

UNEASY PARTNERS, HOPEFUL FUTURE – THE ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE OF CANADA AND THE CANADIAN DEFENCE ACADEMY

by Doctor A.J. Barrett

In 1965, possibly without fully understanding where it might lead, the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) commenced a graduate studies programme.¹ This small step firmly placed the College on a bold and innovative path for a military college. Each succeeding step along that path² opened the doors of this once-exclusive school for young males ever wider, bringing RMC closer to becoming a university for the Canadian Forces (CF). When the Division of Continuing Studies was established in 1997, the compact was well and truly sealed. This once-parochial cadet college had been transformed into the main educational engine of a national, multi-billion dollar enterprise, and, potentially, into being a significant player in the Canadian education and training landscape.

Coincidentally, although perhaps only partly so, defence education is growing in importance, and, moreover, it is ‘going global.’ The post-Cold War world places a high value on the educated soldier, and there is great interest abroad in Canada’s innovative experiments in military education. While many of our officers lack a university degree,³ our defence education system and programmes are much admired. Finally, in this post-modern, post-Cold War world of defence and security, the value of a true university that is, at the same time, a military university, is becoming apparent.⁴

There are strong currents abroad in the educational universe as well. The growing numbers of adults seeking lifelong learning, abetted by rapid developments in distributed learning and ‘e-learning,’ place considerable pressures on universities and colleges to make radical changes. Like many Canadian universities, RMC is passing through that looking glass and into a world that has turned the old university logic on its head. University is no longer only for the brightest and best high school graduates; today’s university is now for all who qualify, and have a need to attend it. Universities are discovering vigorous new competitors and emerging patterns of education, where young people enter the work force at an earlier age and acquire education as they progress through a longer working life. As the universities adjust to these changes, so must the Canadian Forces and the Royal Military College.

For RMC, the first step is already in progress. The academic wing, first created for the instruction of cadets, and now doing double duty for postgraduate teaching and outreach, is increasingly an academic body focused upon graduate studies and outreach, while still serving as cadet instructors. This may be a hard lesson for some to absorb, but the course has been set, and the outcome is inevitable.

Though small, RMC has considerable strengths and advantages. It is no exaggeration, for instance, to describe it as one of the world’s leading centres of defence and security studies.⁵ Moreover, RMC is structured more like a large university than a liberal arts college, and, therefore, it can also contribute strongly in science and engineering, graduate studies and research. It is a truly bilingual university. Partly because of its military culture, RMC has been more nimble than most civilian universities.⁶ Time and again, as the educational needs of Canada’s armed forces have changed, RMC has re-invented itself to adapt.⁷ The times and circumstances have dictated that RMC re-invent itself once again, and, to its credit, the College has responded magnificently.⁸ There is more to come.

At this time of flux, a substantial new factor has emerged. The Canadian Defence Academy, a robust “ministry of education for Defence,” has been established on the very grounds of the institution it commands. The proximity is a concern for many reasons, not least for the uncertainty it engenders in the RMC population. A little analysis may help here, and the strategic objectives of the Academy may be a good place to start.⁹ They are:

- Add further rigour to professional military education;
- Enable CF personnel to develop their intellectual potential; and
- Ensure coherent and integrated CF educational processes.

The Academy is expected to achieve these objectives through *inter alia* the direct delivery of education by RMC and the Canadian Forces College (CFC) in Toronto, the identification of CF activities that can be accredited for academic qualifications, and liaison with external organizations to identify educational opportunities for the CF and its members.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Canadian Defence Academy is thus both the agent of the change that will be visited upon RMC and a principal means to adapt to that change. What is more, CDA gives RMC extraordinary advantages as, along with other universities, it faces a challenging and uncertain future. For RMC, the Canadian Defence Academy may be both a menace and a salvation.

With the advent of the degressed officer corps, RMC becomes the principal entry means for the high school graduate.¹⁰ There are then two main entry streams: the already- educated Direct Entry Officers (DEOs), and the younger high school graduates, who will grow up in a military environment, and, in a few short years, be commissioned as educated officers. However, RMC is no longer the 'fire and forget' progenitor of young lieutenants and acting sub-lieutenants. It is the sustaining intellectual home for all CF members, not just its own graduates, and not just officers. It is in this sense that RMC has truly become the CF University.

The Royal Military College is therefore the main engine for professional military education available to the Canadian Defence Academy. In spite of a commendable willingness to adapt to the needs of the larger defence community, RMC cannot do it all. The challenge for CDA will be to build educational networks that vastly extend the capacity of the CF system, and all while maintaining defence focus. In this "learning architecture," RMC and CFC must be the bedrock of the CF culture and mission that is not to be found elsewhere. RMC needs to grasp and to come to terms with its place in this larger defence education agenda, not only that of the CF, but also of the nation. There is only one national university in Canada, and only one that has defence and security at its centre. Although chartered as an Ontario university, RMC must think nationally. It needs to develop flexible transfer credit agreements with universities of other provinces and jurisdictions. It needs to develop useful articulation agreements with community colleges, using Quebec and the western provinces as examples. The College must – like any modern university – learn to cope with continual change. The world will simply not stand still.

For the College, the CDA must be a sympathetic gateway to its principal client, and to a clientele whose needs continue to change. The Canadian Defence Academy, RMC's new "ministry," will provide a strategic vision

for defence education in Canada. The CDA will have a broader horizon and a greater reach than RMC alone. It will have the capacity to explain CF needs to the College in a language the College will understand. It will have the capacity to explain the College's strengths, limitations and needs in a language the CF will understand. Properly used, the CDA will be both the source of RMC's activities and the guarantor of its existence.

In summary, four ideas emerge:

- The Royal Military College is the CDA's and the CF's main intellectual engine;
- The Royal Military College is not the only learning engine at the disposal of CDA;
- To survive, and thrive, the Royal Military College needs to develop strategic partnerships with a large spectrum of Canadian and international learning institutions; and
- To survive, and thrive, the Royal Military College needs the Canadian Defence Academy.

This is a moment of great opportunity for RMC. All obstacles to establishing a credible presence as a true military university have been overcome or removed. Nationally, the College's reputation is secure. International prestige will follow from the contributions RMC makes to the global world of defence education, and the CDA can offer tremendous support in this area. CDA can provide and sustain a strategic vision, reach and leverage for RMC that it will not find easily within its own walls, and that is unavailable to other Canadian universities. Through an effective working relationship with the Defence Academy, the College can be an active and potent agent for the Canadian Forces and for Canada.

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NOTES

- As with many early initiatives at RMC, the graduate studies programme was approved on condition that no additional resources would be required. Currently, RMC is the largest single provider of postgraduate study to the Canadian Forces; roughly one third of the College's graduates are masters or doctorates. This is the highest ratio of graduates to undergraduates in Canada.
- Extension courses in 1970, the University Training Plan Officers (UTPO) and then the University Training Plan Non-Commissioned Members (UTPNM) in 1973, the institutionalization of bilingualism in 1976, the admission of women in 1980, and then Continuing Studies in 1996.
- Estimates vary. J.L. Granatstein, in *Who killed the Canadian Military*, (Toronto, Harper Collins, 2004) puts the figure at about 25 per cent.
- See for instance: Minister of National Defence, Doug Young: *Report to the Prime Minister on the State of Leadership and Management in the Canadian Forces*, Ottawa, 1997; *Canadian Officership in the 21st Century (Officership 2020): Strategic Guidance for the Canadian Forces Officer Corps and the Officer Professional Development System*, DND, Ottawa, 2001; *The Canadian Forces Non-Commissioned Member in the 21st Century (NCM 2020): Strategic Guidance for the Canadian Forces Non-Commissioned Member Corps and the NCM Professional Development System*, DND, Ottawa, 2003.
- Much of this reputation is due to the excellent RMC War Studies programme.
- This despite a deserved reputation for being conservative. However, it is worth noting that, at the request of the Canadian Forces, the College has instituted an undergraduate programme in Space Sciences, graduate programmes in Nuclear Engineering, Business Administration, Defence Studies at the Canadian Forces College (CFC), and Defence Engineering Management, the latter in conjunction with the Land Forces Technical Staff Programme. Each one of these was implemented with astonishing speed, at least as universities measure time. RMC is, however, no longer the only Canadian university with an ability to act quickly. The new private and distance-learning universities are also demonstrating a remarkable capacity to respond to a rapidly changing educational marketplace.
- Most notably in 1948, when the College re-opened after the Second World War. On a smaller scale as well, the College has adapted to meet CF needs. When engineers were in short supply in the 1970s and 1980s, RMC became the CF's only reliable source of engineers. Today, the demand is for more officers with a liberal education, and so the College's focus is shifting slowly from engineering to the arts and sciences.
- The creation of a new Division of Continuing Studies in a time of shrinkage and restraint was a brave investment in a new and different future for the College. When RMC accepted responsibility for the new Officer Professional Military Education Programme, it sealed its commitment as a provider of military education to the entire Canadian Forces.
- Governance Framework for a Canadian Defence Academy*, Consulting and Audit Canada Ottawa, 2001.
- High school graduates account for about 30 per cent of all officer entrants.



Changing of the Colours on commissioning parade 2005 at RMC.