

FEATURES

Canadian Forces Base Downsview

photos by Andre Souroujon

By JAMES FLAGAL

When one thinks of Canada, its military might is one of the last things to come to mind. The last time a Canadian soldier died in action was in the early '70s in Cyprus during the political turmoil which that country was experiencing. And even then Canada was not defending its direct security interests; rather we were fulfilling a peacekeeping function, a major role of the Canadian Armed Forces. Last year almost 900 Canadian troops served with United Nations peacekeeping forces, with 515 still stationed in Cyprus.

Another major role of the military is to carry out search and rescue operations by land, air and sea. Last year alone there were over 8,300 search and rescue incidents, 6400 of those marine related. The military also coordinates its operations with other government bodies, whether it is providing protection for royal visits by the Prince and Princess of Wales, or helping relocate a native community after a flood has destroyed their homes.

And then of course there are the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) commitments which comprise one of the five commands of the Canadian Armed Forces—Command Forces Europe (CPE). In 1986-87, the budget for CPE was \$148.5 million, and operations used 1,160 personnel. Next is the Communications Command, which provides essential services to coordinate the armed forces and also conducts research in order to upgrade existing equipment. One of the main responsibilities of this command is to monitor and maintain NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defence), a major part of the \$72.4 million communications services budget.

Air Command is the largest command, consisting of over 31,482 personnel working with a whopping 1986-87 budget of \$424.1 million. Mobile Command is essentially our equivalent of the US's version of the army, with over 40,200 regular force, militia, and civilian staff. Our marine core is formally called the Maritime Command, and uses well over 16,000 personnel.

In total, the Canadian Armed Forces in 1986 boasted over 86,000 regular force members with more than 50,000 additional personnel in reserve. On top of that the Department of National Defence (DND) has well over 30,000 employees. This intricate command structure sounds pretty impressive, especially given the overall DND budget for last year of \$9.9 billion. In reality however, our defence expenditures pale in comparison to some of our NATO allies. While our defence expenditures are just over 7% of their gross national product, ranking us second to last among NATO members.

For those students who do not have the money to attend college and learn a trade, or for those who want to go to university and obtain a professional degree, the armed forces does offer an attractive package. Also, students who enter the armed forces avoid incurring the overwhelming debts which many face upon graduation, and their subsidization programme is far better than living off the measly \$110 per week which the Ontario Student Aid Plan offers.

In general, a grade 13 graduate student applying to the armed forces would enter the officer stream which not only pays for full tuition, books, health and dental care, but also pays a salary to the student while he/she attends school. The system works like this: after graduation from high school, a student would go to a recruiting centre which in Toronto is located at 4900 Yonge Street. After talking to a recruiting officer, the candidate would then decide which classification he/she wants to pursue—essentially, in which capacity they would like to serve in the armed forces.

There are several areas of opportunities for those candidates who are not interested in a university education. Through the armed forces, one can be trained to become anything from an air traffic controller to a laboratory technician, from an electrician to a physical education and recreation instructor. Many of Canada's commercial pilots have received their training with the armed forces, before going to take a job with a commercial airline. The Officer Candidate Training Plan (OCTP) applies to those students who have completed Grade 12, while Grade 13 students are eligible for the Regular Officer Training Plan (ROTP). The latter programme essentially applies to students wanting to go to university, for example a military engineer would have to complete his/her senior matriculation.

But before a person is accepted to officer classification he/she must pass a series of interviews and tests. Of the 200 people that apply to become a pilot, only eight will actually complete the programme. The reason behind the low passing rate is the rigorous selection programme which candidates must endure.

For those students in university, training would take place during the summer, but if a candidate is seeking professional training—for example, in the area of medicine or engineering—then a student can attend either a private college, or a local university. Again, their officer training would take place during the summer months. There are three military colleges across Canada, and the college in Kingston offers a variety of courses from philosophy and english to chemistry and electrical engineering. It's surprising to consider that in a school offering that diverse a curriculum, there are only 600 students. While he/she attends university, the armed forces pays its officer a starting salary of \$727 a month, which increases to \$775 in the fourth year of the programme. In return, after graduation a student in the ROTC stream must serve at least five years (paid of course) in the armed forces.

There is also a stream for university graduates entitled

the Direct Entry Officer Programme. Instead of having the rank of Officer Cadet, as with the ROTC programme, a candidate immediately becomes a Second Lieutenant, making over \$2000 a month. Room and board on the base costs only \$180 a month. The armed forces will also pay for students wishing to attend medical or law school, and their salaries then are even more handsome.

Many people are unaware how independent the armed forces operates from the rest of society. For instance, under the National Defence Act, the armed forces has an independent legal code which among other things, provides for the death penalty for desertion during

By ZENA KAMOCKI

1145: Our adventure begins. We arrive at the base—fifteen minutes late. Aware that punctuality is the cornerstone of army life, we navigate the winding roads with reckless haste, past barren fields and mysterious, low, clustered structures, in desperate search of the Administrative Building.

1147: We are lost. A brief conference at the end of one particularly deserted road with the Base's military police sets us back on the right track. A quick U-turn, a left at the next stop sign, around a curve, and within minutes, Captain Garry Blenkinsop, our guide for the day, is ushering us into



Crash Landing: Second-Lieutenant Phil Brooks guides non-com Excal editor James Flagal through a flight simulation.

Welcome To CFB Downsview: Captain J.M. Romaniec discusses the internal operations of the base, and how it fits in with the rest of the Armed Forces.



for briefing room for a quick slide show and a short presentation by Captain J.M. Romaniec on the inner workings of the Canadian Forces Base Downsview (CFBD).

1240: We leave the Administrative Building and head for the car, with the wind gnawing hungrily at our ears. We follow Captain Blenkinsop, who has driven on ahead, to our next stop.

wartime or for cowardice under fire (running from the enemy). Each commanding officer is invested with the power to administer punishments. The armed forces even has its own system of courts, military lawyers, and service detention barracks for those sentenced to imprisonment. The armed forces is also equipped with its own school system which teaches more than 14,000 primary and secondary students in 57 schools.

Every day, thousands of York students pass the Downsview base, knowing very little of what goes on behind the gates. The base occupies approximately 666 acres of prime real estate, whose value is currently

1245: Captain Blenkinsop leads us into the Officer's Mess Hall. Captain Romaniec is already waiting inside.

Army regulations require uniforms or, in the case of non-military visitors like ourselves, formal clothing to be worn here. As well, only officers and their guests are permitted to dine here; there is another mess hall for regular army members down the street.

The room is spacious, with dark wooden beams and paneling, and a wooden floor. There is a salad bar and a dessert table in the middle of the room.

We sit at a large round table at the far end of the room, and glance through the day's luncheon menu. A waitress soon appears to take our orders. Jamie and André sample the Lasagna, while I partake of the fried-egg sandwich.

Captain Blenkinsop informs us that we are running behind schedule, so we finish hastily, forgoing dessert and coffee, much to Jamie's chagrin.

Feast Fit For An Officer: Only uniforms are allowed to be worn in the Officer's Dining Hall, and their guests must be formally dressed.



estimated at \$250-300,000 per acre. CFB Toronto is the central headquarters for the entire Ontario horseshoe region, from Oshawa to Niagara Falls. The base supports over 12,500 personnel, the vast majority of which are in the field (for instance at CFB Hamilton).

In the following feature, Excal's James Flagal, Zena Kamocki and photographer André Souroujon caught a glimpse of the life of an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces while touring the Downsview Base. With its own fire hall, infirmary, police force, and even uniform depot, the base is practically self-sufficient. As one recruiting officer told us, joining the armed forces is taking on a whole new way of life.

1309: We leave the mess hall, and Captain Romaniec for the time-being. In the car, we briefly discuss the quality of army food. My sandwich was quite adequate, while the lasagna was rated less favourably—but not as bad as that served in York cafeterias.

1311: We arrive at the base hospital (an oddly appropriate place to stop after lunch). Inside, we are introduced to Captain Mary Egan, the hospital's (only) nurse.

This hospital is limited in size and scope, she tells us, with the key focus on preventative medicine, as well as drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Three resident doctors, a nurse, and a (civilian) pharma-

cist are employed at this facility, which includes an examining room, two semi-private rooms, one private room, a treatment room with complete equipment for emergencies, in addition to administrative offices.

Medical checkups, immunization, and allergy shots, are administered at this hospital, and as well, regular inspections of the mess halls are performed by the hospital administration to maintain good health standards.

"The more serious cases of illness are transferred to Ottawa," she says, "and emergencies do go to civilian hospitals."

With respect to drug addiction and psychological 'burn-out,' Captain Egan explains that "the resources are here to identify problems quickly." A three-week programme in Kingston in a rehabilitation unit, followed-up by weekly meetings with the patient at this hospital, to monitor their progress, is one such resource, she says.

"Stress-management is part of the leadership job (of every officer)," Captain Blenkinsop adds. When 'burnout' symptoms occur, less stressful jobs are assigned to that person; so that any potential problems are remedied right away.

There is a shortage of doctors in the military, according to Captain Egan, even though there are many benefits to practising medicine here. "The army pays for medical school," she explains. "Once you are accepted into first year, you are accepted into the military."

"(Students) get courses here that they wouldn't get elsewhere," she continues. "Once one graduates, one must 'serve three years (in the army) and then one can leave if one wants," she adds.

1337: Back out into the cold car. We follow Captain Blenkinsop's speeding auto past the base's private (Shell) gas station on the right, and the church, on the left. The church houses two denominations (Catholic and Protestant), Captain Blenkinsop tells us later, but while services are held for both regularly, attendance by the Base community is not mandatory.

1340: We park outside the hangar. In the distance, we observe a helicopter preparing for takeoff. Inside, we walk past several parked air vehicles and into the operations centre, where all the 'tasking' from the central militia district is co-ordinated. Captain Terry Cosgrove explains to us how it is done.

A request for helicopter support is called a "helquest," once it is cleared through administrative channels, it becomes a "heltask." "Requests go up the mill, get approved, and then away we go," he says. Heltasks are delivered to the servicing department, Captain Cosgrove explains, which signs out aircraft. All aircraft are registered by number on a wall chart. A green tag placed on a number means that the craft is serviceable (available), while a red tag means that it is unserviceable.

There are two squadrons of 22 people each operating in

this section, Captain Cosgrove explains. There are also 15 additional headquarter staff. "Most are all commercial pilots that fly with the reserves (militia) part-time," he says. "There are three regular support people working here; all the rest are reserves."

The most common tasks performed by the Base's aircraft, Captain Cosgrove explains, include augmenting and supporting land forces in their operations; shuttling VIPs; coordinating the CNE airshow; supporting official government missions; and effecting what is known as "casualties evacuation (casevac) during natural disasters or accidents."

There are seven helicopters on this base, Captain Cosgrove continues, as we walk back to the hangar to inspect one of the aircraft. "Helicopters are more functional in the big city," he explains. These aircraft never see combat, he explains. "They are mostly just for transport," although they also provide support for the police, and were used for security during the 1976 Olympics.

1410: We drive from the hangar back to the army side of the Base, stopping in what appears to be a small village or



Tasking: Captain Terry Cosgrove explains how the two squadrons of 22 pilots coordinate their schedule. It's simply a matter of turning a "helquest" into a "heltask," he says.

subdivision. These are the officers' quarters, intended for military officers with families (single army members dwell in the barracks), Captain Blenkinsop tells us.

There is a shortage of such accommodations here, however, and officers are lucky to get into one," he explains. The average rent for a townhouse here (large enough for a family) is \$400 per month, he adds.

1430: We walk to the Militia Centre, where Captain Bob Young, and Captain Romaniec show us a short film "made by the militia, to help build up the reserves," as Young explains. Copies of the film are sent to each militia unit (43 in all), as well as to high schools and universities, to help with recruiting, he says.

There are many advantages to joining the militia, Young feels. For university students, there is a guaranteed summer job for four years, after which one can stay in the reserves, or join the regular army. Service in the militia is a good stepping-stone to the regular army, he says.

One setback, however, as Captain Romaniec points out, is that militia forces may not attain the same level of experience as regular forces doing the same job.

The militia is also having difficulty attracting volunteers from the 25-40-year-old group, Captain Romaniec says. The reserve force would benefit from obtaining a few more mature, stable, and experienced members.

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Atop Toronto's Skyline: Following the tour, Excal photographer Andre Souroujon was able to take a helicopter ride and get a glimpse of the city. The base has seven Kiowa helicopters and two military planes, and six private planes.

