum, redirecting undergraduate ROTP students to civilian universities would allow Parliament to give effect to the sagacious advice of Justice Arbour and put an end to the CAF’s maladroitness and the patchwork attempts to correct the sexual misconduct culture at RMC.

Re-engineering the role of the RMC as a national training institution for graduate studies would establish RMC as a global leader capable of generating and directing empirically grounded research in salient issues in the related domains of Security, Intelligence and Defence Studies. 🍁