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Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security: Historical Perspectives

Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer



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Cover: The Mobile Striking Force, an airportable and airborne brigade group designed as a quick reaction force for northern operations, was an inexpensive solution to the question of how Canada could deal with an enemy lodgement in the Arctic. During training exercises, army personnel from southern Canada learned how to survive and operate in the north. In this image, taken during Exercise Bulldog II in 1954, Inuk Ranger TooToo from Churchill, Manitoba relays information to army personnel in a Penguin. DND photo PC-7066.

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Calgary Papers *in Military and Strategic Studies*

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Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer

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Canada's Northern Defenders: Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Rangers, 1947-2005

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

“**T**he Centre of Gravity for [Canadian Forces Northern Area (CFNA)] is our positive relationship with the aboriginal peoples of the North,” CFNA commander Kevin McLeod highlighted in 2003. “Deploying out on the land, conducting patrols, training and supporting the youth ... and being involved in the local communities, are why we are here, and this must not be forgotten.”¹ It is a daunting task, given that the CFNA’s mission is to defend the Canadian Territorial North: the 3.8 million square kilometres represent forty percent of Canada’s land mass and comprise one of the largest areas of military responsibility in the world. Northern Area encompasses five topographical regions – from the desolate peaks of the high Arctic and the desert-like terrain of the Arctic lowlands, to the forested mountains of the Western Cordillera – and is home to a culturally and linguistically diverse population totalling less than 100,000 people. For decades, this geographical breadth and demographic diversity has perplexed defence policy-makers who have in turn often chosen to simply ignore the region. To be Arctic-capable and Arctic-tough, the Canadian Forces (CF) must be “credible, professional and capable of conducting operations in the North.”² Given that the vast majority of Canadians live south of the treeline and are unfamiliar with their country’s northern inheritance, these capabilities are dependent upon relationships with northern residents and, in particular, indigenous peoples.

Part of CFNA’s mandate to reinforce Canadian sovereignty is fulfilled through the Canadian Rangers. This unique force is designed to serve as the “eyes and ears” of the armed forces in isolated, northern and coastal regions of the country which cannot be practically or economically covered by other elements of the CF. Created in 1947, the Rangers survived a course of waxing and waning interest over the ensuing four decades. During the last 20 years, however, the Rangers have become an entrenched component of the military’s northern strategy and have elicited significant media attention. There are currently (2007) 4,000 Rangers in 168 patrols across the country and 1,500

Rangers in 58 patrols fall under the administrative control of 1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1 CRPG) headquartered in Yellowknife. Their unorthodox military approach in northern communities represents military accommodation and acceptance of cultural diversity in a practical form. Through the Canadian Rangers, the CF encourages indigenous practices, while promoting the participation and leadership of Aboriginal community members in defence activities. Military training and operations allow the Rangers to exercise their unique skills and increase the collective capabilities of their patrols.

Based on extensive archival research and a series of interviews conducted with 1 CRPG personnel from 2000 to 2004, this chapter assesses military-indigenous relationships in the Canadian Arctic since the late 1940s. Recognizing that the standard approach used to train and exercise Regular and Reserve Force units would not work in northern communities, the military has developed a flexible, culturally-aware approach that intertwines differentiation, accommodation and acceptance. Ranger instructors who are willing to acclimatize and adapt to the ways and needs of diverse northern communities learn to teach and build trust relationships with patrols in an adaptive manner that transcends cultural, linguistic and generational lines. In turn, the Rangers serve to strengthen northern indigenous communities by encouraging traditional land- and sea-based activities and local capacity-building. By extension, the Rangers' positive role in northern life means that military training supports the health and sustainability of their communities and cultures.

Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations

There are few images more captivating to the southern Canadian imagination than the lone Inuk hunter, crossing the sea ice by snow machine, heading to an historic hunting ground. As Franklyn Griffiths reminds us, the "arctic sublime" continues to haunt the national psyche.³ Viljalmur Stefansson painted a portrait of the "friendly arctic" filled with untapped riches, but most southerners saw their distant inheritance of ice and snow (they always thought of it in winter) as forbidden and dangerous. As a result, benign indifference marked the federal government's approach to northern policy (including sovereignty and security issues) through most of the 20th century. Furthermore, until recently, northern indigenous peoples were treated as foreign "objects" rather than potential actors. Nevertheless, the extension of military development into their homelands had profound effects on their cultures and their lives. In recognition of these impacts, fed-

eral policies over the last three decades have emphasized the importance of accommodating northern indigenous perspectives and interests and allowing these people to play a meaningful role in the national project. The conclusion of land claims and self-government agreements, the establishment of the Arctic Council and the appointment of a Canadian Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs (filled to date by prominent Inuit leaders) indicates an acceptance that northern indigenous peoples are now partners in shaping the government agenda.

While the existing literature on Aboriginal-military relations has paid little attention to the Canadian Rangers, scholars have provided useful frameworks to understand the shifting contexts in which this unique force has operated. For example, Ken Eyre has outlined three “surges” of military interest in the Canadian Arctic during the Cold War. He revealed that the federal government’s varying appreciation of security and sovereignty threats had a direct correlation with military priorities for and activities in the region.⁴ Since the end of the Cold War, however, Arctic security issues have undergone a significant transformation. The leading scholar of these changes, political scientist Rob Huebert, has explained that the effects of military operations on northern peoples and ecology have become central considerations. Sovereignty, rather than traditional forms of military security, is now the primary focus of Canadian defence activities in the Arctic.⁵ As the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs observed in 1997, “the security of individuals and the environment in the Arctic is now placed above traditional state sovereignty and defence issues that dominated throughout the Cold War.”⁶ This has a clear effect on the way the military can accomplish its mission in the North in the 21st century.

Scholarly literature on civil-military relations also intersects with the northern security agenda. One school of interpretation sees the CF as a positive contributor to Canadian development, both domestically and internationally. In the context of the Arctic, the extension of military communications systems, transportation and activities into the North have served to open and connect it to the rest of the world.⁷ The second school sees the military as a dominant threat to Canadian values and to the environment. Using examples like low-level flying, environmental contamination from CF operations, and direct confrontations between Aboriginal peoples and the army, such as Goose Bay, Oka, Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash, the military is characterized as a coercive hegemon.⁸ Indeed, policy scholar Frances Abele has argued that “sovereignty and security policy decisions, in their immediate impact, have been and continue to be disproportionately costly

to northern indigenous peoples." Inuit spokesperson Mary Simon has added, "Too often, military projects are centralized undertakings that are unilaterally imposed on indigenous peoples and their territories. Such actions are inconsistent with the basic principles of aboriginal self-government."⁹ In short, military activities and northern indigenous worldviews and life-paths are incompatible.

The institutional emphasis of most civil-military relations theory and scholarship tends to neglect issues of culture. This chapter recognizes that values, attitudes and symbols inform not only the nation's view of its military role, but also the military's own view of that role. Concordance theory, Rebecca Schiff explains, highlights dialogue, accommodation and shared values amongst the military, political elites and society. Rather than assuming a sharp separation between civil and military institutions, she encourages research drawing upon additional elements of society that affect the role and function of the armed forces. How do citizens interact with the military? Is there agreement over the role of the military in society?¹⁰ The paucity of research on the social integration of the military in Canada *writ large* demands more attention, as do specific relationships like those shared with Aboriginal groups.¹¹

This chapter focuses on Aboriginal peoples' service in what is now 1 CRPG (which spans the Territorial North). It explores evolving military perceptions about contributions that Northern Aboriginal peoples can make to national defence. The documentary record suggests that the Canadian military historically possessed conflicting ideas about the role and utility of Aboriginal peoples in the Rangers – and the CF more generally. By the late 1970s, however, new sovereignty and security discourses encouraged the military to integrate Aboriginal peoples into the CF in culturally appropriate ways. Officials saw operational value in traditional skills and the military has grown in its awareness that diversity can serve as a "force multiplier" rather than a liability. Over the last two decades, this understanding has allowed the Rangers to flourish in the north, attract significant positive media attention for the military and support self-governing and sustainable northern communities.

Several qualifications are necessary to note at the onset. First, this chapter does not purport to speak from an Aboriginal viewpoint. Although I have interviewed Aboriginal Rangers over the last five years, most direct quotations are taken from archival documents and published primary sources. Second, I have relied heavily on interviews with Ranger instructors who have worked with Rangers in the North. Although these testimonies reveal

as much about the instructor as they do about the people they are describing, these professional soldiers bring a unique perspective given their experience with numerous Ranger patrols and their knowledge of military culture. Furthermore, my conclusions are somewhat essentialist. Aboriginal voice and experience are, of course, plural. As Alan Cairns explains, "'Aboriginal' covers not only the obvious diversity of Indian, Inuit and Métis but multiple internal distinctions – men's voice and women's voice, modernizers and traditionalists, urban Aboriginals in Toronto and their relatives on isolated northern reserves."¹² Future studies will determine whether the general comments that I offer are applicable to Rangers across the North and across the country more generally.

Historical Overview: The Search for a Role, 1947-69

Although I have charted the growth of Aboriginal participation in the Canadian Rangers elsewhere,¹³ the historical evolution of the force warrants reiteration given that it remains the least known formation in the CF. The Rangers were officially established as a component of the Reserves in 1947, based on the template of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR) created in British Columbia during the Second World War.¹⁴ 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 thus 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 Rangers 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 was operated and administered on a localized basis.¹⁵

The question of Native Canadian participation in the Rangers generated conflicting opinions in the early postwar period. Members of coastal

Native communities in British Columbia had played a significant role in the wartime PCMR and received heroic tributes in newspaper reports. They also embraced this form of wartime service that did not obligate them to serve overseas. "All the Indians of these parts are strongly and enthusiastically ... for the Ranger organization," PCMR instructor Brendan Kennelly reported of the Kinconlith unit in 1943. "They see in it their opportunity to do their bit & to be prepared to help in home defence in country ... and in terrain & surroundings with which they were familiar and in which they would be most useful."¹⁶ While it seemed obvious to some military officials that indigenous peoples would make similar contributions to the Canadian Rangers, not everyone was caught up in the hype. In late-1946, Brigadier S.F. Clark, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, cautioned that:

folk-lore attribute many qualities to outdoor people and especially to natives (such as Indians and Eskimos) which, in fact, they do not possess. It is common belief that Indians and Eskimos, and to a lesser degree trappers, in our Canadian hinterlands possess special qualities of sense of direction and as such would be extremely valuable as guides to Military parties during operations. One of the most experienced Arctic travellers, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, states that invariably he found that Indians and Eskimos were reasonably good guides in country with which they were familiar but that as soon as they were taken into unfamiliar country, they displayed no "sixth sense of direction" but were, in fact, less able to find their way about than an experienced Anglo Saxon.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the Rangers were intended to serve in their local areas. Given this fact, the question remained whether Native peoples could have a role to play in the new force.

Major-General Chris Vokes, who oversaw Central Command, did not think so. He discouraged the formation of Ranger units in northern Ontario because the population was largely Cree. First, he felt that there really was no need for such organizations: "Nothing goes on in the James Bay area which is not quickly known through the natural curiosity of the natives. The Hudson Bay factor and the missionaries plus the RCMP pretty well know everything which goes on ... through the mocassin telegraph and their private wireless." Furthermore, Vokes explicitly dismissed the Aboriginal population as worthwhile contributors to Canadian defence:

The population is for the most part Cree Indian, some with Scottish names and blue eyes who exist by trapping and guiding for goose and duck hunters in the Autumn. They are most indolent and unreliable and born lazy. Hunger is the only motivating force, plus the propagation of their race, at which they are very adept ... I doubt the value of these Indians in a para military organization.¹⁸

If Ottawa insisted on a presence in the region, he would turn to White locals to establish small units at Moosonee, Moose Factory and Fraserville. He clearly did not believe that indigenous residents would have anything to contribute, despite impressive Native participation rates from the region during the world wars. In Vokes' opinion, Indian traits precluded effective military contributions. Exclusion, not accommodation, was his preferred option.

Quebec Command also foresaw limited prospects for the integration of northern indigenous peoples into military activities. During the summer of 1948, an intelligence officer surveyed the areas around northern trading posts and recommended that recently-established Ranger company headquarters should remain dormant until an emergency. Officers had been appointed and platoon recruiting was well underway, but there were no strength returns because communications were limited. The General Officer Commanding, Major-General R.O.G. Morton, surmised that "it would never be easy to keep in touch with the other ranks, many of whom were Indians and Eskimos of migratory habits." In contrast to Vokes, however, Morton saw indigenous traits and lifestyles as appropriate to the force. After all, "the Eskimos and Indians living in isolated communities were excellent marksmen and probably would use the annual 100-round allotment of ammunition (the only remuneration they received) for hunting seal and reindeer."¹⁹ Rather than fixating on negative stereotypes like his Ontario counterpart, Morton perceived the potential, mutual benefits of integrating Native peoples with an intimate knowledge of the land and northern survival skills into the Rangers.

As the Rangers took shape in the late-1940s and early-1950s, their expansion into the Far North reflected evolving geo-strategic appreciations. The Arctic, now sandwiched between rival superpowers, would be the front line in any future world war. In 1947, the USSR developed an intercontinental bomber, bilateral weather station agreements were sealed with the US and American forces returned to the Canadian North. Two years later, the Soviets exploded their first nuclear bomb and the threat of a continental at-

tack became more ominous than ever before. Yet "neither the United States nor Canada looked on the North as a *place* to be protected because of some intrinsic value," Ken Eyre astutely observed. "It was seen as a *direction*, an exposed flank."²⁰ This posed a series of important questions for defence and foreign policy makers:

Did Canada have the resources to guard that front line to the satisfaction of its powerful ally, the United States? It was obvious, almost from the start, that it did not. But could Canada allow the United States to mount that "long polar watch" alone, from Canadian territory? Would this not be an admission that whatever sovereignty Canada claimed in the polar regions was weak at best and nonexistent at worst?²¹

Options were limited. Canadians had to "defend against help." If Canada was neither able nor willing to defend the northern approaches to the continent, the Americans would be compelled to take unilateral measures to defend themselves and could thus become a security threat. The dilemma remained: how could Canada help protect the continent against the Soviet Union while, at the same time, protect the Canadian North against the United States?²²

Demographic, political and financial realities dictated that the Canadian military could not feasibly station large numbers of regular soldiers in the North. Mobilizing northern residents could bolster Canadian sovereignty and security in the region. Staff officers began to note the importance of "Eskimos" to national defence by 1950. Ironically, the Soviet Union provided the precedent: for decades, the Russians had devoted considerable attention to developing their Arctic areas and assimilating natives into their future plans. The Soviet Institute for the Peoples of the North trained members of Soviet native groups so that they could return to the Arctic with skills as doctors, teachers, meteorologists and aircraft technicians – "and also thoroughly indoctrinated with the Red virus of future world domination." In contrast, a Canadian briefing paper observed, "both Canada and USA have been almost standing still where the Eskimo is concerned." It noted the "most regrettable condition" in which a few were engaged in the armed forces "to do jobs of a menial nature." The paper continued:

Anyone who has knowledge of the Eskimos knows them to be most ingenious, of outstanding integrity, loyalty, patience and industrious far beyond the average whiteman in the arctic. Given

half a chance the Eskimos would prove beyond any doubt the ideal race for staffing Armed Service Units, meteorological stations, hospitals, schools, and scientific bases in the far North.²³

This would be a long-term project, with pitfalls. Government and Mission schools proved “of little value to the Eskimo at the moment as it forces them ... to forsake their trapping grounds ... and [to forget] most of his native ways and [he] must learn these all over again when he returns home.” A much better solution, this officer reflected, would be to encourage Eskimos of “promising ability” to work “in a useful capacity in their own country after graduation.”²⁴ Flight Lieutenant S.E. Alexander noted in a 1950 memorandum that there was no reason why Eskimos could not be trained to assume most military duties in the Arctic. The expense would be minor compared to paying for “unclimatized personnel, who for the most part, are bitter and unhappy with their postings and consequently not too concerned in carrying out their duties.” It was cost-effective and would contribute to their acculturation. “This matter of utilizing the Eskimos to the fullest extent both for their own advancement and the good of their native land has been discussed many times with those who know the Arctic. There has never been a dissenting voice.”²⁵

Defence officials embraced this logic. Ranger units, their ranks filled with northern indigenous peoples, began to spread across the Arctic.²⁶ An intelligence officer with the army’s Western Command established Ranger platoons in the Western Arctic at Coppermine, Bathurst Inlet, Cambridge Bay, King William Land, Read Island, Holman Island and Aklavik in 1949.²⁷ Similarly, the military authorized the formation of companies on Baffin Island in 1951. Senior officials in Ottawa responsible for Eskimo affairs stressed that Ranger service would be good for the Inuit. One policy-maker noted that the Inuit were “reliable, honest and intelligent and would make good Rangers,” but he wanted to make sure that rifles issued to them were not “free hand-outs.” After all, a rifle was “a major asset to an Eskimo and something he had to earn by hard work” and bullets for hunting cost significant money.²⁸ His underlying message: the federal government had to inculcate the Inuit with proper values to succeed in a capitalist world. To most government officials, however, the weapon and ammunition provided to the Rangers was a *quid pro quo* – they served their country and this was the remuneration that they received. They used them to great effect in their subsistence economy. “Nobody has ever attempted to calculate, or could if one wanted to, the number of caribou, moose, and seal that fell to Ranger marksmen,” Eyre noted

in hindsight.²⁹ The .303 Lee Enfield was a reliable weapon, even in Arctic conditions, and the number was undoubtedly substantial.

Annual re-supply and training visits by Regular Force Ranger Liaison Officers (RLOs) provided opportunities for cross-cultural contact. The experiences of Ambrose Shea, the RLO for Eastern Command, are representative. His first forays into the Baffin region were a culture shock. Over time, however, he developed a familiarity with the Rangers in the northeastern Arctic. He visited them in their remote camps, ate and fished with them and developed a strong respect for their knowledge and skills.³⁰ Distance and weather inhibited regular contact, so the RLOs relied upon training bulletins to keep the Rangers up-to-date. Amongst northern indigenous Rangers, however, it would appear that few training activities actually took place. The Rangers were simply given their annual allotments of ammunition and “practiced” on the land by hunting. There was little sustained contact. Reverend John R. Sperry, the Anglican missionary at Coppermine (Kugluktuk), was a Ranger lieutenant from 1950 to 1969. The administration of his platoon was very informal. Sperry held no meetings, provided no specific instructions or training to the Rangers and received no visits from a liaison officer. “We just knew that if an aircraft went down we should look for it,” Sperry later reflected. If someone was lost, the RCMP also passed along the information and community members went out to look for them. “All the men were going out anyway,” he explained, so search and rescue activities were not viewed as “Ranger” activities.³¹

By 1960, Shea became disillusioned with the military’s disregard for the 550 Rangers in Newfoundland, Labrador and Baffin Island. After expanding into indigenous communities, he lamented:

the Army seemed to stand aghast at its own temerity and from then on, and in an increasing degree, the attitude of Higher Command towards the Rangers can be best summed up in the words of the old ballad:-

“Mother, may I go out to swim?”
 “Yes, my darling daughter,
 Hang your clothes on a hickory limb
 But don’t go near the water.”

The message Shea had repeatedly received: “the Rangers may exist but under no circumstances must they do anything.” This logic reflected a broader devaluation of part-time soldiering more than it did racism against

Aboriginal peoples, highlighting the establishment's predisposition towards fully assimilated, professional forces. For his part, Shea was responsible for organizing and maintaining eleven Ranger companies scattered over 8,000 miles of coastline. Liaising with the Baffin Island Rangers alone consumed three months of his year, and while he enjoyed positive relationships with the Rangers themselves, his impact was limited. "It is doubtful if some of the Rangers really understand what the whole business is about," Shea explained,

and for various reasons it is difficult to explain it to them. The Eskimoes [sic], in particular, have no real word for "soldier" ("Unataktik," that is, "one who fights," is as near as they get) and look upon warfare as a species of insanity peculiar to the white man. "I hear that the white men are fighting like dogs again," was one man's comment on the Suez affair. Furthermore, it is the RLOs belief that some of the Eskimoes think that he is the entire Canadian Army and that, as such, he is an eccentric but benevolent dispenser of free rifles and ammunition. The name given the RLO in certain localities "Kokiutit angayak'ok", "Rifle Chief" or "Boss of the Rifles", is sufficient indication of this.³²

The cultural divide could not be bridged without more sustained contact and without greater clarification of what the Rangers were supposed to actually do.

Despite these various shortcomings, Shea still saw a place for the Rangers – and Eskimo Rangers in particular. "The idea of arming a local population and asking them to take a hand in defending their own locality is an ancient one and eminently sensible," he wrote. "It does not become out-dated, even in this atomic age." The Rangers had amassed considerable military intelligence over the previous decade, including topographical detail, submarine and ship sightings and reports of suspicious individuals. They had reported unexplained bomb-drops on Northern Baffin Island, producing bits of the bombs to verify the veracity of their report, and had provided evidence of guided missile activity. In an emergency, it would be useful to have an organized body like the Rangers in communities and they were different from the "highly-organized and extensively staffed" Ground Observer Corps (GOBc), a purely civilian group. If intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) made the GOBc obsolete, the Rangers would always be useful as "'friends on the ground' so long as the Canadian Army continues to exist."

Perhaps most importantly, the Rangers were obviously and keenly interested in the organization. Baffin Island's Eskimo Rangers had a "distorted" idea of their role, but they took it seriously:

An extreme example of this occurred three years ago when a Ranger in North Baffin Island began, but fortunately did not complete, a single-handed attempt to capture the US Coast Guard Cutter "Staten Island". He realized that she was not a Canadian ship, jumped to the conclusion that she was a Russian, and felt that it was his duty as a soldier to take some action.

Although the Northern Baffin Eskimo were "cut off from the world in many respects," Shea found that they were "vividly aware of the Russian threat; so much so that the RLO has sometimes wondered whether they may not have had some personal contact with the Russians with which they are afraid to reveal." He found them "intelligent, adaptable and intensely practical" – like the Gurkhas – and naturally took to military training given their hunting lifestyles. "If trained in arms," the officer added, they could prove "extremely effective guerrillas. It is a pity that there are not more of them." Indeed, few white men could navigate the Arctic without their assistance, making them "good people to have on our side."

In Shea's final assessment, it made sense to retain the Rangers, but to reduce their present organization to a more "workable size." Their organization into "companies" and "platoons" fed distorted notions that they could exist and function in a conventional military manner. "Nothing could be further from the truth," Shea explained. "A 'Company' of Rangers is a collection of rugged individualists who may be scattered over a hundred miles of coastline and in twenty different settlements." They were untrained and only existed as a "unit" on paper. His final flourish reminded his superiors that they had formed a trust relationship with northern peoples that had to be maintained:

A small quantity of obsolescent equipment is issued to them in the same spirit that an engagement ring is issued to a prospective bride: as a token of engagement. Their main virtues are that they are willing to serve the Army voluntarily in the capacity of 'friends on the ground' to the best of their ability, which is often considerable, and to the best of their local knowledge which is likewise. Their cost is negligible. These are virtues which are becoming increasingly rare and which deserve encouragement.³³

By the end of the 1950s, the Rangers factored little into Ottawa's defence plans for the North. The Soviet threat was decidedly airborne and northern residents with armbands and rifles could scarcely fend off hostile bombers with nuclear payloads. Defence officials turned to technological marvels like the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line to protect the continent. Officials seemed to conclude that even if their value was negligible, so too was the Rangers' cost. It was their "cheapness," not their indigenous knowledge and contributions, which ensured the force's survival through the 1960s. They were left to "wither on the vine," with little direction, sporadic re-supply and no training.³⁴ Nevertheless, the few popular articles that did appear on the Rangers were laudatory. Larry Dignum told readers of *The Beaver* that the "Shadow Army of the North," functioning as civilians and carrying out their duties in conjunction with their "regular jobs," quietly performed valuable duties to defend Canada and maintain law and order in isolated areas. The Rangers' mystique shone clear:

When on duty they wear a scarlet armband with the three maple leaves of the Canadian Army superimposed on a crossed rifle and axe. They have no uniforms, receive no pay, seek no glory, but these men of known loyalty, Indian, Eskimo and white, take pride in standing on guard in the empty and remote parts of Canada with vigilance and integrity, and in silence.³⁵

In contrast to Vokes' pessimistic appraisal of potential Aboriginal contributions to the Rangers, the *Beaver* article and another in the *Star Weekly Magazine* highlighted the vital importance of Indian and Inuit cooperation. "Some of [the Rangers] can't read their own names but they are the real scholars of this country when it comes to reading signs on the trails of the north," the latter article stated. It continued, "Eskimos, Indians, whites and all the mixtures of these races, they are united in one task: Guarding a country that doesn't even know of their existence." They were not only "the least expensive military force any nation has today," but a useful source of reports on suspicious activities.³⁶

Were they actually useful? Perhaps, but in the late-1960s, a military struggling to discern its role in a changing world, and reeling from the cultural implications of Unification, had largely forgotten about the Rangers' existence. John Diefenbaker, former prime minister and longstanding proponent of a "northern vision," lobbied in 1969 for an "Arctic Force," revealing that he had no knowledge of the Rangers. He wanted units of 20 to 30 men in

sensitive areas to “preserve for Canada the greatest undeveloped frontier,” “provide new vistas of opportunity for the Eskimo,” and “provide for youth a new challenge to a worthwhile life.” At first the force would have to be officered by the Regular Force, but with training, it would reach “100% Eskimo membership.”³⁷ He was oblivious to this proposal’s striking resemblance to the existing Rangers. Journalist Scott Young made the connection, noting that Canada had had “a force precisely of this nature for nearly 22 years.” When Young spoke with defence officials, they were reserved in their revelations about the force. “They don’t get any training – but then they’re born with most of the training they need,” one colonel explained. “I think we give them a few rounds of ammunition, but that is about all I know about them.”³⁸

Defence officials again questioned their utility as the decade drew to a close. Major W.K. Stirling visited 17 communities with Ranger platoons in the summer of 1970 to assess levels of activity and interest, but found that nearly all were moribund. Stirling concluded that northern Canadian society was no longer a place where the Ranger organization would find solid ground:

Perhaps the most important piece of general advice I received was that southern Canadians should rid themselves of their romantic concept of the North. The Arctic has become a rather sophisticated social environment. Hunting and trapping, although still carried on are not the main pursuits of the indigenous people. Eskimos are being collected into permanent settlements such as Frobisher, Cambridge Bay and Tuktoyaktuk where they are provided with houses and to a large extent live on welfare. The young Indian and Eskimo is being well educated in modern schools at Inuvik, Yellowknife and Frobisher. When they complete their education they will be trained to take their place in modern society and not on the Arctic ice or the trap line.

In short, modern communications, transportation and economics had overtaken the northern indigenous lifestyle that had made them useful Rangers. “Certainly there are still people in the North who hunt, trap, fish and prospect and one hopes there always will be,” Stirling continued, but they were now the exception, not the rule. “The people who know the North best are the RCMP, bush pilots, certain members of the Territorial Government, some prospectors and the missionaries.” Unfortunately, these were not categories of people upon which to base the organization. “The type of people envisaged by the DND [Department of National Defence] planners in 1946 on

which to develop the Canadian Ranger concept simply no longer exist in sufficient numbers.” He thus recommended that the Rangers be disbanded and regular military forces take over their roles in the Canadian Arctic.³⁹

Indigenizing the Northern Security Discourse, 1970-94

The year 1969 rekindled concerns about Canadian sovereignty in the North. Although the Trudeau Government was less favourably disposed to military commitments than its predecessors, the surveillance of Canada’s territory and coastlines and the protection of sovereignty now assumed primary political importance. In 1970, the government established Northern Region Headquarters (NRHQ) in Yellowknife, but placed no operational units under its direct command. The Rangers were the exception, numbering – on paper – 700 members in 36 northern communities. Despite Cabinet and parliamentary recommendations to upgrade the program, the numbers did not rise.⁴⁰ Like the Trudeau administration’s whole approach to sovereignty protection, the promised commitment to expand the program was more symbolic than tangible.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the fact that the Rangers already existed as an “officially constituted” element of the CF, and asserted sovereignty at a minimum cost, were important considerations at a time when the government was unwilling to commit men and money to military matters. Ranger patrols spanned the breadth of the Arctic, from the most easterly patrol at Broughton Island, to the most westerly at Aklavik, and represented every Aboriginal group in the North (although the majority of members were Inuit). A Northern Region briefing book trumpeted the Rangers’ involvement:

It is significant also that the Ranger concept capitalizes on those attributes of native northerners that they themselves espouse as their traditional way of life – their knowledge of their environment, their ability to live and survive on the land, their hunting instinct. In sharing an important defence commitment, the Canadian Rangers fulfil a role no less important than any other component of the Canadian Armed Forces, and have a justifiable pride in doing so.⁴²

The new language was telling. The focus was on northerners making a contribution to their country. Their inherent knowledge of the land and their natural instincts – in short, differentiation – made them useful participants in the armed forces.

After 1970, there were no further recommendations for disbandment, but a number of very detailed proposals for reorganization or revitalization of the Rangers were not implemented. The main problem seemed to be "the lack of a clearly defined role and tasks not adapted to the realities of Canada in 1970's." Nearly everyone said they could perform a useful military function, but few suggested what precisely their tasks should be. In the 1970s, Northern Region conducted training for groups of up to 25 Inuit and Dene Rangers. These activities proved "highly popular in small Arctic communities, provides us a nucleus ... of Rangers in these communities, gives us a permanent contact group in many locations and provides a source of guides and advisors" for army units exercising in the North. Questions remained, Major R.S. McConnell explained in 1978:

During these training sessions, a constantly recurring question is "what are we to do? what is our purpose?" The book roles do not go far in convincing the native northerner that he is indeed a valuable member of the Canadian Forces. Though he is dedicated, and immensely loyal to the Crown, he is somewhat suspicious that we come and give him two weeks training, for which he is paid, and then walk away and leave him with a rifle and 300 rounds of ammunition, which we promise to replenish annually. To the Ranger, this is the entire incentive to join and his sole motivation to remain a Ranger.

Why not use them for search and rescue, McConnell asked, and give them a practical role? "The point is constantly made that if a light aircraft is missing, even if only one person is aboard, no expense is spared in trying to locate it," he explained, "whereas a party of hunters who are overdue from a trip get no attention at all. This, to the natives, is inexplicable and to some degree tied to their perception of 'the white man looks after his own and to hell with the natives.'" Given the Rangers' training, they seemed ideal candidates to conduct ground search and rescue in the region. They would also ensure that indigenous peoples played a role in northern operations.⁴³

A new Northern Development focus, based on a multifaceted concept of security and sovereignty, accompanied these trends during the 1970s and 1980s. Broad political, legal and social forces prescribed that the federal government's relationship with northern peoples assume a higher profile. In 1972, Jean Chrétien, the Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), announced an integrated federal policy in

Northern Canada in the 70's. Among its seven goals were the maintenance of Canadian sovereignty and security in the North, as well as the maintenance and enhancement of "the northern environment with due consideration to economic and social development." This overarching framework meant that individual departments, including DND, could no longer pursue specific objectives without due respect for the government's broader strategic vision. The notion of a fiduciary duty of trust and respect, with which the federal government must conduct all dealings with Aboriginal peoples, was established in law in 1980 and further guided federal policy. Therefore, legal and moral issues propelled the idea that the CF needed to be more inclusive and exclusion and differentiation predicated upon perceived indigenous "inferiority" no longer fit with an emerging political discourse celebrating multiculturalism. Nonetheless, differentiation factored heavily in the discourse on the Rangers, who were clearly "others-at-arms." This needed to be spun in a positive way.

Because northern participation in the Canadian Rangers was not considered a "real" military contribution, the growing presence and tempo of operations in the Arctic also led to "embarrassing difficulties" for the CF. The military had not made any efforts to recruit northerners into the Regular Force before the 1970s, Ken Eyre explained, and very few northerners displayed any interest. Given the military's resurgent involvement in the region, Defence Minister Leo Cadieux promised a major effort to "increase (Eskimo) participation in the armed services." The ensuing recruiting programs revealed that the military failed to appreciate northern realities. The few young northerners who enlisted in a special military trades program in 1971 "experienced extreme stress in coping with the often conflicting demands of military and traditional culture" and the rare individuals who remained were transferred to southern bases rather than being posted in the North. One senior officer proclaimed that the Eskimo would make good soldiers because "he has his own culture but is the sort of man who could become Western very easily, become one of us." There was little consideration that very few would actually want to join mainstream, southern society. Another officer's perspective highlighted the contributions that Eskimos could make to northern defences if posted at Arctic bases. "The ones we're looking for are mobile and have a self-navigating capability and roam a lot," Major-General R.A.B. Ellis told the *Globe and Mail*. "They have an ability to find themselves and get to a pre-determined location. They can take a trip of 800 or 1,000 miles and know exactly where they are ... with no gear, maps or charts."⁴⁴ Inuit were now being constructed as superhuman, a tendency on the part of non-

Aboriginal commentators who mythologized the "other-at-arms." Not only were the military's expectations ridiculous, they failed to question whether traditional forms of professional service would appeal to northerners.

Eyre has pointed out that the military's expectations displayed a profound naïveté. An individual cannot "know" the breadth of the North akin to a southern city and certainly could not be expected to know the area around Alert around which no Inuit had lived. More fundamentally, if any 18 to 23 year-old northerner had the basic education qualifications to join the CF, they could not have pursued "the traditional nomadic life wherein these much-vaunted skills would have been learned." Older Eskimos who possessed these skills would not have sufficient formal education and were unlikely to speak English. With poignant insight, Eyre suggested that had the military actually met its goals and recruited 60 research communicators from a total Eskimo population of less than 25,000, the results could have been disastrous:

One could honestly ask if Eskimo communities could afford to lose their best educated young people to serve in the Forces. The matter would have been particularly acute when one considers the developing set of Inuit priorities of that period. There was a perception that Eskimos should produce their own lawyers to argue their land claims, their own administrators and politicians to run their communities, their own businessmen to run their cooperatives, their own teachers to instruct their children. Surely, in terms of the federal government's northern goal of meeting native peoples' aspirations these latter professions should have taken precedence over military service that would have taken Eskimo soldiers out of the mainstream of Inuit life. In this sense it is fortunate for the North as a whole that few Eskimos have come forward asking for a military career.⁴⁵

This serving officer's sober assessment demonstrated that not all military officers were blinded by southern Canadian preconceptions. Initiatives like the Northern Native Entry Program (NNEP) failed to attract many volunteers and most who did enlist could not overcome the cultural shock and dropped out.⁴⁶

By contrast, the Rangers enjoyed strong Aboriginal support in northern communities. But this posed issues for command and control. Traditionally, non-Native officers were appointed in communities to act as cross-cultural

interlocutors. Indeed, official policy in the 1950s and 1960s dictated that Inuit would not be allowed to serve as Ranger officers. Differentiation meant that northern indigenous peoples could contribute to the military, but they were unsuited to lead it, even on a local level.⁴⁷ As a 1986 study report noted, this idea was challenged by the 1970s:

Early research in Northern Region indicated a lack of trust of the Canadian Forces by the indigenous people. In addition, it was pointed out that the old practice of automatically appointing the “white” token resident in the community as the Ranger leader had failed and that the military idea of leadership is not easily translated into a concept native peoples can comprehend, let alone work with.⁴⁸

As a result, Northern Region units were re-organized as individual “patrols” of 10 to 20 Rangers, each commanded by a Ranger sergeant and his second-in-command, a master corporal. These positions were elected by the communities. Furthermore, the renewed focus on the Rangers in Northern Region also meant more sustained contact. Most Rangers received, at the very least, basic military training and many had also attended a refresher course. Training exercises provided an opportunity to re-supply each patrol with ammunition and to ensure that their rifles were still serviceable. “This annual contact has led to an excellent rapport between the Rangers and the Regular Force staff,” an optimistic appraisal noted.⁴⁹ The road to mutual respect was indeed taking shape.

Other contextual considerations increased the attractiveness of the Rangers. The military had a role in national development, from northern environmental protection to community relations, and NRHQ’ mandate to “serve as a link between [the CF] and the northern settlements in which they operate and exercise”⁵⁰ obliged military authorities to balance traditional, military-based security needs with socially and environmentally responsible programs. Even commentators who saw little military value in the Rangers acknowledged the connection they offered with northern communities. The editor of *Canadian Defence Quarterly* proclaimed that the “native hunters and trappers” could “hardly [be called] ... a military organization,” but noted the socio-political relevance of their presence:

Even if it were not for the regrettable gradual urbanization of the Eskimo (in the sense that they are becoming increasingly

dependent on the services provided in industrial society), the military value of the Canadian Rangers would be minimal. The main benefit lies in the ties that membership in the organization forges between the native population and the apparatus of the state, still somewhat foreign to them.⁵¹

At most, this viewpoint revealed a begrudging acceptance that accommodation had a civic utility; it was hardly a tribute to the Rangers' practical contributions to defence.

The transit of the Northwest Passage in 1985 by the American icebreaker *Polar Sea* precipitated another flurry of interest in the Arctic. Again, it was an American challenge to Canadian sovereignty, not a traditional military threat, which elicited cries for a bolder Canadian presence in "our north." External Affairs minister Joe Clark's statement on sovereignty to the House of Commons encapsulated the growing concern and linked it directly to the northern peoples:

Canada is an Arctic nation. ... Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic is indivisible. It embraces land, sea and ice.... From time immemorial Canada's Inuit people have used and occupied the ice as they have used and occupied the land.... Full sovereignty is vital to Canada's security. It is vital to the Inuit people. And it is vital to Canada's national identity.⁵²

By mobilizing indigenous peoples' historic occupancy and use to bolster Canada's claims to the region, the federal government's position also raised a legal, moral and practical reason to encourage direct indigenous input into defence activities. Indeed, security and sovereignty discussions became intertwined with broader themes of militarization and indigenous survival. Low-level flying controversies, persistent environmental concerns and public appeals by Aboriginal leaders to demilitarise the region transcended traditional, realist understandings of state-centred security and sovereignty. George Erasmus, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, saw "no *military* threat in the Canadian North," only a threat to the cultural survival of indigenous peoples posed by a military build-up. Inuit Circumpolar Conference President Mary Simon also stressed that military activities "justified by the government on the basis of defence and military considerations ... often serve to promote our *insecurity*." Inuit ties to the environment and a collective social order meant that, for them, "Arctic security includes en-

vironmental, economic and cultural, as well as defence, aspects."⁵³ In short, a holistic strategy was needed to accommodate and accept indigenous peoples' physical welfare, their homeland and their cultural survival.

Mention of the Canadian Rangers was notably absent from indigenous leaders' arguments for demilitarizing the Arctic. Obviously, and significantly, this force was not perceived as a threat to the environment and cultural survival. In fact, it appeared to represent just the opposite – an opportunity for cooperation. The broadened security debates bolstered rather than detracted from their attractiveness in an era when military and Aboriginal interests seemed to diverge. The Rangers received praise from Inuit leaders across a wide spectrum of issues. Mark Gordon, representing Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), felt that the Inuit had "a valuable contribution to give" to northern security and praised the Canadian Rangers for acting as "the eyes for the Armed Forces." He highlighted that the Rangers provided "valuable services to our communities, such as search and rescue," as well as "help[ing] our communities a great deal in providing us with food." Aboriginal autonomy and self-government was now part of the political discourse and the Rangers seemed the most viable answer to Inuit communities' security paradox: that while the military was needed to protect Inuit interests, the communities could not withstand massive influxes of outsiders and had to be able to "feed [them]selves." In essence, what Gordon suggested was an Inuit version of "defence against help:" a military presence in the North was required to protect Inuit interests, but they did "not want the guy who comes in to protect us to run us over either."⁵⁴ The Rangers, "who in most instances are the most experienced and the best hunters of the communities and the most knowledgeable of the area surrounding their communities," already represented a "vehicle" for constructive dialogue between the military and the local populations.⁵⁵

Rhoda Innuksuk of the ITC envisioned security as a concept that transcended both military and non-military realms and she advocated a more inclusive policy-making process that allowed for Inuit participation "to minimize the disadvantages and negative impacts of this activity and to maximize the benefits and opportunities it may present." She saw the Inuit and the military as partners who could work together for mutual advantage:

Inuit understand Arctic conditions. National Defence has demonstrated the importance of this fact to Arctic operations too by training Canadian troops in Inuit survival techniques and through the Canadian Ranger program, a program we would

like to see expanded. We feel Inuit have more to contribute... Northern [sic] are different, and different from an operations perspective. This is itself an opportunity for innovation.⁵⁶

As active participants, and not just observers, the Inuit could assist the military in protecting sovereignty and security, "as well as non-military interests." The reception by the parliamentary committee was very favourable. Not only were the Rangers cost-effective, they ensured a military presence and offered a direct role in defence for permanent northern residents. A member of parliament grasped the essence of the message that would be integrated into the future expansion of the Rangers: "it is not a matter of the people accommodating the old way of life to the military necessity; ... it is a matter of accommodating the military necessity, not to the old way of life but to the people who are here now with some old knowledge and some new knowledge."⁵⁷

Accommodating and Embracing Diversity: The Rangers in 1 CRPG, 1987-Present

In 1987, with backing by such strong advocates within the local indigenous populations, a new Defence White Paper, in addition to senior political and military officials, indicated that the northern Ranger program would be both continued and enhanced. The Minister of National Defence promised to improve the level of equipment and training for the Rangers, highlighting their "important expression of sovereignty" and anticipating an increased role as military activities expanded in the North.⁵⁸ The Standing Committee on National Defence reported the following year:

The Rangers are now given a limited amount of training and are expected to receive some new equipment, including a new rifle to replace their Lee Enfields, and communications equipment. By 1995, total Ranger strength in the Northern Region is expected to rise to about 1,000 with the formation of new patrols in several communities.⁵⁹

In fact, the expansion was more rapid and numerous than expected. By 1992, there were 1,362 Rangers in Northern Region. Although the end of the Cold War and growing federal deficits prompted the Conservative government to cancel or scale back most other Arctic initiatives that it had promised in the White Paper (such as nuclear submarines and the number of Forward

Operating Locations), the Canadian Rangers fared remarkably well. In this particular case, accommodation and acceptance fit with government austerity. The Rangers were cheap and inclusive – a winning recipe in the political environment of the 1990s.

Enhancement seemed appropriate in this context. After all, articles in the media continued to treat the Rangers as remnants of a bygone era, using obsolete weapons to counter late-20th century threats. “Certainly no one in this kinder, gentler age is about to attack an international good guy like Canada,” Mary Williams Walsh wrote in a 1993 article, first published in the *Los Angeles Times* and reprinted in the *Toronto Star*. “So what is Johnny Pokiak doing, standing guard here by the frozen waters of the Beaufort Sea, armed with a World War I-vintage Lee Enfield rifle, 200 rounds of ammunition and orders to make tracks for the nearest phone and ring up army headquarters, collect, should he spy something funny – say, the coning tower of a nuclear submarine poking up through the ice?” Pokiak explained that he was “protecting the Canadian sovereignty” – there was no invasion force waiting to invade, but Canada still needed to show the flag to remind our neighbours that this was our land.⁶⁰

Although the 1994 federal budget gave a clear indication of the declining commitment to Canadian defence, a parliamentary committee recommended that the capabilities of the Rangers be augmented, especially “North of 60.” The subsequent Defence White Paper announced that the program would be “expanded and enhanced.” Defence officials, especially Colonel Pierre Leblanc (the Director General Reserves and Cadets and soon-to-be Commander of CFNA, the new name for NRHQ), recognized that this new focus allowed “some current deficiencies to be addressed with an opportunity for expansion into some communities where the Rangers can make a significant contribution to the social fabric.”⁶¹ The Rangers Enhancement Program (REP) followed with an overwhelmingly northern focus. Nine more patrols were created in CFNA (and two more on the shores of Hudson’s Bay in northern Quebec – Nunavik) and the Rangers received distinctive red Ranger sweatshirts and t-shirts in 1997.⁶² The Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves recommended these initiatives and “heard evidence that supports the value of the Canadian Rangers program from an operational aspect and for its importance to isolated communities.” Its 1996 report highlighted the cost-effectiveness and “significant” contribution the program made “in enriching the social fabric in remote areas.” Several recommendations were made, generally in the areas of command and control, improvements in equipment and funding and the official adoption of com-

munity-based Ranger "patrols" as the primary unit rather than a company-platoon structure. The Committee wholeheartedly recommended continued support for the Rangers' growth in the years ahead.⁶³

By the end of the 20th century, almost every community that could demographically sustain a patrol in the Territorial North had one. As of 31 December 2004, 1 CRPG had 58 Ranger patrols with a strength of 1,575 Rangers (1,310 male and 263 female). Although no official statistics on the Rangers' ethnicity are available, the 1 CRPG patrols are representative of the diverse ethnic composition of the North. The majority of Rangers in the Yukon are "White," while the patrols in the Northwest Territories reflect the geographic and linguistic dispersion of northern peoples. Most of the Rangers patrols south of the treeline are comprised of members of Gwich'in, Dene, Métis and "White" communities. North of the treeline, most of the patrols are Inuvialuit. In Nunavut, the Rangers are almost entirely Inuit, and many if not most operations are conducted in Inuktitut. As a result, in communities like Talaoyak or Pangnirtung where a high proportion of Rangers do not speak English, Ranger instructors must work through interpreters. This slows down training, military officials explained, but is a practical reality that must be accepted.⁶⁴

"Canadian Rangers have a tremendous impact on the lives of people in their local communities," boasts the official DND website. "Many Rangers hold leadership positions in their communities, such as mayors, chiefs or Ranger sergeant. They are active community members who have a positive influence on their peers and are often held up as role models for their youth." This statement is telling: the military trumpets not only the Rangers' military contributions, but also their contributions to local communities. The days of the Ranger as peacetime "guerilla" soldier standing ready to engage and contain a small-scale enemy invasion are gone. The recent disavowing of this former role reflects a more sober assessment of the practical realities of the Rangers' potential contributions.⁶⁵ After all, Canadian Rangers are an atypical volunteer militia. To join the force, the only formal requirements are that an individual be at least 18 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 are distinct from other military units in salient respects. The average entry age is 30 (and is frequently over 40) in the North because potential recruits must await the departure of their elders for an open position. Furthermore, there is no upper age limit, and as long as an individual can still perform their duties, they can remain a Ranger. Some anecdotes are

truly amazing: 74 year-old Ranger Peter Kuniliusie of Clyde River, Nunavut, retired in November 2004 after *fifty-two years* of continuous service.⁶⁶ Indeed, it is accommodation and acceptance of social diversity and experience that makes the Ranger concept unique.

The Ranger's operational tasks remain centred 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 CFNA's surveillance plan.⁶⁷ 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, centred on the patrol's home village. Furthermore, SOVPATs allow the CF to put "footprints in the snow where they are not normally put," former CFNA commander Colonel Norris Pettis explained.⁶⁸ For example, 30 Rangers from all three Territories participated in Operation Kigliqavik Ranger I in April 2002, which ventured 1,000 kilometres across the frozen tundra and sea ice from Resolute to the magnetic north pole off Ellef Ringes Island. Two years later, Rangers on Operation Kigliqavik Ranger III (the northernmost patrol ever conducted by the CF) covered 1,800 km from Resolute to Eureka to Alert. These patrols allow the Rangers to operate in unfamiliar environments, share skills, develop relationships with other members from across the North and serve as confidence-building measures for participants.⁶⁹

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 (discussed below); and providing local assistance to both Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) and disaster relief activities. SOVOPs allow southern-based units to receive practical Arctic warfare training, while the Rangers are afforded the opportunity to teach them traditional survival skills. For example, Rangers teach Regular Force personnel how to hunt and skin animals in the Arctic and how to erect snow houses. These interactions encourage cross-cultural awareness and understanding and Regular and Reserve Force soldiers' laudatory assessments of Aboriginal people in the Rangers solidify military bonds and

reaffirm their important contributions to defence.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most visible, high-profile activities conducted by the Rangers on a consistent basis are GSAR operations. In 1999, the Chief of the Defence Staff awarded a Canadian Forces Unit Commendation to the members of 2 CRPG for their efforts in response to the avalanche at Kangiqsualujjuaq in northern Quebec.⁷¹ That same year, Rangers from 1 CRPG took part in 164 volunteer search and rescue operations, one medical evacuation and one emergency rescue.⁷² Although the media tends to refer to all GSARs involving members of Ranger patrols as “Ranger” operations, units are usually not tasked by the RCMP or the CF and therefore are not “official” activities. This line has little bearing on Ranger participation – most volunteer first and foremost as members of their northern communities.

The final Ranger task is the most general and basic – to maintain a CF presence in the local community. This is fundamental, given the reductions in northern military operations over the last several decades and DND’s commitment to having a “footprint” in communities across the country. The Rangers represent more than 90 percent of CF representation north of the 55th parallel and provide a special bond with their host populations. They are far more than the military’s “eyes and ears;” they are an organized group that communities can turn to for numerous activities. Unorthodox roles, such as breaking the Yukon Trail for dog mushers, ensuring that polar bears do not attack unsuspecting trick-or-treaters in Churchill, and welcoming dignitaries, bring favourable media attention. Their participation in Remembrance Day parades reinforces the intimate and continuing, positive military presence in Canadian life. They are simultaneously citizen-soldiers and citizen-servers, intimately integrated into local community activities, ensuring that the CF is not socially isolated or structurally separated from northern indigenous societies.⁷³

In a 1992 article on militarization and Aboriginal peoples, Mary Simon explained that military activities cannot be allowed to erode or curtail the Inuit right to self-government. “If the future of our Arctic homeland is to be safeguarded,” she asserted, the Inuit had to have a direct role in decision-making.⁷⁴ The Rangers are designed to acknowledge that leadership should not be externally imposed. The structure of an individual patrol is rooted in the community and operates on a group basis. Each Ranger patrol is led by a sergeant, who is seconded by a master corporal, both of whom are elected by the other members of the patrol and one of whom (at least) must be able to speak English.⁷⁵ Patrol leaders are the only members of the CF who are *elected* to their positions by the patrol. As a result, Ranger non-

commissioned officers (NCOs) are directly accountable to the other members of their military unit in a unique way. Rank is not achieved but held on a democratic basis. Patrol elections, held in the community on an annual basis, exemplify the self-administering characteristics of the Ranger force. Furthermore, Ranger activities are reported annually to the various land claim administrations in the North to fulfill legal requirements under these agreements.

The Rangers' mission focuses less on warfighting and more on low-intensity humanitarian missions, which are planned in partnership with local peoples. Furthermore, the Ranger force is "inter-national" and accommodates different cultural groups.⁷⁶ The Rangers are valued for what they bring as "differentiated" individuals, rather than what they could offer if assimilated and conditioned through the regularized training regimes. In the case of the Rangers, differentiation no longer assumes that northern Aboriginal peoples inherently "possess" innate navigation, shooting or survival skills that lay at the heart of the Ranger concept; "biological" assumptions have been discredited. Instead, over the last quarter century, military officials have raised concerns that changes in the North may erode cultural skills amongst the Rangers that are vital to successful military operations. "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 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.⁷⁷

This issue is significant. The problem is not that indigenous members of the Rangers are difficult to acculturate into military culture. It is the opposite: that an erosion of Aboriginal skills may jeopardize their contribution. If traditional survival skills are allowed to atrophy, Rangers skills will weaken and the CF's ability to operate in the North will suffer. "Given the minimal activity by southern-based units in the arctic," the CFNA commander noted in 2003, "this trend has disturbing implications for the CF if it hopes to fulfill its mandate to operate effectively in all parts of the country."⁷⁸

The creation and rapid expansion of the Junior Canadian Rangers (JCR) over the last decade is the boldest example of the military's commitment to support traditional indigenous practices. Like the Canadian Rangers, the JCR program is a unique initiative in its flexibility and decentralized-focus. Officially established in 1996 to provide "community-based, structured, and supervised youth activity free of charge in remote and isolated communities," the JCR is open to all 12 to 18 year-olds in participating communities. It is an inclusive rather than an "elitist" capacity-building program. Drawing upon the resources of local Ranger patrols, it is designed to help "preserve the culture, traditions, and activities that are unique to each community." JCR training is much less standardized and more local in orientation than the southern cadet program and the community is heavily involved in curriculum development. An adult committee, composed of eight volunteers who have been approved by the community authorities, as well as two community elders, work in partnership with the local Ranger patrol to set curriculum. Sixty percent is at the community's discretion (including subjects such as local language, making shelters and bannock, singing and dancing), and the CF directs the remaining forty percent. Rangers instruct and supervise the "Ranger Skills component," which includes leadership and field exercises, first aid, map reading and navigation, and weapons safety and use – critical skills in a hunting society. This structure supports community involvement in decision-making to build human capacity amongst youth.

The program seems to work. "The participants of this youth program have shown greater self-esteem, increased responsibility, and a better understanding of, and connection with, their communities," a DND backgrounder boasts. This claim seems to be borne out by anecdotal testimonials about the JCR, as well as its meteoric growth and popularity in northern Canada.⁷⁹ These considerations are very important given social trends in the region. The northern Canadian birth-rate is much higher than the national average, and consequently the population is much younger. This demographic reality compounds many social problems amongst northern youth (including disturbingly high suicide rates) that are exacerbated by feelings of hopelessness and isolation.⁸⁰ DND saw that it had a constructive role to play and the JCR represents the only program for youth in many northern communities. Additionally, the shared uniform, Ranger name, and summertime camps that gather JCRs from various communities provide teenagers with a "feeling of belonging to the rest of the country." Although only a decade old, the strength in the Territorial North has risen to 1,050 Junior Canadian Rangers (573 males and 477 females) in 33 patrols (as of 31 December 2004).⁸¹

The Canadian Rangers serve a vital function in the North that transcends military, socio-political, economic and cultural realms. The existing organization, managed on a community level, embraces 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 one military activity in the North that actually seems to contribute to sustainable human development amongst northern peoples. In military terms, it represents a democratic approach to supporting Aboriginal peoples as direct actors in asserting Canadian sovereignty and security. Positive relationships and mutual respect have produced high levels of trust, cohesion and morale between the Rangers and other components of the Canadian Forces.

Conclusions

In *Who Killed the Canadian Military?*, historian Jack Granatstein lamented policies introduced by the Canadian military to make it an inclusive force at the expense of combat effectiveness. Advisory boards set “ridiculous standards” for levels of immigrants and Native Canadians in the ranks, founded on a racially-based quota system, and this “race-based” logic “would do Hitler proud.” In the end, Granatstein concluded that “the policy of quotas makes clear that the Canadian government does not view its military as a fighting force that must be efficient, effective and well-trained ... but more as a social acculturation agency designed to replicate the Canadian population and make everyone welcome in shared tolerance and equality.”⁸²

The Canadian Rangers, however, demonstrate that the acceptance of cultural differences can serve as a force multiplier. The Rangers in 1 CRPG represent a “success story” in military accommodation and acceptance on several levels. First and foremost, Ranger patrols provide a cost-effective military presence. Contrary to the common conception that decentralized, community-based partnerships with northern indigenous peoples are prohibitively costly, the Rangers are very inexpensive compared to other conceivable military programs in the North. They embody an investment in local skills with few capital requirements. For communities, they bring money and resources that support and encourage traditional and subsistence activities. Furthermore, the Rangers do not threaten the environment or northern ways of life – they depend upon them. Ranger and JCR patrols actually facilitate the trans-generational transfer of traditional knowledge and

skills, rather than seeking to assimilate indigenous peoples into orthodox military culture.⁸³

“Canadian Forces Northern Area is committed to earn the respect of the people of Nunavut, the Northwest and Yukon Territories,” the 2003 Commander’s Direction explains, “demonstrating the attributes of a highly professional formation of the Canadian Forces that can be trusted to safeguard their sovereignty and security interests through the projection of a credible military presence.”⁸⁴ The tempo of military operations in the North has been increasing in recent years and the federal government’s 2005 defence policy statement affirms that it will continue in the future. Climate change raises the potential for increased shipping activity in the region; resource development initiatives, foreign tourism and commercial overflights 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 the North. The CF must maintain a positive working relationship with the people of the North in order to conduct sustained operations, and trust and credibility are essential.

Thanks to the Rangers, there is no impermeable wall between the military and civilian sectors in the Canadian North. Instead, their presence ensures that the CF is already well integrated into northern society and that Aboriginal peoples have – and will continue to have – an opportunity to participate in the armed forces without sacrificing their cultural identities. They are representative of a cross-section of the civilian population in the North and therefore are not estranged from civil society. Instead, a decentralized structure rooted in local communities links the civilian and military sectors through the Rangers’ individual social networks. As identities are being recognized and created through political changes and self-government in the North, it is imperative that the CF and northern communities are constructively engaged and maintain a spirit of mutual cultural awareness. After all, Canada’s sovereignty claims in the North rely partially – if not most credibly – on indigenous peoples’ historic and contemporary use of the land and sea. As Franklyn Griffiths pointed out in a recent article, it is hypocritical to do this without giving these people a say and a meaningful role in exercising control and enforcement in the Arctic. They reside there, have an immediate and superior knowledge of the environment, are on the front lines of changes that affect the North and have practical daily attachments to the land and sea. As a result, northern indigenous peoples need to be partners directly engaged in practical stewardship.⁸⁵ They already are in the Canadian Rangers.

In his important book *Citizens Plus*, political scientist Alan Cairns argues that future Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations lay in forging a meaningful "middle ground," recognizing "that those who share space together must share more than space." A sense of communal belonging and commitment is integral to the core principle of cross-cultural acceptance. Cairns believes that the notion of "citizens plus," stressing the virtues of full, common citizenship while reinforcing salient differences, is the most mutually beneficial and responsible way to further Native-Newcomer relations in Canada.⁸⁶ Aboriginal peoples' participation in the Canadian Rangers serves as an example of how difference can be accommodated and accepted within the armed forces. Rangers are "citizens plus" in their communities. They are also "citizens plus" in the military.

Notes

Reprinted from *Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Military: Historical Perspectives* ed. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Craig Mantle (Kingston: CDA Press, 2007): 171-208.

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ABSTRACT: Climate change is transforming the Arctic. Questions abound about what this will mean for the Canadian Forces, for Canada's sovereignty position, for northern peoples, and for stability and security in the circumpolar world. Fortunately, Canadians have encountered and debated similar issues in the past. This volume, featuring chapters by established and emerging scholars, offers essential historical analysis on Canadian Arctic security and sovereignty policies and practices since the Second World War. The "lessons learned" lay a solid foundation for future research and historiographical debate in this dynamic field, and should inform Canadian thinking on what is necessary to protect national interests in the twenty-first-century Arctic.

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