
TEACHING CANADA'S INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY SOLDIERS ... AND VICE VERSA: "LESSONS LEARNED" FROM RANGER INSTRUCTORS¹

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For sixty years, the Canadian Rangers have served as the "eyes and ears" of the armed forces in remote areas, providing a military presence in isolated, northern and coastal regions of the country that cannot be practically or economically covered by other elements of the Canadian Forces (CF). As non-commissioned members of the CF Reserve, these lightly-armed and equipped volunteers hold themselves in readiness for service but are not required to undergo annual training. Their unique military footprint in coastal and northern Canada, managed on a community level, draws on the indigenous knowledge of its members, rather than "militarizing" and conditioning them through typical military training regimes and structures. The Rangers represent a flexible, inexpensive and culturally inclusive means of "showing the flag" and asserting Canadian sovereignty in remote regions.² There are currently 4000 Rangers in 168 patrols across the country, from Newfoundland to Ellesmere Island to Vancouver Island, making them a truly national force. Aboriginal people make up more than sixty percent of the Rangers' overall strength, reflecting a strong and enduring Aboriginal-military partnership rooted in cooperation and camaraderie.

Ranger instructors are critical to this important group of Reservists. Based upon a series of interviews conducted with Canadian Ranger Patrol Group personnel from 2000-2006, this paper provides a pioneering exploration of the roles, responsibilities and "lessons learned" by Ranger instructors—the regular and reserve force non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who train the Ranger patrols in their communities and areas of operations. The primary purpose of this paper is to identify the personality traits and leadership skills that facilitate successful instruction of Ranger patrols, with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal communities. In simple terms, the standard approach to training of regular and reserve force units in the south would not suffice, so a flexible, culturally-aware approach is developed by instructors who are willing to acclimatize and adapt to the ways and needs of diverse communities. Far from being an extended "hunting and fishing trip," the professional soldiers who volunteer for postings as Ranger instructors are tasked with tremendous responsibilities in a tough physical environment and they must learn to teach and build trust relationships with patrols in an adaptive manner that transcends cultural, linguistic and generational lines. Their reflections on training Aboriginal peoples in this unique element of the CF warrant serious attention.

Background on the Canadian Rangers

Despite being one of the most unknown formations in the Canadian military, the Canadian Rangers have a long history of service. The Rangers were officially established as a component of the reserves in 1947, based on the template of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers in British Columbia during the Second World War. Rather than requiring the government to station regular force troops in northern and isolated areas, the Rangers represented a cost-effective solution to Cold War sovereignty and security concerns that drew upon existing human resources in local areas. Civilians, pursuing

their everyday work as loggers, trappers or fishermen, could serve as the military's "eyes and ears" in areas where demographics and geography precluded a more traditional military presence. The plan was to recruit individuals who would not appeal to other units for age, health or employment reasons and thus would remain in their local area in both war and peace. With little training and equipment, the Rangers could act as guides and scouts, report suspicious activities and (if the unthinkable came to pass) delay enemies using guerrilla tactics. The only equipment issued to each Ranger was an obsolescent .303 Lee Enfield, 200 rounds of ammunition annually and an armband. This has since grown to include a sweatshirt, ball cap, t-shirt and a trigger lock. From the onset, the force structure was decentralized, and variations in roles, location and terrain made it impossible to create a "standard establishment." Each Ranger platoon (which is now designated as a patrol) was operated and administered on a localized basis.³



Combat Camera AS2006-0460a 10 August 2006 Shingle Point, Yukon Photo by: Sgt Dennis Power

Ranger Mike Taylor, a member of 1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1 CRPG) keeps an eye on the coast of the Beaufort Sea during Operation Beaufort. Taylor is one of eight rangers occupying an observation post at Shingle Point, reporting on activity in the area around the clock to their headquarters in Inuvik.

Through the second half of the twentieth century, the Rangers survived a rather tumultuous course of waning and surging strategic interest in the North. By the mid-1950s, units were established across the territorial north and remote coastal regions, but the Rangers largely vanished from the official military radar when Canada and the U.S. turned to technological marvels like the Defence Early Warning (DEW) Line to address the Soviet strategic threat. Although the Rangers were left to "wither on the vine," they survived—mainly as a result of their negligible cost. When the *Manhattan* voyages of 1969 spurred renewed military interest in the arctic, the "Northern" Rangers were resuscitated as a sovereignty-bolstering measure. Another surge of sovereignty concerns following the voyage of the *Polar Sea* in 1985 has propelled more dramatic growth of the Rangers over the last two decades.⁴

Both of these periods of renewed interest followed "alarmist" sovereignty threats vis-à-vis the Northwest Passage, but part of the impetus was the rise of a new security

discourse that did not divorce military activities from socio-economic, cultural and environmental health. In the late 1980s, for example, Inuit Circumpolar Conference president Mary Simon repeatedly called for the demilitarization of the Arctic on social and environmental grounds, and construed the military presence as a threat to Aboriginal peoples' security. These ideas encouraged governments to assess programs according to both state-centred security criteria and broad social and political forces. Thus, over the last two decades, explicit government statements have increasingly stressed the socio-political benefits of the Rangers in Aboriginal communities. Confrontations during the 1990s, from Oka to low-level flying to Gustafsen Lake to Ipperwash, all reinforced the need to foster positive military-Aboriginal relationships. In this context, the Rangers have been politically and publicly marketable as a military success story in community-building, merging traditional and human security considerations in a domestic context. Given these considerations, it is not surprising that the Rangers have increased dramatically over the last fifteen years, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities.

Although official statistics are not kept on the ethnic background of the Rangers, the membership tends to be generally representative of host communities and regions. Five Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups (CRPGs) co-ordinate the activities of Rangers in their respective areas of responsibility. 1 CRPG is based in Yellowknife and is responsible for patrols in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern British Columbia. The membership in Nunavut is almost entirely Inuit, and most operations are conducted in Inuktitut. In communities like Talaoyak or Pangnirtung, where a high proportion of Rangers do not speak English, instructors must work through interpreters. This slows down training, but is a practical reality that must be accepted.⁵ The patrols in the Northwest Territories reflect the geographic and linguistic dispersion of Northern peoples: most patrols south of the tree-line are comprised of Gwich'in, Dene, Métis and non-Native peoples; north of the tree-line, most of the patrols are Inuvialuit. Although most Rangers in the Yukon are non-Native (as is the territorial population), Aboriginal people make up the majority of several patrols. 2 CRPG covers Quebec, with the vast majority of Rangers of Inuit descent in Nunavik, Cree along James Bay, and Innu (Montagnais) near Schefferville. 3 CRPG spans northern Ontario, where most of the Rangers are Anishnawbe or Cree. 4 CRPG includes Aboriginal communities in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. 5 CRPG covers Newfoundland and Labrador, where Inuit and Métis make up a sizeable percentage of the Ranger force in Labrador. Working with these peoples requires an acceptance of diversity, adaptability to local cultures and geographical conditions and awareness of local priorities and practices.

The Rangers' operational tasks remain centered on the basic premise that low-cost, localized, "citizen-soldiers" help to assert sovereignty and security in remote and isolated areas. Official tasks in support of sovereignty include: reporting unusual activities, such as unusual aircraft and unusual ships or submarines and unusual persons in the community; collecting local data in support of regular force military operations; and conducting surveillance and/or sovereignty patrols (SOVPATs) in accordance with Canadian Forces Northern Area's (CFNA's) surveillance plan.⁶ Within their capabilities, the Rangers directly assist CF activities in a number of ways: providing local expertise and guidance; advising and instructing other CF personnel on survival techniques, particularly during Sovereignty Operations (SOVOPs); providing a locally-based and inexpensive means of inspecting and monitoring the North Warning System (NWS); supporting the Junior Canadian Rangers program; and providing local assistance to Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) and disaster relief activities. Most of the time, therefore, the Rangers are accomplishing their mission while they are out on the land in

their “civilian” lives. Each patrol’s sector of operations comprises an area with a radius of 300 kilometres, centered on the patrol’s home community.

The operational focus now clearly prioritizes sovereignty assertion, disaster relief and emergency response, and community development. The days of the Ranger as peacetime “guerrilla” soldier standing ready to engage and contain a small-scale enemy invasion in advance of regular troops is gone. The recent disavowing of this former role reflects a more sober assessment of the practical realities of the Rangers’ potential contributions. After all, Canadian Rangers are an atypical volunteer militia. To join the force, the only formal requirements are that an individual be at least eighteen years of age, be in sufficient physical health to undertake activities on the land, have a good knowledge of the local area around his or her community (or be willing to learn), and have no criminal record. They have no obligation to serve, and can quit the force at will.

The Rangers are distinct from other Canadian Regular and Reserve Force units in other salient respects. The average entry age is over thirty, and in some communities potential recruits must await the departure of their elders for an open position. Furthermore, there is no upper age limit (except in 5 CRPG, which imposes mandatory Ranger retirement at sixty-five), and a few Rangers have served continuously for forty and even fifty years.

Ranger Instructors and Training

The premise behind the Canadian Rangers is that they are well equipped, experienced outdoorspeople, who need only minimal instruction in order to redirect their skills to benefit the community and the Canadian Forces. Consequently, Canadian Rangers receive only basic training, which seeks to augment their highly developed knowledge of how to survive on the land.... Canadian Ranger Patrol Leaders are responsible for the training and good conduct of all the Canadian Rangers in the patrol, and are the point-of-contact for the Canadian Ranger Instructors from each of the CRPG (Canadian Ranger Patrol Group) Headquarters.⁷

Ranger instructors are members of the Regular Force (1 CRPG) and Primary Reserves (all other CRPGs) who train and administer the Rangers across the country. They do not receive any formal training to become instructors, but the vast majority are combat arms specialists with extensive training and skills, such as navigation and weaponry. Once in the field, Ranger instructors bear tremendous responsibilities. There is extensive paperwork and liaison work with communities prior to Ranger training exercises; budgeting for cash, ammunition, weapons, equipment, and rations; and extensive preparations and planning for field training exercises. Plans and estimates are based upon the practical, learned experience of instructors rather than formal trials. Once in the community, the instructor’s work is non-stop from arrival to departure, from purchasing petroleum, oil and lubricants (POL), to sorting out rations, to teaching up to thirty Rangers for ten-days (in contrast to 8-10 personnel in a typical section in the south). The logistical and administrative responsibilities are much more onerous than for the typical combat arms sergeant stationed in southern Canada and are designed to place the burden on the instructor rather than the patrol itself. They are expected to be everything in one, from paymaster to quartermaster “to padre when a guy is not feeling so well.”⁸ Sergeant Joe Gonneau (2 CRPG) explained that instructors needed to be self-sufficient—there is very little outside support on the ground, and an instructor could not simply drive to stores if something failed to arrive. “When I am up there, it is just me.”⁹ At the end of annual patrol training or an exercise, the instructor also must record all that has happened so that future instructors can plan to reinforce strengths and correct weaknesses in the patrol. This is important, given the annual nature of training and the short timeline available to each instructor to work with each community.



Ranger Norman Simonie sends a report from his observation post on Devon Island to his Command Post in Iqaluit 150 km away. Operations in the Arctic usually cover large areas and great distances between patrols and their headquarters, making good communications vital.

Because the structure of an individual Ranger patrol is rooted in the community, it operates on a group (rather than individual) basis. The local commander is a Ranger sergeant, seconded by a master corporal, both of whom are elected (in all but 5 CRPG) by the other patrol members.¹⁰ Patrol NCOs are the only members of the CF who are elected to their positions. As a result, Ranger instructors must be aware that the Ranger leaders are directly accountable to the other members of their unit in a unique way. Rank is not achieved but held on a conditional basis. Patrol elections, held in the community on an annual or periodical basis in most CRPGs, exemplify the self-administering characteristics of the Ranger force.

Although “hierarchical” on paper, the “command” in practice can be less rigid than would appear. Decision-making in most Aboriginal communities is based upon consensus, and this is reflected in the patrols themselves. For example, instructors explained that when they ask a Ranger sergeant a question in some Nunavut communities, he (all are male in that region) will turn to the elders in the patrol for guidance prior to responding. In this sense, while the sergeant is theoretically in charge of a patrol, the practical “power base” may lie elsewhere. In Igloodik (1 CRPG), one particularly respected elder (described to me as “the” elder in the community and “the king of the community”) is “just” a Ranger. On paper, therefore, the Ranger Sergeant has power and influence, but in practice, this Ranger “leads” in most aspects. The distinction between formal and informal leadership structures is particularly salient.¹¹ Given these considerations, instructors must be prepared to present their plans to the entire patrol, and the patrol may not be run in the traditional military sense.¹² In practice, Ranger patrols are not tasked out of an expectation that each individual can do everything, but that at least one member of each patrol can do anything that is required. Therefore, trying to evaluate individual Rangers as if they should be expected to know everything (as per standard individual assessments in the south) is less useful than

assessing patrols as functional units. It is their collective ability to draw upon the myriad skills possessed by the group that makes them effective.

The military's acceptance of these unorthodox practices, which are rooted in Aboriginal values but diverge with general depictions of a rigid, hierarchical, unbending military culture, indicates a capacity for flexibility and accommodation that is seldom recognized by scholars. I have argued elsewhere that the Rangers represent a form of "post-modern" military organization predicated on inclusiveness and acceptance.¹³ This spirit of cooperation and accommodation ensures mutual intelligibility between the military and Aboriginal communities, and also facilitates reciprocal learning. "Just treat everyone with respect," WO Pete Malcolm (4 CRPG) explained, "and recognize that everyone has something to contribute."¹⁴ It is also noteworthy that Rangers in the eastern arctic have unilaterally added the word "voice" to the official motto: they consider themselves the "eyes, ears and voice" of the CF in their communities and in the north more generally.¹⁵ The Rangers themselves have internalized their ownership of the force, which validates its status as a grassroots volunteer organization as well as a national military formation.

Due to geographical, demographic and operational realities in different regions, as well as the voluntary nature of the Rangers, the training regime is remarkably flexible. "Canadian Ranger training is not mandatory other than the initial ten-day orientation training for new members," the Rangers website explains. "Specialist training may also be offered to assist Canadian Rangers [to] master and practice a new skill." The explicit emphasis is on self-sufficiency and leadership, "as well as traditional skills—which are uniquely defined according to the cultural and historical practices in the local community."¹⁶ Given that Ranger NCOs have not taken courses like their counterparts in other CF units, and are not bound by the same education requirements, they also must be taught about how the military functions. This training allows the patrols to



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MCpl Brian Durelle (left), from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR), and Canadian Rangers, Tommy Qaqqasiq (center) and Roger Alivaktuk (right), discuss the route they will take for a patrol during Exercise NARWHAL, taking place August 13-24 in the Cumberland Peninsula area of Baffin Island.

perform their official tasks in support of sovereignty, to assist other CF units as guides, teachers and sources of local intelligence, and to serve their local communities in search and rescue and disaster response.

At the same time, Ranger instructors recognize that the training they offer not only serves the CF's domestic mission, but also facilitates the trans-generational transfer of critical life skills within Northern communities. The importance of the time on the land to practice and reinforce traditional land skills has been highlighted in recent reports and media articles. "An emerging development that could impact on future Ranger operations is a noticeable decline in the transfer of skills necessary to live on the land," the 2000 Canadian Forces Arctic Capabilities Study reported:

It is becoming gradually apparent that younger members of the Canadian Rangers are less skilled than older members in some aspects of survival in the Arctic wilderness.

The reason for this can perhaps be found in cultural changes in the aboriginal communities but the impact for CFNA today, and into the future, is an increasing training requirement for the Rangers if they are to remain effective.¹⁷

If traditional Aboriginal survival skills are allowed to atrophy, not only will Rangers' skills weaken but the CF's already limited ability to operate in the North will sunder. Ranger activities thus represent an important means of sharing knowledge of traditional survival skills within indigenous communities. The potential loss of these skills, which are inextricably linked to Aboriginal identities, is a persistent but growing worry amongst Northern peoples. While most Rangers over the age of forty possess some knowledge of traditional practices, most of the younger Rangers have not had the same level of previous exposure. As a 31-year old Ranger sergeant in northern Baffin Island explained in the mid-1990s: "Often traditions are no longer passed on to the next generation in the North. Until I joined the Rangers five years ago, I could barely build an igloo."¹⁸ In this respect, the structure of the Rangers provides for the transfer of indigenous knowledge amongst members of a patrol, and thus, the retention of traditional knowledge within a community. By extension, the Ranger instructor's role to encourage the trans-generational transfer of traditional survival skills is vital to the future operational integrity of the CF which relies upon northern residents for guidance and survival training.¹⁹

Ranger Training

The course training package designed for the Canadian Rangers is really a framework that befits a flexible program. As a result, it is delivered differently in the various regions of the country. Various working groups have tried to devise a standard training regime for Rangers, but tremendous cultural, geographical and regional variations make standardization difficult. For example, Ranger instructors have found that Aboriginal communities in regions across the country demand different approaches to training. Yukon patrols with a largely non-Native membership enjoy army hierarchy and direct command, meet on a regular basis even when the instructors are not in town and provide periodic reports to headquarters. By contrast, Nunavut patrols comprised almost entirely of Inuit will not respond favourably to authoritarian leadership and are less likely to get together without clear incentives.²⁰ Most Ranger instructors stress that top-down command structures do not work in Aboriginal communities, where egalitarianism is a fundamental principle and communal approaches to decision-making are the cultural norm.

Studies on Aboriginal cultural practices and cross-cultural relations help to explain the principles that Ranger instructors associate with effective Ranger training and positive relationships in patrol communities. Rupert Ross, a lawyer who worked closely with Ojibwa and Cree elders in northern Ontario, has explored "Indian reality" and Native-non-Native interpersonal relations. He outlines five "rules of traditional times" or



Canadian Rangers wait outside the Pangnirtung community center prior to a joint patrol with Canadian Forces (CF) soldiers during Exercise NARWHAL, taking place August 13-24 in the Cumberland Peninsula area of Baffin Island.

“ethical commandments” in traditional Aboriginal culture. The “ethic of non-interference” suggests that to interfere with other people is rude and culturally inappropriate—it is a form of confrontation. In short, you are forbidden to advise or to comment on another person’s behaviour unless asked to do so. Anger is not to be shown, and open conflict and displays of hostility should be avoided. Furthermore, Ross explained, “the

traditionally proper way to show appreciation was to ask the other person to continue with his contribution rather than offer vocal expressions of gratitude” or individual praise. Communal praise was preferable in that it did not embarrass people by singling them out and could not be viewed as a threat to community harmony by raising one individual above the others.²¹

To understand how Native people prepare for action in a dangerous or stressful situation, Ross identifies the “conservation-withdrawal tactic” whereby a person intentionally slows down “to conserve both physical and psychic energy” and carefully reflects on the situation until committing to a particular course of action. While the Euro-Canadian cultural response is to take immediate actions, the traditional Aboriginal approach eschews ill-considered or frenzied responses, which corresponds with traditional survival strategies. Finally, the notion that “the time must be right” for action reflects traditional subsistence and spiritual life-way. In a hunter-gatherer society, Ross explained, “he who fails to anticipate, to adjust and to strike when conditions are most promising will come home empty handed. That, in the survival context, could be extremely dangerous.” Traditional Aboriginal values stress the need to take time to contemplate various options, collect information and weigh opinions before making a decision, which is ideally based upon consensus.²²

Although Ross’s reflections are based upon a particular region and cultural group, broad generalizations about Aboriginal culture suggest similar principles. Many of these insights are reflected in the observations made by Ranger instructors, who have learned ways of working constructively with Aboriginal communities and individuals. Rather than forcing their “lessons learned” into a formal analytical framework, they are best reflected upon in a less formulaic manner that is more in tune with the spirit of the information that they provided in interviews and their experiences with the Rangers.

The tempo of northern operations is much slower than in temperate climates, and time estimates and planning must accommodate this reality. Simply put, one cannot force the operational pace of the south onto the arctic. Equipment failure rates are higher, and all activities require careful contingency planning. Cold casualty rates increase when troops stop after having been overworked to the point of sweating. Personnel carrying survival gear in cold temperatures burn off calories at an accelerated rate, and require time to eat compensatory meals that can take longer to prepare and consume. Of course, the stakes are uncharacteristically high in the arctic:

The Canadian North in winter ... is not neutral: **it is an enemy**. Given the half a chance it will cripple or kill a soldier as efficiently as an artillery burst... The wise commander must minimize his own “non battle casualties” if he is to remain operationally viable. Before soldiers can be expected to fight in such an environment, there are two important steps they must take. First, they must learn to live there; secondly, they must learn how to work there. Only when this learning curve is complete, is the soldier in a position to apply his trade and actually fight there.²³

Soldiers’ survival skills are developed through experience and expert guidance. Unless one has spent time in the North, Ranger instructors suggested, practical preparations are somewhat academic. Combat arms training provides a pivotal foundation, but soldiers must experience the North and be trained to live, move and work in its unique climate and environment.

The basic rationale for the Rangers is that they are local experts because of their indigenous knowledge of the environment and climate. Accordingly, instructors must be careful not to press the patrol members to do things with which they are not comfortable. If an instructor is too insistent on going out on the land or sea, even when conditions are unsafe, the Rangers will probably do so against their better judgment. Significant

anecdotal evidence suggests that this can put the patrol members and the instructor in serious danger. Success in northern and remote operations more generally depends upon awareness that uncertainty requires contingency planning, an acceptance of unanticipated delays and attentiveness to local wisdom. It is critical for new instructors to learn that, while they are professional soldiers with much to teach, they are likely the



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Canadian Rangers listen to a range safety briefing prior to zeroing their .303-calibre Lee-Enfield rifles during Exercise NARWHAL, taking place August 13-24 in the Cumberland Peninsula area of Baffin Island.

biggest burden—and often the weakest link—in terms of survival when they are out on the land for exercises or operations. “As a guest in their area,” WO Pete Malcolm (4 CRPG) reflected, “Who am I to tell them how to survive and get around?”²⁴

The key for instructors is to learn how to become better listeners—to appreciate how Aboriginal decision-making differs from non-Native practices, and does not involve clear recommendations telling another person how to act. Aboriginal Rangers are not forthright with suggestions, WO Malcolm noted: “you need to draw everything out of them.”²⁵ Decision-making often involves lengthy discussions that engage an issue from multiple perspectives and the subtle emphasis of particular facts, but do not involve clear statements of points of view and reach conclusions only after a prolonged “distillation” process.²⁶ As Sergeant Joe Gonneau (2 CRPG) explained to me, you cannot have a rigid schedule: “we run it at their pace.”²⁷

New instructors are challenged to be flexible and patient. When stationed with southern Regular Force units, Army sergeants are trained to have their commands met without debate and on time. There is an inherent rigidity in the philosophy of command and strict obedience. This “hard army” approach does not work with the Rangers. Instructors cannot yell at patrols according to standard drill techniques, “dress down” and embarrass individuals who make mistakes, or demand unquestioning and immediate responses. There are cases where longstanding Rangers, and even Ranger sergeants, have quit on the spot when faced with an over-zealous and insistent instructor. Some “infamous” instructors are alleged to have demanded push-ups from Rangers who arrived late to training—something that commentators characterized as “stupid” given the requirement for equal treatment and the number of elders in Ranger patrols. In short, WO Malcolm explained, an instructor needs to display tact, particularly in Aboriginal communities.²⁸

While the Rangers have important skills, they also enjoy working with Ranger instructors because they can learn a lot from the military. For example, in many communities Rangers navigate through memory. They know the land through rock piles, snow drifts and ice patterns, but do not possess the techniques to navigate outside of their traditional territories. Instructors teach them map and compass, GPS and communication skills that expand the breadth of area in which they can comfortably operate. Furthermore, annual field exercises provide Rangers with an opportunity to go to parts of their area of operations that they otherwise might not visit, and they are involved in planning these activities to suit local interests. Sovereignty patrols, enhanced sovereignty patrols, mass exercises, leadership training, and shooting competitions also provide Aboriginal Rangers with opportunities to meet other people from their patrol group, and also to visit new parts of the country. These experiences can be profound. Sgt Bill Lapatourelle (1 CRPG) described how one of the Rangers from Resolute Bay had never seen trees before heading to Yukon with the Rangers. The Ranger went on to complain that there was “no scenery down south” because he could not see for miles around him: he had to get back to the tundra because he felt claustrophobic.²⁹

Ranger instructors need to have humility—an appreciation that they do not know everything. The first thing that WO Pete Malcolm (4 CRPG) did when he met Kenny Johnson, an Aboriginal Ranger at Kitkatla, B.C., was ask him to let him know if he was “doing something stupid”—breaching any cultural etiquette. When he first went in to the community, Malcolm was the only “white guy” in the village. But after a while he got to know people. He made a point of staying with the patrol commanders (particularly because there was no hotel in the community at the time), so he lived with them and got to know them. Soon Malcolm was invited to village ceremonies at the local school and filled with food and gifts. He played bingo with the community at fundraising events. He was also struck by how many local Aboriginal elders served in the world wars, reinforcing that the community had a long history of service with the CF.³⁰ “You’re there to teach them, and they’re there to teach you,” 5 CRPG Training WO Dave Gill sagely noted.³¹

Instructors must also have an open mind and must be prepared for a tremendous learning curve. Sergeant Dan Hryhoryshen (4 CRPG) described the “culture shock” he experienced when he set up the Kitkatla patrol. After a helicopter dropped him off in a ball diamond in the community and he offloaded his large load of equipment, he felt very isolated. “All of a sudden, the tables were turned on me,” Hryhoryshen later reflected. “I am the White guy in town, in a combat uniform, representing the federal government.” He quickly learned to relax, be rather informal and focus on building trust. “It is all about developing relationships with these people,” Hryhoryshen explained. “You cannot behave like a bureaucrat.”³² Sergeant Cyril Abbott (5 CRPG) offered similar advice to be flexible and accommodate their needs. “I find with these people, you’ve got to listen to them,” he stressed. “They know the weather, and they know the local conditions.” Rather than barking military orders at the Rangers, he advised that instructors show “ask them to do something, you never tell them.”³³

Sergeant Todd MacWirtter, a Ranger instructor with 5 CRPG, noted that Labrador Rangers do not follow fixed timings, so typical military schedules are problematic. On his first visit to Postville, for example, more than half of the patrol showed to training an hour late. When they heard the plane arrive soon thereafter, they promptly left to get their mail, returning at lunch as if nothing had happened! “Forget everything that you learned in the military,” he advised, “from punctuality to direct orders.” If the Rangers want to take six lunches in a day, do not make this an issue if they still get the job done. They do not “rush” like southern military forces. It was also imperative to learn about patrol members, and vice versa. He explained that Inuit patrols took time to “warm up” to an instructor, and that openness and a respect for their limitations went a long way. If there are older Rangers in a patrol, forced marches are not well advised. Furthermore, instructors need to learn to adjust their approaches to teaching, recognizing that not all Rangers have the levels of education expected of Regular or Reserve CF Force recruits. Instructors cannot rush through explanations, and should be prepared to take more time to explain themselves. “Just be yourself,” MacWirtter explained, “be one of them, and try to explain it to them on their terms.” Finally, he stressed that instructors needed to be open to the Rangers’ ways of doing things, given their expertise and local knowledge. Explain what you want to accomplish in terms of end results, and solicit their opinions. Instructors who proved unwilling to change and clung to an “old military background” approach to training did not last long.³⁴

A sense of humour is also essential to work with the Rangers. Sergeant J-F Gauthier’s (2 CRPG) first training exercise in January 1998 was most memorable for a joke played on him by the Inuit Rangers in Salluit, Nunavik. After leaving town for their field training, the group stopped for tea. Gauthier asked if he could go for a pee, and the Rangers said this was fine. He walked away from the group, and when he started to urinate, someone behind him yelled: “What are you doing, this is the land of our ancestors!” Gauthier apologized profusely, and was told to take a plastic bag and a knife to clean up after himself. “This land is very important to us,” the Rangers insisted. When Gauthier knelt down and started to clean up, everyone in the group fell down on the ground in hysterical laughter. When they returned to town five days later, everyone in Salluit seemed to know the story—the Rangers had reported it back in advance by radio. En route back home, when the plane stopped in Kuujuaq, someone there teased him about the story. Gauthier could not believe it, but this confirmed in his mind that word gets around quickly in the north. Even when he visits Salluit today, someone still reminds him of this episode. Gauthier takes it in the fun spirit that it was intended.³⁵

Good instructors must also be careful never to embarrass Aboriginal Rangers. Teasing and cajoling are ways the Inuit and other northern peoples teach their children and one another, but embarrassment is much more serious than in the south. Silence and “soft-spokenness,” rather than casual “babble” and loud commands, resonated in

these patrols. While Rangers fully expect a new instructor to “act like a white man” on his first patrol, the relationship must evolve on a more personal level thereafter. Furthermore, because Inuit peoples teach by doing, you “have to watch like a hawk” to learn. Although you can ask the Rangers questions (and they will answer), they will never ask an instructor to do anything. As one instructor explained, “if you don’t learn something it’s your fault, not their fault.”³⁶

A flexible, culturally-sensitive approach and a willingness to become acclimatized to the ways of diverse groups of people are similarly essential. Most instructors stress that mutual learning, credibility and trust are crucial to effective relationships with patrols. The best way to approach any challenge with the Rangers, WO Kevin Mulhern (1 CRPG) explained, was to sit down and discuss it with them. He suggested that the “mission-focus” mentality often should be reversed when dealing with the Rangers—it was often better to explain what the military wanted to accomplish and then figure out with them what should be done in terms of a mission.³⁷ In order to be effective, Ranger instructors need to accept that compromise is a source of strength, not a display of weakness. This same spirit needs to be instilled in the Rangers: trying to mesh Army culture with local culture requires mutual compromise.³⁸ No two patrols are alike, neither are the Rangers in a patrol a homogenous group. “The diversity is always there, no matter what the patrol,” WO Gill (5 CRPG) explained, and the Ranger instructor “cannot be the one stiff person; they need to be adaptable and flexible.”³⁹

Cultural differences between instructors and the Rangers require mutual learning and flexibility. Former Ranger instructor Dave McLean (1 CRPG) explained that culture could impede communication, but that a policy of “firm, friendly and fair” worked well. He shared several examples of considerations that challenge conventional military norms in the south. In Inuit communities, there is a basic concept that “no man has the right to tell another man what to do.” While it is bewildering to see a group of Rangers stand around while another struggles with his sled, “teamwork” is not prescribed in their cultural practices in the southern sense.⁴⁰ Thus, although Rangers possess individual



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Canadian Rangers walk to their targets after firing their .303-calibre Lee-Enfield rifles during Exercise NARWHAL, taking place August 13-24 in the Cumberland Peninsula area of Baffin Island.

skills suited to their local areas, instructors provide patrol members with training on how to work as a group.

Development of this skill is important because the Rangers often represent one of the only organized groups available locally to help coordinate and participate in emergency response. “Canadian Rangers provide a range of specialized services to the peoples in their area,” the commander of the Northern Ontario Rangers explains, “including humanitarian assistance, local search and rescue, rapid response for disaster situations, such as aircraft crashes and support for evacuation in natural emergencies, such as forest fires and floods.”⁴¹ They act first and foremost as members of their communities, seldom waiting for an official tasking before heading out to look for lost hunters, or helping villages cope with major disasters. On 1 January 1999, for example, members from eleven of the Ranger patrols in Nunavik responded immediately to news of a massive avalanche in Kangiqsualujuaq. For days they made vital contributions by supporting local authorities in rescue efforts, securing the area and assisting with funeral preparations. Additional support was provided from patrols as far away as Coral Harbour (nearly one thousand kilometres to the west), where Rangers harvested and shipped fresh caribou to the disaster site. The Chief of the Defence Staff later noted that “without their dedication, the toll in human suffering would surely have been higher... The leadership and moral support the Rangers provided in the face of this crisis was invaluable.”⁴² For this extraordinary effort, 2 CRPG was awarded a Canadian Forces Unit Commendation.⁴³

“If you are closed and don’t want to open your mind, you will fail,” Sergeant J-F Gauthier (2 CRPG) explained to me in a telephone interview in May 2006. “If your attitude is to learn and share, then you can succeed.” Instructors thrive when they do not prejudge the Rangers or their communities according to their own cultural assumptions. Northern communities are plagued by problems—from high suicide rates, to violent crime, to alcoholism and substance abuse—amply documented in scholarly and government reports, and often linked to colonialism and imposed cultural change. Ranger instructors need to recognize that going into a community and insulting people about the source of these problems is not conducive to goodwill, and will not bring about meaningful change. Instructors need to take a longer-term view, acknowledging they can help to lay the groundwork for constructive social engagement by being open to different cultures, communities and ways of life, rather than by coming in thinking they know all “the answers.”⁴⁴

Final Reflections

The Canadian Rangers serve a vital function in Aboriginal communities that transcends military, socio-political, economic and cultural realms. They demonstrate that military activities designed to assert sovereignty need not cause “insecurity” for Aboriginal peoples. Managed on a community level, a Ranger patrol draws upon the indigenous knowledge of its members, rather than “militarizing” and conditioning them through the regularized training regimes and structure of other CF components. This flexible, cost-effective, and culturally inclusive part of the Reserve Force represents a significant example of a military activity that actually seems to contribute to sustainable human development amongst Aboriginal peoples. The Rangers are symbolic, practical and rooted in partnership: all important variables for sustainable, integrated management in an era of much speculation but continued uncertainty.

The threat of enemy invasion on Canadian territory remains remote, as it has for more than a century. Nevertheless, the tempo of military operations in the Canadian North has begun to increase in recent years, and the new government’s election promises assert that it will continue to increase in the future. Climate change raises the potential for increased shipping activity; resource development initiatives, foreign

tourism and commercial over-flights are expanding; and the potential for terrorists, organized crime, illegal migrants and contraband smugglers to operate in the region have all highlight the need for a greater military focus on remote areas. The CF must maintain a positive working relationship with Aboriginal peoples in order to conduct sustained operations and credibility is essential. The Ranger instructors who liaise with the Rangers in their communities serve as the most common interface between the CF and the local populations, and it is their professionalism that has secured the trust relationships that prevail with northern communities. As the Rangers organization continues to mature, it is these CF representatives who will ensure that it evolves in a manner that is appropriate to the military and to these communities.

In the summer 2002, historian Marc Milner wrote in the *Canadian Military Journal* that "few Canadians ever see a Canadian soldier, much less actually know one."⁴⁵ This is not true of the many Aboriginal communities that boast a Ranger patrol. Chances are that everyone in the community knows a Ranger, and communities are well aware of the Regular or Reserve Force instructors who venture there on an annual basis. Training and exercises provide the Rangers with an opportunity to exercise their unique abilities and skills and to increase the collective capabilities of their patrols. By extension, the Rangers' positive role and presence means that their military training also supports the health and sustainability of their communities and cultures. Serving as a vital link between these "indigenous sovereignty soldiers" and the military, Ranger instructors deserve acknowledgement for their unique contributions to sovereignty and CF operational effectiveness in northern, isolated and coastal regions of Canada.

About the Author...

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Endnotes

1. This article could not have been written without the support of 1 CRPG, 4 CRPG, and 5 CRPG, as well as the Rangers staff and instructors who shared their time and knowledge. Professor Jim Miller, the Canada Research Chair (Native-Newcomer Relations) at the University of Saskatchewan, and a St. Jerome's University Faculty Research Grant supported this research in 2003-04 and 2005-06 respectively. A SSHRC Queen's Fellowship and the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies funded preliminary research in 2000.
2. For a fuller elaboration of these themes, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "The Canadian Rangers: A Post-modern Militia That Works," *Canadian Military Journal* 6/4 (Winter 2005-06), 49-60. For an introduction to the Rangers, see the official website at www.rangers.dnd.ca.
3. J. Mackay Hitsman, "The Canadian Rangers," DND, Army Headquarters, Historical Section, Report no. 92 (1 December 1960), National Defence Headquarters, Director of History and Heritage, Ottawa, Ontario.
4. On this period, see Kenneth Eyre, "Forty Years of Defence Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87," *Arctic* 40/4 (December 1987), 292-9, and Robert Taylor, "Eyes and Ears of the North," *Star Weekly Magazine*, 22 December 1956, 2-3. The author is currently writing a full history of the Rangers from 1947 to present.
5. DND Backgrounder BG-99.047, "The Canadian Rangers in Nunavut," 5 March 1999; interviews, Col Pierre Leblanc (CFNA) and Capt Don Finamore (1 CRPG), 20 March 2000, Sgt Dave McLean (1 CRPG), 22 March 2000, and MWO G.R. Westcott (1 CRPG), 26 February 2004; telephone interview, Sergeant J-F Gauthier (2 CRPG), 11 May 2006.
6. The aims of sovereignty operations are to: (a) demonstrate Canadian sovereignty by deploying forces to the Territories; (b) exercising the Army's basic operations in any season; (c) exercise and evaluate the issued equipment in arctic climates; (d) develop a cadre of soldiers experienced in northern operations; and (e) provide challenging leadership situations. "Canadian Forces Activities in the NWT and Yukon 1997/98," 21 May 1997, Annex A, NDHQ f.4500-1 (G3). For more information on roles and responsibilities, see Rangers website at www.rangers.dnd.ca.
7. "Canadian Rangers Training," http://www.rangers.dnd.ca/pubs/rangers/training/rang-train_e.asp (last accessed 13 June 2006).

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8. Interviews with MWO G.R. Westcott and WO Kevin Mulhern (1 CRPG), 26 February 2004.
 9. Telephone interview, Sgt Joe Gonneau (2 CRPG), 5 May 2006.
 10. In 1999, a fourth rank, that of Ranger Corporal, was created for two reasons. It allowed for the creation of patrols with representation in several communities or "detachments." It was also created out of Junior Canadian Ranger program requirements; at a minimum, it is the corporal who looks after this program in a community. Interview, Finnamore.
 11. Rob Marois, Ops O, 1 CRPG, Rangers Briefing, 26 Feb 2004.
 12. Interview, WO Kevin Mulhern (1 CRPG), 26 February 2004.
 13. Lackenbauer, "Canadian Rangers."
 14. Interviews, Sgt Jeff Gottschalk (1 CRPG), 27 February 2004; Sgt Denis Lalonde (1 CRPG), 2 March 2004; Sgt Bill Lapatourelle (1 CRPG), 1 March 2004; WO Pete Malcolm (4 CRPG), 14 July 2005.
 15. Peter Kuniliusee, quoted in an interview with Petty Officer Paul Smith (formerly 1 CRPG), 20 February 2006.
 16. "Intro – Canadian Rangers Training," http://www.rangers.dnd.ca/pubs/rangers/training/intro_e.asp (last accessed 13 June 2006).
 17. Commander's Assessment, CFNA FY 2004/2005 Level 1 Business Plan, 27 Oct 2003, 1-2. See also Bob Weber, "Rangers less at home on their range," *Globe and Mail*, 9 August 2004.
 18. Ranger Sgt. Levi Barnabas, quoted in "Defenders of Canada's North," *Reader's Digest* (1997), quoted in The Ranger Report (30 October 1997), 13.
 19. For a scholarly example, see Richard G. Condon, Peter Collings, and George Wenzel, "The Best Part of Life: Subsistence Hunting, Ethnicity, and Economic Adaptation among Young Adult Inuit Males," *Arctic* 48.1 (March 1995), 31–46. The transfer of traditional knowledge is also a central tenet of the Junior Canadian Rangers programme, which will not be discussed in this paper. For an introduction, see the official website at www.rangers.dnd.ca.
 20. Interviews with 1 CRPG staff and instructors, 2004.
 21. Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality* (Markham: Octopus Books, 1992), 12-35, 41.
 22. Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost*, 35-40. See also Rosalie Wax and Robert Thomas, "American Indians and White People," *Phylon* 22.4 (1961), 305–17. Ross offers that "When Native people use the phrase "consensus decision-making" I believe they are referring less to the fact that everyone agreed in the end than to the fact that the process of arriving at the decision was communal. It is akin to the process of 'joint thinking' as opposed to one where competing conclusions are argued until one prevails." *Dancing with a Ghost*, 23.
 23. "Arctic Operations: Threats to Which the Canadian Forces Are Expected to Respond in Northern Canada," presentation to Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College, Kingston, 22 Oct 84, 8. Copy in possession of the author.
 24. Interviews, Gottschalk, Lalonde, Lapatourelle, Malcolm.
 25. Interview, Malcolm.
 26. This corresponds with Ross's observations in *Dancing with a Ghost*, 21-22.
 27. Telephone interview, Gonneau.
 28. Interviews, Gottschalk, Lalonde, Lapatourelle, Malcolm.
 29. Interview, Lapatourelle.
 30. Interview, Malcolm.
 31. Interview with WO Dave Gill (5 CRPG), 21 February 2006. Ranger Master Corporal Keith Guy recalled during an interview on 6 March 2006 that "Dave Gill originally tried to make soldiers out of us, but we made him into a Ranger like ourselves."
 32. Interview with Sgt Dan Hryhoryshen (4 CRPG), 13 July 2005.
 33. Interview with Sgt Cyril Abbott (5 CRPG), 6 March 2006.
 34. Interview with Sgt Todd MacWirter (5 CRPG), 21 February 2006.
 35. Interview, Gauthier.
 36. Interview, McLean. In an interview, WO Pete Malcolm (4 CRPG) also specifically cautioned that instructors should never berate Natives in front of others.
 37. Interview, Mulhern.
 38. Marois, Rangers Briefing.
 39. Interview, Gill.
 40. Interview, McLean.
 41. CO 3 CRPG, "The Ranger Mission," http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/3cprg/English/mission/mission_e.shtml (last accessed 7 July 2004).
 42. Jane George, "Nunavik Rangers Honoured in Montreal," *Nunatsiq News* [Iqaluit], 30 November 1999.
 43. DND Backgrounder, "The Canadian Rangers," 8 February 2000.
 44. Telephone interview, Gauthier. For an introduction to northern social issues, see RCAP, vol. 4: Perspectives and Realities, chapter 6: The North, section 4: The Source of Current Problems, available online at http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sj28_e.html (last accessed 13 June 2006).
 45. Marc Milner, "Whose Army is it Anyway?" *Canadian Military Journal* 3/2 (Summer 2002), 13.
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