



The Canadian Forces Reserve Force Study 2008

Focus Group Report

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Social Policy 3

Directorate Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis

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Social Policy 3-5

Directorate Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis

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**Defence R&D Canada
Centre for Operational Research and Analysis**

**Director General Military Personnel Research & Analysis
Chief Military Personnel**



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Abstract

The Canadian Forces Primary Reserve Study 2008 is a two-phase research project investigating and identifying issues and concerns among Reserve Force members. This study consists of two parts, the first of which is focus groups, the second being a survey. Researchers from the Director Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis conducted focus groups in five locations across the country and spoke to Reserve Force members in a variety of locations, on a number of topics which were identified by key stakeholders in the project. Overall, Primary Reserve members felt they were doing much more than supporting the Regular Force, both at home and overseas. Most agreed that conditions were much better for Reserve members now than ever before in terms of conditions of employment and employment opportunities. In the main, participants voiced strong attachment to the CF and its mission. There were a number of irritants which participants felt could become critical if not dealt with soon. Main dissatisfiers included lack of adequate training opportunities and resources, and the pay inequity between themselves and their Regular Force counterparts. Information about pay and benefits was seen as inadequate. Administrative support was also seen as a major dissatisfier, especially when it came to pension and pay issues, and post-deployment screening and care. Further research in the form of a survey will assist with identifying the main problems surrounding these issues, and contribute to providing stakeholders with recommendations for policies and services for Reserve Force members.

Résumé

L'Étude 2008 sur la Première réserve des Forces canadiennes est un projet de consultation en deux phases visant à cerner les problèmes et les préoccupations des membres de la Réserve. Cette étude est menée en deux temps : on a d'abord réuni des groupes témoins et un sondage a suivi. Les chercheurs de la Direction - Recherche et analyse opérationnelles (Personnel militaire) ont réunis cinq groupes témoins dans cinq régions du pays, puis ont recueilli l'opinion de membres de la Force de réserve à divers endroits au pays sur bon nombre de questions que des instigateurs du projet avaient recensées. Dans l'ensemble, les membres de la Première réserve ont estimé qu'ils jouaient plus qu'un rôle de soutien auprès de la Force régulière, tant au pays qu'à l'étranger. La plupart s'accordaient pour dire que les conditions d'emploi et les perspectives d'avancement des réservistes étaient nettement meilleures aujourd'hui qu'elles ne l'ont jamais été. Essentiellement, les participants ont exprimé un fort sentiment d'appartenance aux FC et à sa mission. Par contre, ils ont signalé un certain nombre d'irritants à régler sans tarder avant que la situation ne s'envenime. Les principaux facteurs de mécontentement incluaient le manque de possibilités de formation et de ressources d'instruction, une rémunération inéquitable chez les réservistes par rapport à celle de leurs homologues de la Force régulière. Ils ont aussi fait état de l'information touchant la rémunération et les avantages sociaux qu'ils voyaient comme inadéquate. Le soutien administratif a également été perçu comme un irritant majeur, notamment en ce qui a trait aux régimes de retraite, aux questions de rémunération, au dépistage et aux soins en postdéploiement. D'autres consultations sous forme de sondage aideront à cerner les principaux problèmes sous-jacents à ces questions; elles seront l'occasion de fournir des recommandations aux parties intéressées pour l'élaboration de politiques et de services à l'intention des membres de la Réserve.

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Executive summary

The Canadian Forces Reserve Force Study 2008: Focus Group Report

**Brian McKee; Sergeant S.A. Powers; DRDC CORA TN 2008-051;
Defence R&D Canada – CORA; December 2008.**

The Canadian Forces Primary Reserves are increasingly contributing to the Canadian Forces mission. Director Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis (DMPORA) researchers designed a research plan to identify key issues and dissatisfiers with Reserve Force members. This was at the request of numerous internal clients including DGPR, DGMPPRA, CMS, CLS, CAS, and DG Reserves and Cadets. The first phase, outlined in this report, involved focus group research with Canadian Forces Reservists at five locations across the country, which involved over 100 participants.

Overall, Reservists felt that over the past few years, particularly since Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, the CF has begun to value their contribution. Employment and deployment opportunities were plentiful, and Reserve Force members were proud to be contributing at the rate they were. Many Reservists voiced the opinion that the CF could not meet its missions without their contribution.

Reserve Force members had a variety of reasons for joining. Those members who were ex-Regular Force found it a way to remain in the forces while managing their own careers. Others felt it offered well-paying, part-time employment while attending post-secondary school. There was also a smaller group of members who were "career" Reservists. These members had joined the Reserves as a way to be in the CF without the threat or worry of being posted or deployed. All groups of members, across all locations, stated they would recommend the Reserves to others because of the great opportunities the CF provided.

The main dissatisfiers with employment with the Reserve Force included lack of training opportunities, especially seen in certain technical military occupations, as well as lack of resources allocated to Reserve Force units. Above all else, members were dissatisfied with the difference in pay between themselves and their Regular Force counterparts. Many times members voiced the opinion that they felt the CF was using them as "cheap labour". Many members who had been deployed had not completed proper post-deployment screening, and felt they were forgotten after they were returned to their home units. Lack of adequate administrative support for issues such as pay and benefits was also identified as a dissatisfier.

Overall, members felt that relations between Reserve and Regular Force members were good; it seemed to members that where the inequity and unfairness was evident was in the pay and benefits, especially the fact that they received 85% of Regular Force members' salaries, and in the administrative support area.

In the second phase of the research project, a survey will be administered that will allow for the gathering of further information on the key issues brought forward in the focus groups. This information will be passed to the key stakeholders in order to inform policy, develop programs, and provide support for Reserve Force members.

Sommaire

The Canadian Forces Reserve Force Study 2008: Focus Group Report

**Brian McKee; Sergeant S.A. Powers; DRDC CORA TN 2008-051;
R & D pour la défense Canada – CORA; Décembre 2008.**

Les Premières réserves contribuent de plus en plus à la mission des Forces canadiennes. Les chercheurs de la Direction de la Recherche et analyse opérationnelles (Personnel militaire) (DRAOPM) ont conçu un plan de recherche visant à cerner les principaux problèmes et motifs de mécontentement des membres de la Force de réserve à la demande de nombreux clients internes, dont le DGPR, DGRAPM, CEMFM, CEMAT, CEMFA, et le DG Réserves et Cadets. Une première étape, décrite dans ce rapport, a porté sur de la recherche par groupes de discussion composés de réservistes des Forces canadiennes, qui a fait intervenir plus de 100 participants réunis à cinq emplacements dans le pays.

Globalement, les réservistes ont trouvé que ces dernières années, en particulier depuis que le Canada participe à l'effort de guerre en Afghanistan, les FC ont commencé à valoriser leur contribution. Les possibilités d'emploi et de déploiement ont été abondantes et ils sont fiers de contribuer à leurs niveaux actuels. De nombreux réservistes sont d'avis que leur contribution est indispensable à la réussite des missions des FC.

Les diverses raisons qui ont motivé les réservistes à s'enrôler dans la Force de réserve incluent, pour d'ex-membres de la Force régulière, la possibilité de demeurer dans les FC tout en gérant leur propre carrière et, pour d'autres, celle de toucher un bon salaire et de travailler à temps partiel tout en poursuivant des études postsecondaires. Parmi les groupes ciblés, il y avait également un groupe plus restreint de réservistes de carrière. Ceux-là se sont enrôlés dans les Réserves afin de se joindre aux FC sans avoir à craindre une affectation ou une mutation. Tous les groupes de participants, à tous les emplacements, ont déclaré qu'ils recommanderaient l'enrôlement dans une Réserve en raison des possibilités formidables offertes par les FC.

Les principaux motifs de mécontentement à l'égard de l'emploi dans la Force de réserve comprenaient le manque de possibilités de formation, en particulier dans certains emplois techniques des groupes professionnels militaires, ainsi que l'insuffisance des ressources allouées aux unités de la Force de réserve. Mais par dessus tout, les réservistes ont exprimé leur mécontentement face aux disparités entre leur rémunération et celle de leurs collègues de la Force régulière. Ils ont maintes fois répété qu'ils avaient l'impression d'être utilisés par les FC comme de la main-d'œuvre « bon marché ». De nombreux réservistes qui avaient déjà participé à un déploiement ont dit qu'ils n'avaient pas subi de dépistage médical postdéploiement convenable et qu'ils avaient l'impression d'avoir été oubliés une fois de retour à leur unité d'appartenance. Le manque de soutien administratif adéquat sur des questions comme la rémunération et les avantages sociaux est un autre sujet qui suscite le mécontentement chez les réservistes.

Globalement, les réservistes étaient d'avis que les relations étaient bonnes entre les membres de la Force de réserve et de la Force régulière; l'iniquité et l'injustice leur semblaient par contre évidentes dans le domaine de la rémunération et des avantages sociaux, surtout du fait qu'ils touchaient 85 % de la solde des membres de la Force régulière, et dans le domaine du soutien administratif.

Dans la deuxième étape du projet de recherche, on réalisera un sondage permettant de recueillir des renseignements supplémentaires sur les principales questions soulevées dans les groupes de discussion. Cette information sera transmise aux intervenants-clés afin qu'ils en tiennent compte dans les politiques et programmes et qu'un soutien soit offert aux membres de la Force de réserve.

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1 Introduction

Throughout January and February 2008, researchers from Director Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis (DMPORA) conducted five focus groups in various locations across the country talking to Canadian Forces Reserve Force personnel about a range of issues relating to their attitudes, opinions and perception of their work within the CF. Part of the discussion involved the role of Reservists and the terms and conditions of their employment. Reserve members attended focus groups in Halifax, Bagotville, the National Capital Region (NCR), Petawawa, and Edmonton. At all locations, the Reserve Force groups had unusually high attendance. Participants included an impressive range of Reservists spanning all ranks, environments, and ages. In all groups there were a number of Class A Reservists, although Class B Reservists dominated the meetings in terms of numbers. In total, focus groups were held with over 100 Reservists across the five locations. The information gathered from the focus groups will be used to inform the development of a more comprehensive Reserve Force survey to be administered this spring.

2 Methodology

2.1 Population and Sampling Frame

The population of interest for the focus groups of the CF Reserve Force Study 2008 included all rank levels, environments, class of service¹, and experience levels of the Primary Reserve. To ensure representation from all elements and regions, focus groups were held across the country in five locations, including Halifax, Bagotville, the National Capital Region (NCR), Petawawa and Edmonton. Databases were requested from DHRIM Output Products based on location. All Reserve Force members from these locations were included in the sample frame. From the databases, 500 names per location were drawn by random selection using SPSS. These 500 members were sent personalized emails inviting them to participate in a focus group at a convenient location (see Table 1). It should be noted that in at least one location (Bagotville), more people attended the group than responded. See Annex A for a sample of the email invitation. This level of participation is within standard expectations for focus group research.

Table 1. Focus Group Locations and Turnout

Date	Location	Responded	Attended
21 January 2008	NCR	41	27
24 and 25 January 2008	Halifax	34	24
28 January 2008	Petawawa	25	18
1 February 2008	Bagotville	9	10
4 February 2008	Edmonton	28	24

2.2 Focus Group Participants

Focus groups were made up of members from all rank levels, and environments. In all groups there were a number of Class A reservists, although Class B and C reservists predominated. The groups were made up of a number of different ‘types’ of reservist. A number of participants were retired Regular Force members who had component transferred into the Reserves upon their release, there were also post-secondary school students, DND employees and other working professionals outside of the Canadian Forces, and ‘career’ reservists (i.e., full-time reservist for their entire career).

Years of service ranged from a few months in, to members who had over 25 years in the CF, some completely in the Reserves, others with combined Regular Force service.

¹ Classes of Service include Class A, B and C.

One of the biggest hurdles in holding focus groups with reservists is that the Reserve Force units' training night schedule is already full with mandatory training that must be complete before the summer. This, along with a lack of funding to pay Class A reserve members to participate in one of our focus groups contributed to a lack of Class A representation. The majority of focus group participants were Class B members. However most of these had at one time been a Class A reservist and could offer opinions on the issues from that perspective. Furthermore, such was the interest in the groups, that some Class A members attended in their own time and at their own expense. While only about 10 participants in all identified themselves as Class A members, more than half of those participating had been in that category of Reserve at one point in their career. This certainly allowed for representation of major concerns of these reserve members.

In order to capture a better sampling of current Class A members it would be necessary to hold focus group on parade nights. Attempts were made to do this in the course of this study. However, availability of personnel to participate in such groups while meeting other commitments on parade night was limited and researchers were faced with time constraints making this impractical for this research project.

2.3 Moderator's Guide

The moderator's guide was developed with the assistance of input from the multiple stakeholders in this project. Along with DMPORA, these stakeholders included representatives from:

- a. Chief of the Land Staff /Director General Land Staff;
- b. Chief of the Air Staff /Director Air Personnel Strategy;
- c. Chief of the Maritime Staff/Director Maritime Personnel;
- d. Chief of the Land Staff /Director General Land Reserves;
- e. Chief Military Personnel (CMP)/DCOS Medical Policy;
- f. CMP/Director Personnel Generation Requirements;
- g. CMP/Canadian Forces Health Services Group;
- h. CMP/Director Military Personnel Strategy and Coordination;
- i. Vice Chief of the Defence Staff /Directorate of Reserves;
- j. Canada Command;
- k. CMP/Directorate Quality Of Life; and
- l. CMP/Director General Compensation and Benefits.

In December 2008, stakeholders met and discussed key areas of interest requiring research for the CF Primary Reserve. The main areas identified were:

- a. General issues which include the role of reservists, attraction, recruitment, and retention, quality of life, resilience, culture, commitment, support and compensation;
- b. Regular and Reserve Force relations; and
- c. Deployability of reservists including skills and competencies, as well as challenges to deployment, and the impacts of deployment.

These areas were used as the framework to develop the moderators guide for the focus groups. The moderators guide consisted of seven sections. These sections were:

- a. the role of the reservist;
- b. attraction and recruitment;
- c. retention, job satisfaction and expectations of employment;
- d. Reserve quality of life;
- e. the Reserve Force pension plan;
- f. Reserve and Regular Force relations; and
- g. deployability.

A copy of the full moderator's guide is included in Annex B.

3 Focus Groups

3.1 General Observations

Overall, most Reserve personnel stated that their situation has changed for the better over the past few years. They felt that Reserve members now have more respect and support from the organization and from their Regular Force counterparts. They attributed this to the increased role of Reserves at home and abroad in support of the CF mission. Many felt that, as one person put it, 'The CF couldn't exist today without the reserves to pick up the slack'. This does not mean that all is well. There were a number of areas of discontent, some of which would appear to be key dissatisfiers that might lead people to leave the force. These will be elaborated on in further sections of this report.

Focus group participants were very forthcoming in their views and opinions. In all locations there were some consistent issues and problems and there did not appear to be regionally specific issues. Furthermore, most problems appeared to be shared by members across rank and occupation.

While most expressed the opinion that they were generally fairly treated, the differences in general terms of service between Regular and Reserve personnel were viewed as problematic for many respondents. Furthermore, there were conflicting opinions in terms of rights, duties, and obligations of Reserve members. For many, the bottom line was that Reserve members viewed themselves as not well-informed on the latter owing to a lack of adequate communications.

3.2 The Role of Reservists

Focus group participants were asked what the role of the CF Reserve Force is, and if they believed that the Reserve Force was fulfilling this role. Participants typically stated that the role of the Reserve Force was to support the Regular Force, both at home and overseas. Many participants felt that, since the Canadian Forces' involvement in Afghanistan, the Reserve Force is doing much more than simply supporting the Regular Force, but is rather augmenting it. Overwhelmingly, participants stated that the Canadian Forces would not be able to meet its commitments without the Reserve Force.

3.3 Attraction and Recruitment

There was a varying array of responses when members were asked why they initially joined the Reserve Force. The retired Regular Force members felt that being part of the Reserve Force was a way to remain active in the CF, while at the same time, being able to settle down in a location of their choosing, without fear of being posted to another area and with the option of seeking deployment should they so choose. Some of the younger members in the group reported that they joined so that they could have a part-time job, which offered full time employment for the summer months, and reimbursement towards post-secondary education. Other members attending the groups stated that they joined the Reserve Force because they had a spouse in the Regular Force. Joining the Reserves permits these individuals to be part of the Forces, while

retaining the ability to accompany their spouse in postings, something that would not be possible in a civilian job. Among participants there were a number of people who reported having joined the Reserve Force as a way to be in the CF without having to worry about being posted and with the ability to manage their own careers.

When members were asked if they would recommend joining the Reserve Force to others, the overwhelming answer was “yes”. Again, reasons were that the Reserve Force allows people to contribute to the CF and maintain a civilian career, without the worry of posting or deployment. Almost all reserve members expressed great pride in what they did and in their contribution to protecting Canada. They stated that anyone who shared their pride in their country should also be interested in a reserve career.

3.4 Retention, Job Satisfaction, Expectations of Employment and Reserve Quality of Life

Participants were guided through a discussion of a range of topics pertaining to retention, job satisfaction and expectation of employment. They were asked to comment on and discuss their choice of military occupation, plans to release, support and compensation. This led to a discussion covering a wide range of issues and concerns. The questions concerning choice of military occupation led into discussions on training and more specifically, the perceived lack of training opportunities for reservists. Quality of life questions inevitably led to discussions on pay and benefits, and issues around Reserve and Regular Force member pay rates. These series of questions also brought about discussion about the perceived lack of adequate resources available to the Reserve Force.

3.4.1 Lack of Training

Reserve members throughout the country contended that they received much less in the way of training than their Regular Force counterparts. Given that the main avenue for promotion is access to and acquisition of more advanced skills training, this absence of opportunity was viewed as a career inhibitor. Participants in almost all locations reported that when training was provided, reservists had to take whatever was available while the choice opportunities were given to full-time CF members. It was often reported that Reserve members remained in positions longer than those in the Regular Force and so could utilize skills and information acquired through training, to a greater degree than Regular Force personnel, who were posted out of position after a few years.

With regard to basic military training, many participants felt that Reservists were not treated properly and were given inadequate access to opportunities. Many people joined the reserves to get military training in such areas as the use of weapons and equipment. The reality, according to most participants, was infrequent rifle range practice and the use of antiquated equipment that did not prepare them to offer the kind of support to the Regular Force that they felt was required. Furthermore, training deficiencies also made them less competitive for advancement opportunities especially when competing with former Regular Force CF members who had become Reservists or with DND civilian employees.

The level of training a member receives from the CF is largely related to his or her MOSID. The more “technical” the trade, the larger the perceived discrepancy between Reserve and Regular Force training. An example of this, cited in one group, is the Reserve Force Medical Assistant MOSID. A fully qualified Reserve Medical Assistant cannot deploy as a Medical Assistant overseas he or she has civilian qualifications or previous Regular Force experience. This was viewed by participants as unfair to the Reserve member. Participants believed that the organization was losing the opportunity to use valuable resources to their best potential.

Occupations such as RMS Clerk, however, offer courses that are considered equivalent to those provided to Regular Force personnel. RMS Clerks in the focus groups voiced the opinion that they had to know twice as much as their Regular Force counterparts in order to do their jobs properly. They are required to know Reserve Force administration practices, as well as those applicable to the Regular Force.

In general, as demonstrated by these two examples, Reservists in the focus groups believed that they needed to demonstrate greater knowledge and expertise in order to get the same recognition as their Regular Force counterparts. They also felt that they were given fewer opportunities to develop these skills, as a result of fewer opportunities for training in the Reserves.

3.4.2 Lack of Resources

Participants expressed the belief that Reservists are under-resourced. They cited fewer training opportunities and a deficiency of basic equipment as well as a perceived lack of administrative support. Whether it was in accessing records for pensions, obtaining information on benefits and entitlements, or assistance in getting training opportunities, reserve members noted that they believed they had limited administrative support. This perception of inequity was exacerbated by what they saw as the fact that many Reservists, in particular those in Class A, had full-time jobs outside of DND, and had only limited time available to do Reserve business.

In terms of resource allocation, many participants complained that they felt as if they were second-class citizens. They observed that their role was critical to the CF, certainly to a greater degree than in the past, but felt that they were not receiving the support from the organization that was required and deserved.

The general perception among reservists was that they did not receive all the information they required to make decisions with regard to their careers and their work. They contended that often computers are not available at units to allow people access to the DIN and email. For this reason they felt they relied more on their unit clerks or informal sources to transfer information. As one person put it, ‘We feel as if we are left in the dark about things’. Furthermore, participants contended that their understanding of the organization can be limited and they may not know where to go for information or how to retrieve it. This was particularly noted around issues relating to pay and pensions.

3.4.3 Pay and Benefits

Reserve members expressed concerns about their pay and benefits and the fact that they felt they were not being adequately compensated, at least when compared to their Regular Force counterparts. From discussion in the groups, there was also a marked degree of confusion and lack of clear understanding about details of benefits and the mechanisms available for clarifying questions. Many people stated they did not know who to turn to for information and guidance and felt that the organization did not make it easy to retrieve such information through published sources or on-line. Most agreed, however, that in terms of reserve remuneration, the situation had improved considerably over previous years. Many participants related stories of hardship they endured in the past because of lack of coverage.

There was a general perception of unfair treatment when it came to consideration of the comparable salary levels between Reserve and Regular Force. Participants stated that they received 85% of the pay given to their Regular Force counterparts. It was stated by some that, increasingly, Reserve members, particularly those in the support trades, were performing the same duties as their Regular Force counterparts. These participants stated that they often put in the same hours and worked under the same conditions but got 15% less in salary. There was an awareness that the pay differential was in part to compensate Regular Force members for hardship caused by postings and relocations. However many participants stated that they served with Regular Force members who did not get posted or deployed either. As one participant put it:

“Let’s call this what it is, this is a red herring. The Canadian Forces is using us as cheap labour. They can fill a job by a Reservist for 15% less then it would cost them to post someone into it.”

Many of the Naval reservists present in the groups discussed the fact that the Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels (MCDVs) are crewed primarily by Naval Reserve personnel. Some of the members of the groups reported that Naval Reserve members were actually transferring into the Regular Force to get less time at sea. Many of these participants believed that that there were Reserve Force members who had more sea time than some of their Regular Force counterparts. Again, participants perceived the use of Naval members by the CF as “cheap labour”.

To assist in the debate, facilitators presented the argument that Regular Force members often had more advanced technical and other skills thereby meriting higher salaries. In all groups, the typical reaction to this statement was that this was not often the case. The fact that Regular Force members had unlimited liability and could be put in harm’s way also did not persuade people that the pay differential was justifiable. Participants expressed the belief that if a Regular Force member did not want to go on deployment, there were a number of ways available to them to avoid having to do so. One of the methods frequently mentioned was getting a social worker to “DAG” them red. The perception among participants was that this was fairly simple to do with people stating a spouse or other family member was not supportive of the deployment. Participants raised the fact that many Reservists now go on deployment and that they carry the same risk as a Regular Force member. Furthermore, people frequently pointed to what they saw as the fact that many Regular Force members never deploy. In all groups, there were Reserve members who had been on multiple deployments, many more they felt than most Regular Force members.

At the end of the discussion on the pay differential, members were asked if this pay difference was enough to drive them into releasing from the CF, or make them want to join the Regular Force. In almost all areas, the overwhelming response was that for the time being, given other improvements in terms of pay and benefits, members were content to stay where they were in spite of the perception of an unfair pay difference. However, many participants expressed the view that this was a concern that could fester, so that it would become a cause for attrition. Some stated that better presentation of arguments for the differential might help the situation. In almost all groups, there were some Reservists who did not find fault with the pay discrepancy and saw it as the price they paid for remaining in one location. Many further stated that, overall, salaries were fairly good at the moment, which also lessened the impact of the differential.

Some of the participants spoke of eliminating the current classes of service (A, B, and C), and changing this to active service/full-time and part-time service, as a way of getting round the current pay differential. They believed that members who were on active service would be what is currently referred to as Class B and Class C service. The pay rate for this active service status would be the same as the Regular Force. Those members who are classified as Class A members, would be considered part-time, and would be paid at Regular Force rates, but by the half-day or daily rate of pay.

3.4.4 Reserve Force Pension Plan

Recent changes to the pension plan for reservists mean that over the next few months decisions have to be made in terms of agreeing to buy back time. However, few knew what they had to buy back and the financial benefits of such an investment. Furthermore, there was confusion over the amount of time people would have to make a final decision. Even getting approximate figures was seen as a laborious exercise that was perceived as probably not worthwhile. Records of Reserve service are required to properly calculate potential buyback. However, it was stated that many units did not retain records before the 1990s. In lieu of records proving time served, the CF will give reservists 90 days service in one year. This means that those serving more than this for years with missing information will lose out.

In terms of the buyback, Reserve members participating in the groups generally felt that changes are needed to the system. They felt that having to pay a higher interest rate that was compounded was unfair and at variance with the treatment of Regular Force members. Furthermore, in various groups we had reported paybacks of up to \$165,000 dollars. The deductions from pay necessary for this were seen as too costly for the average member and so discouraged them from entering into the program. Furthermore, many stated that they were provided with no expert advice, and so felt that they could not judge whether or not they would benefit in the long-term by paying back benefits. Most participants expressed the view that the pension plan was not really a good benefit, as it was one that could not be accessed easily and appeared to be more trouble than it was worth.²

² It should be noted that information on pensions was solicited on behalf of DPSP and feedback has been given to the Director of the program.

3.5 Reserve Force and Regular Force Relations

For the most part, participants felt treated fairly by their Regular Force counterparts. Some people had experienced problems. These seemed to be concentrated in certain trades, such as Medical Assistant, or other technical trades. Furthermore, it would also appear, from the information gathered through the focus groups that members who belonged to hard army trades, such as infantry and armoured, were most affected. One participant stated that he had no problems working with the Regular Force until they found out he was a Reservist, and then things changed. The Regular Force referred to him as a “toon”³, and made disparaging remarks about his lack of commitment to the CF, level of training, and ability.

3.5.1 Treatment of Reserve Units on Bases

This sense of being treated unfairly was evident in all locations where groups were organized. However, it appeared strongest on Army bases and less of an irritant in Naval units. In several Army garrisons, reserve members spoke of the perception of unfair allocation of everything from accommodations to administrative support. Many believed that the Regular Force was looked after first and the reserves got whatever was left over. In one area, Reserve members preparing for deployment, complained that they shared cramped quarters with little in the way of amenities, had to wait long periods to get required training, and were relegated to a minor and subsidiary role in preparations. As one person put it, ‘they treat us as if we are an afterthought’. Indeed, this situation had gone so far that a number of official complaints had been launched by members at the base which were currently under review by the CO.

The unique role of Reserve Force Naval members, as previously mentioned, was generally reflected in a very positive attitude towards treatment in the Navy. Members felt that they were regarded quite highly and appeared to be valued for their expertise. Some mention was made of the perception that their skills were not always seen as transferable because they sailed different classes of vessel than Regular Force members. However, often people followed this up by stating that they believed most other personnel saw them as having much more highly developed skills in operating the vessels they had.

Air Force participants also appeared less likely to feel that they are exposed to any unfair treatment. Many had technical skills that were at a premium within the Air Force and so felt that their peers in the Regular Force respected them. It was also felt that the Air Force had fewer issues between Regular and Reserve members, because they did not deploy in the same way as the Army.

³ “toon” is a short form of the word “cartoon”. Reserve Force members are referred to as a “toon” because cartoons are weekend shows, and is used to illustrate how Reserve Force members only show up to work with the military on weekends.

3.6 Deployment/Post-Deployment Experiences

When Reserve members are deployed, their experience, or at least their perceptions of that experience, appear to change dramatically. Of those who had served overseas, most spoke highly of the experience. When deployed, they were treated well by the CF and by their Regular Force colleagues. Initially, many said they hid the fact that they were in the Reserves from their comrades so as to avoid drawing negative attention to themselves. This was due to the perception that sometimes, Regular Force personnel would assume that Reserve members did not have the same skills and abilities as they did and so could be somewhat dismissive. However, by pulling their weight and showing what they could do, Reserve members believed they had gained the confidence of their peers. Many also stated that simply showing willingness to deploy when they did not have to also earned them the respect of Regular Force comrades.

Reserve Force members viewed the administration of pay and benefits as a major irritant in the deployment and post-deployment periods. Participants asserted that many Reserve Force members started pre-deployment training without a contract. Even with a contract there was a perception that many problems appeared to arise which extended even beyond the end of the operational tour. Members felt that these issues increased the stress of being deployed. They further contended that Regular Force members did not have the same problems and this was perceived as indicative once more of unfair treatment of Reservists. In almost all groups, members approached the researchers, seeking advice on how to resolve outstanding pay issues.

3.6.1 Post-deployment

When deployed, Reservists stated that they had access to all the same opportunities and entitlements as other members of the CF. It was believed that this contrasted with the treatment they received when they returned to their home base and assumed their Reserve status. After deployment, many expressed the feeling that they were neglected and forgotten. They asserted that often post-deployment medical and other post-deployment screening items were not conducted. As some members were returning to their civilian jobs after a long absence due to being deployed, many found it difficult to take more time off work to complete post-deployment screening, as appointments were only available during normal working hours.

No participants spoke of losing their civilian jobs while on deployment. Admittedly, many in attendance at the groups occupied positions within DND as Class B Reservists. It may have been the case that those working for civilian employers were unable to attend as the groups were held during regular office hours. Some people noted that they were aware of job protection support in their province for those on deployment. However, as one person put it ‘Job protection is fine but it doesn’t stop an employer from saying they will not hire you because you are Reserve – so you won’t get work in the first place.’

On the other hand, many of the Class B members spoke of the possibility of losing their current Class B position if they volunteered for deployment. Some argued that their current employer would not hold their position which would then be filled by another Reserve member. This perception that there was a possibility of coming back from operational deployment to unemployment, was seen as discouraging many members from volunteering for a deployment.

4 Conclusion

One important conclusion to be drawn from the dialogue at the focus groups is that Reserve Force members want, and need, to be heard. Frequently, participants noted that they had never before had such an opportunity to air their views and suggested such sessions should become regular scheduled events. It is important to note that the fact that so many people showed up for the groups demonstrates a high level of engagement with the CF. People who are alienated from an organization do not bother to participate in such discussions. By attending in large numbers, sometimes taking time off their civilian jobs, Reserve Force members were clearly showing that they believed in the CF and felt they were an important part of the organization. This view was reinforced through the discussions.

Overall, members appeared to recognize the progress in the treatment of Reservists made within the Canadian Forces within the last few years. This extended to pay, benefits, and conditions of employment but also included a greater sense that they were being valued for what they did and recognized for their contribution. There was a strong perception among all groups that the Canadian Forces would not be able to survive without the current contribution of the Reserve Force. Participants believed that the reserves were going far beyond their traditional role and responsibilities. This was a source of great pride.

Members indicated that there were still some issues or irritants and that not all members of the Regular Force had the same positive perceptions of Reservists. They also pointed to what they saw as some continuing deficiencies, particularly relating to adequate training opportunities. A perceived lack of appropriate training was believed to hinder promotion, particularly in certain military occupations. This, it was believed, could lead to frustration with the reserves and so possibly alienate members and lead to attrition from the Force.

The main area of discontent expressed by members related to what they saw as an unfair pay discrepancy between Reserve and Regular Force members. The view was expressed that Reservists were “cheap labour” for the CF. Most of the rationale for the pay differential were not seen as valid, as Reserve Force members believed they worked under the same conditions and limitations as Regular Force members. However, although this pay differential was the main dissatisfier voiced, it seemed that this was not a big enough factor to drive members out of the CF or into the Regular Force.

Reserve members felt they were, on the whole, being treated fairly by their Regular Force counterparts. Although they often stated that they still have to “prove” themselves, once they have established they can get the job done, there does not seem to be any difficulty for Reserve and Regular Force members to work together. This seems especially true in deployed operations. Conversely, the equitable treatment is perceived to end when it comes to post-deployment screening issues. Members repeatedly voiced the belief that once they were repatriated to their home units, they were forgotten about and did not receive the appropriate post-deployment follow-up.

Major points of concern for Reserve Force members seemed to concern issues of communication and the perceived lack of adequate administrative support. Reservists felt the system does not have enough administrative personnel to be able to provide all the information and assistance they require. This was clearly shown in the groups, by the number of participants who had no idea as to how to go about getting answers to questions such as those concerning pension issues, and pay issues when deployed.

Overall, the focus-group findings suggest that further research should be done on Reserve training, pay equity issues, administration, post-deployment support and communication. As a way to assist with this latter area, it is suggested that a periodic survey be conducted to secure feedback from Reserve members. It is further recommended that Your-Say Survey, currently limited to Regular Force members, be extended to include samples of Reservists. Developing better two-way communications between Reserve Force members and the organization should also go a long way to helping correct perceptions of inequity. Improved communications can also ensure that the current high levels of engagement are maintained and enhanced, contributing to increased inclusion of Reserve Force members within the CF.

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Annex A Focus Group Invitation

***** This E-mail is intended for Reserve Force CFB Edmonton members.
If you were sent this e-mail in error, please disregard *****

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

The Director Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis (DMPORA) has undertaken a research project to examine Canadian Forces Primary Reserve members' attitudes, beliefs and understanding of different aspects of the Department. We will be discussing topics including the Canadian Forces Pension Plan, compensation and benefits, and the Department Ethics Program.

As part of this project, researchers are conducting focus groups in Edmonton. We have chosen your name at random to invite you to attend a focus group. The focus groups will last two and a half hours at most, and will offer you an opportunity to discuss your views and opinions on various subjects.

4 February 2008
1300 hours – 1530 hours
CFB Edmonton
Lecture Training Facility
Annex B, 2nd Floor.

If you would be willing to attend the focus group please use the voting buttons at the top of this e-mail.

If necessary we can contact Managers/Supervisors of those interested to arrange for time away from work to attend these groups.

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Annex B Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Moderator's Guide

Canadian Forces Primary Reserve Study 2008

Introduction

Over the past several months, we have received a number of requests for data and information on our Primary Reserve (PRes) population. Much of this information can only be obtained through surveys and focus groups. Some of information we are exploring includes the role of Reservists, attraction and recruitment, quality of life, compensation and benefits regular and Reserve relations, and deployment issues. The information gathered in this focus group will assist us in developing a comprehensive Reserve Force survey.

Everything that you say is confidential and anonymous.

Role of Reservists

- What do you believe the main role(s) of the PRes are?
- What do you believe the main role(s) of the PRes should be?
- Do you feel that the P Res is fulfilling these roles?
- Why do you think this is the case?
- What do you believe the main challenges are to the Primary Reserve?

Attraction and Recruitment

- Why did you originally join the Primary Reserves?
- Are the reasons that you originally joined the same reasons for why you remain?
- Would you consider a component transfer to the Regular Force?
- What reasons would deter you from joining the Regular Force?
- Do you recommend serving in the PRes to others? Why or why not?

Retention, Job Satisfaction and Expectations of Employment

- Are you happy with your choice of MOSID?
- Is your role in the Reserves what you expected?
- Are you planning to release from the PRes in the near future?
- If yes, what are the reasons for your planned release?

Reserve Quality of Life

- Do you believe DND recognizes the time and effort being part of the PRes requires?
- Do you believe your civilian employer recognizes the time and effort being part of the PRes requires?
- Is your employer supportive of your military employment?
- Do you believe you are adequately compensated for your service?

Pension Plan

- How well do you understand your pension plan?
- Do you feel you have timely access to information to help you make decisions with respect to your pension plan?
- How effective is the pension communication? What communication do you find most helpful? Why?
- Where do you go to or who do you call if you have any questions regarding the pension plan?
- What are the key elements you want to know about your pension plan?

Reserve and Regular Force Relations

- Do you feel respected by your Regular Force peers?
- What type of interaction have you had with the Regular Force?

DEPLOYABILITY

- Do you feel you have the skills/competencies required for deployment?
- What do you feel the main challenges are for Reservists being able to deploy?
- Do you feel Reserve force members receive similar support from DND during and after deployment as Regular force members?
- For those of you who have deployed, did you receive some sort of reception upon your return, (e.g., a welcome party at the airport)? Did you complete your post-deployment admin and partial work days before you started leave?
- Did you complete your post-deployment checklist? If not, why not?

END OF GROUP

THANKS

Repeat Confidentiality etc.

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The Canadian Forces Primary Reserve Study 2008 is a two-phase research project investigating and identifying issues and concerns among Reserve Force members. This study consists of two parts, the first of which is focus groups, the second being a survey. Researchers from the Director Military Personnel Operational Research and Analysis conducted focus groups in five locations across the country and spoke to Reserve Force members in a variety of locations, on a number of topics which were identified by key stakeholders in the project. Overall, Primary Reserve members felt they were doing much more than supporting the Regular Force, both at home and overseas. Most agreed that conditions were much better for Reserve members now than ever before in terms of conditions of employment and employment opportunities. In the main, participants voiced strong attachment to the CF and its mission. There were a number of irritants which participants felt could become critical if not dealt with soon. Main dissatisfiers included lack of adequate training opportunities and resources, and the pay inequity between themselves and their Regular Force counterparts. Information about pay and benefits was seen as inadequate. Administrative support was also seen as a major dissatisfier, especially when it came to pension and pay issues, and post-deployment screening and care. Further research in the form of a survey will assist with identifying the main problems surrounding these issues, and contribute to providing stakeholders with recommendations for policies and services for Reserve Force members.

L'Étude 2008 sur la Première réserve des Forces canadiennes est un projet de consultation en deux phases visant à cerner les problèmes et les préoccupations des membres de la Réserve. Cette étude est menée en deux temps : on a d'abord réuni des groupes témoins et un sondage a suivi. Les chercheurs de la Direction - Recherche et analyse opérationnelles (Personnel militaire) ont réuni cinq groupes témoins dans cinq régions du pays, puis ont recueilli l'opinion de membres de la Force de réserve à divers endroits au pays sur bon nombre de questions que des instigateurs du projet avaient recensées. Dans l'ensemble, les membres de la Première réserve ont estimé qu'ils jouaient plus qu'un rôle de soutien auprès de la Force régulière, tant au pays qu'à l'étranger. La plupart s'accordaient pour dire que les conditions d'emploi et les perspectives d'avancement des réservistes étaient nettement meilleures aujourd'hui qu'elles ne l'ont jamais été. Essentiellement, les participants ont exprimé un fort sentiment d'appartenance aux FC et à sa mission. Par contre, ils ont signalé un certain nombre d'irritants à régler sans tarder avant que la situation ne s'envenime. Les principaux facteurs de mécontentement incluaient le manque de possibilités de formation et de ressources d'instruction, une rémunération inéquitable chez les réservistes par rapport à celle de leurs homologues de la Force régulière. Ils ont aussi fait état de l'information touchant la rémunération et les avantages sociaux qu'ils voyaient comme inadéquate. Le soutien administratif a également été perçu comme un irritant majeur, notamment en ce qui a trait aux régimes de retraite, aux questions de rémunération, au dépistage et aux soins en postdéploiement. D'autres consultations sous forme de sondage aideront à cerner les principaux problèmes sous-jacents à ces questions; elles seront l'occasion de fournir des recommandations aux parties intéressées pour l'élaboration de politiques et de services à l'intention des membres de la Réserve.

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Reserve Force; reservists; focus group -



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