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Air Force post-deployment reintegration: A qualitative study

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Defence R&D Canada – Toronto

Technical Report

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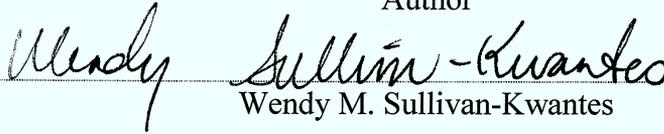
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Abstract

Expanding on previous research with Army personnel (Thompson & Gignac, 2001), this study investigated the post-deployment reintegration experiences of a sample of 95 Canadian Air Force (AF) personnel posted at seven different AF bases across Canada. A total of 14 semi-structured focus groups were held. The present report details the reintegration issues and experiences, both positive and negative, that these AF personnel identified in terms of four domains: personal, family, work, and cultural. Regarding personal reintegration, participants reported such positive changes as increased self-confidence, a renewed sense of purpose, and positive coping skills, but also negative changes, such as a sense of disconnection from others, a tendency towards anger, and a sense that they were “not themselves.” In terms of family reintegration, participants spoke of a new appreciation for their family, but also of stresses on their children, family breakdowns, problems in dealing with changes in family dynamics, and family difficulties associated with rotational types (e.g., 56-day vs. 6-month). Regarding work reintegration, while participants reported some positive effects of deployment on their careers and commitment, they also noted numerous negative effects, such as lack of organizational recognition for their deployment efforts, staff shortages and other organizational problems, problems with leave policies and PERs, a sense of meaninglessness in their unit or wing, problems with psychological and medical follow-up, and the lack of a formal post-deployment process. In terms of cultural reintegration, some participants spoke of a new appreciation for life in Canada and of the support they felt from the Canadian public after deployment, whereas others were disappointed by the lack of support from the broader civilian community, or found that they were less tolerant of hearing “trivial” complaints from others after deployment. In addition to post-deployment issues, pre-deployment issues (e.g., inadequate pre-deployment preparation for members and families) and deployment issues (e.g., inadequate rear-party support for families) were also discussed, as were special problems faced by augmentees (e.g., social isolation, lack of recognition, and difficulties with team integration). Recommendations focused on the need for a standard post-deployment process that includes psychological and medical support, time for decompression, and a lessons learned process; pre-deployment and post-deployment briefings for members and their families; enhanced family/rear-party support during deployment; greater recognition and support from leaders; and a review of organizational policies (e.g., rotation types, leave policies).

Résumé

Faisant suite aux travaux déjà effectués auprès des membres de l'Armée de terre (Thompson et Gignac, 2001), la présente étude portait sur les expériences de réintégration après le déploiement d'un échantillon de 95 membres du personnel de la Force aérienne (FA) canadienne en poste dans sept bases différentes de la FA d'un bout à l'autre du Canada. En tout, 14 entrevues de groupe semi-structurées ont été réalisées. Le présent rapport fait état des expériences et des aspects positifs et négatifs de la réintégration qui ont été mentionnés par le personnel de la FA sur quatre plans : personnel, familial, professionnel et culturel. En ce qui concerne la réintégration personnelle, les participants ont fait état de changements positifs, tels qu'une augmentation de la confiance en soi, une conscience accrue de leur rôle et l'acquisition d'habiletés d'adaptation positive. Ils ont également signalé des changements négatifs, notamment un sentiment de perte de contact avec les autres, une propension à la colère et l'impression de n'« être plus soi-même ». Sur le plan de la réintégration familiale, les participants ont dit qu'ils appréciaient davantage leur famille, mais ont également signalé le stress imposé à leurs enfants, des cas d'éclatement de la famille, la difficulté à faire face à la modification de la dynamique familiale et les difficultés familiales associées au type de rotation (p. ex. 56 jours comparativement à 6 mois). En ce qui a trait à la réintégration professionnelle, les participants ont signalé certains effets positifs du déploiement sur leur carrière et leur engagement, mais aussi de nombreux effets négatifs, notamment le manque de reconnaissance organisationnelle de leurs efforts pendant le déploiement, les pénuries de personnel et d'autres problèmes organisationnels, les problèmes liés aux politiques de congé et aux RAP, un sentiment d'inutilité au sein de leur unité ou de leur escadre, les problèmes entourant le suivi psychologique et médical et l'absence de processus structuré de post-déploiement. Sur le plan de la réintégration culturelle, certains participants ont dit apprécier davantage la vie au Canada et l'appui manifesté par la population canadienne après le déploiement. D'autres participants ont cependant affirmé qu'ils étaient déçus par le manque d'appui du milieu civil en général ou qu'ils supportaient moins, après le déploiement, les plaintes « futiles » formulées par l'entourage. Outre les questions touchant le post-déploiement, des questions concernant le pré-déploiement (p. ex. préparation préalable au déploiement inadéquate pour les membres et leur famille) ainsi que le déploiement (p. ex. soutien au groupe arrière inadéquat pour les familles) ont également été soulevées. Il a également été question des problèmes particuliers auxquels les renforts sont confrontés (p. ex. isolement social, manque de reconnaissance et difficultés d'intégration à l'équipe). Les recommandations font ressortir la nécessité de mettre en place un processus standard post-déploiement comprenant un appui psychologique et médical confidentiel, du temps pour la « décompression » et un exercice de réflexion sur les « leçons tirées » de l'expérience; un briefing avant et après le déploiement pour les membres et leur famille; un meilleur soutien à la famille/au groupe arrière pendant le déploiement; une reconnaissance et un soutien accrus de la part des chefs; et un examen des politiques organisationnelles (p. ex. en ce qui concerne les types de rotation, les politiques de congé).

Executive summary

Study Purpose: The primary purpose of the present research project was to build upon previous post-deployment reintegration work done with CF Army personnel (Thompson, Blais, Febraro, Pickering, & McCreary, 2003; Thompson & Gignac, 2001) and to increase our understanding of post-deployment reintegration issues in the CF, specifically, in the Air Force (AF).

Participants and Methodology: To this end, we conducted focus group interviews with 95 Air Force personnel from seven Canadian Forces bases (CFB Trenton, CFB Comox, CFB Cold Lake, CFB Winnipeg, CFB Bagotville, CFB Shearwater, and CFB Petawawa) over the Fall of 2003 and Winter of 2004. A total of 14 focus groups were held, 2 at each base, consisting of one group of non-commissioned members (NCMs) and one group of officers. Because previous research had indicated that CF augmentees face particular challenges both during and post deployment (Thompson & Gignac, 2001), we were particularly interested in the experiences of Air Force augmentees. Focus group participants assisted in the further refinement of a reintegration questionnaire previously developed for the Land Force by reviewing its format and content, but they also discussed their personal experiences and perceptions with regard to post-deployment reintegration. It is these experiences and perceptions that comprise the focus of the present report. The focus group discussions were transcribed and entered into NUD*IST software (version N6), a software tool for qualitative data analysis.

Results: The positive and negative reintegration issues and experiences that AF personnel identified encompassed four domains: personal, family, work, and cultural. Regarding personal reintegration, participants reported such positive changes as increased self-confidence, self-awareness and empowerment; a renewed sense of their purpose in the AF and the world; and positive coping skills. Participants also reported negative changes, such as a sense of disconnection from others, a tendency towards anger, and a sense that they were “not themselves.” In terms of family reintegration, participants spoke of a new appreciation for their family post-deployment, but also of stresses on their children, family breakdowns, problems in dealing with changes in family dynamics, roles, and routines, and family difficulties associated with rotational types (e.g., 56-day vs. 6-month). Regarding work reintegration, participants reported positive effects of deployment on their careers and commitment, but also numerous negative effects, such as lack of recognition for their deployment efforts, staff shortages and other organizational problems, problems with leave policies and PERs, a sense of meaninglessness in their unit or wing, problems with psychological and medical follow-up, and the lack of a formal post-deployment process. In terms of cultural reintegration, participants spoke of a new appreciation for life in Canada and of the support they felt from the Canadian public after deployment. However, others found that they were less tolerant of hearing “trivial” complaints from others after deployment, or were disappointed by the lack of support from the broader civilian community. In addition to post-deployment issues, pre-deployment issues (e.g., inadequate pre-deployment preparation for members and families; inadequate pre-deployment screening) and deployment issues (e.g., inadequate rear-party support for families) were also discussed, as were special problems faced by augmentees (e.g., social isolation, lack of recognition, difficulties with team

integration). In general, the findings of the present study support previous research on reintegration and other deployment-related issues in other military contexts, such as the Canadian and US army, as well as previous research that suggests that augmentees face extra challenges on deployment and reintegration.

Recommendations: Recommendations focused on the need for a standard post-deployment process that includes confidential psychological and medical support, time for decompression, and a lessons learned process; pre-deployment and post-deployment briefings for members and their families in order to better prepare for and understand reintegration and deployment-related issues; pre-deployment training to prepare AF personnel to work within multi-service deployment teams; enhanced family/rear-party support during deployment; greater recognition and support from leaders; leadership development and training (e.g., to better understand the challenges of augmentees as well as other deployed personnel); and a review of organizational policies (e.g., regarding rotation types, leave policies, PERs, and pre-deployment screening) so that they both address the needs of AF personnel and enhance organizational effectiveness.

Sullivan-Kwantes, W., Febraro, A.R. & Blais, A.-R. (2005). Air Force post-deployment reintegration: A qualitative study. DRDC Toronto TR 2005-159. Defence R&D Canada - Toronto.

Sommaire

Objectif de l'étude : Le présent projet de recherche visait principalement à compléter les travaux déjà effectués auprès des membres de l'Armée de terre des FC (Thompson, Blais, Febraro, Pickering, et McCreary, 2003; Thompson et Gignac, 2001) sur la réintégration post-déploiement et à acquérir une meilleure compréhension des problèmes de réintégration que connaissent les membres des FC, en particulier ceux de la Force aérienne (FA).

Participants et méthodes : À cette fin, nous avons organisé des discussions avec des groupes types constitués de 95 membres de la Force aérienne de sept bases des Forces canadiennes (BFC Trenton, BFC Comox, BFC Cold Lake, BFC Winnipeg, BFC Bagotville, BFC Shearwater et BFC Petawawa) au cours de l'automne de 2003 et de l'hiver de 2004. En tout, 14 groupes types ont été consultés, soit deux par base, c'est-à-dire un groupe de militaires du rang (MR) et un groupe d'officiers. Comme les travaux de recherche antérieurs avaient révélé que les renforts des FC se trouvaient confrontés à des défis particuliers aussi bien pendant qu'après le déploiement (Thompson et Gignac 2001), nous nous sommes penchés surtout sur l'expérience vécue par les renforts de la Force aérienne. Les membres des groupes types ont contribué à améliorer un questionnaire sur la réintégration existant, qui avait été conçu à l'intention de la force terrestre. En effet, ils en ont modifié la forme et le contenu, en plus de parler de leurs expériences et perceptions personnelles à l'égard de la réintégration post-déploiement. Le présent rapport porte essentiellement sur ces expériences et perceptions. Les propos des membres des groupes types ont été transcrits et saisis dans l'outil logiciel NUD*IST (version N6), qui analyse les données qualitatives.

Résultats : Les expériences et les aspects positifs et négatifs de la réintégration qui ont été mentionnés par le personnel de la FA étaient de quatre ordres : personnel, familial, professionnel et culturel. En ce qui concerne la réintégration personnelle, les participants ont fait état de changements positifs, tels qu'une augmentation de la confiance en soi, de la connaissance de soi et de l'auto-habilitation; une conscience accrue de leur rôle dans la FA et dans le monde; et l'acquisition d'habiletés d'adaptation positive. Les participations ont également signalé des changements négatifs, notamment un sentiment de perte de contact avec les autres, une propension à la colère et l'impression de n'« être plus soi-même ». Sur le plan de la réintégration familiale, les participants ont dit qu'ils appréciaient davantage leur famille après le déploiement, mais ont également signalé le stress imposé à leurs enfants, des cas d'éclatement de la famille et la difficulté à faire face à la modification de la dynamique, des rôles et des habitudes de la famille et les difficultés familiales associées au type de rotation (p. ex. 56 jours comparativement à 6 mois). En ce qui a trait à la réintégration professionnelle, les participants ont signalé certains effets positifs du déploiement sur leur carrière et leur engagement, mais aussi de nombreux effets négatifs, notamment le manque de reconnaissance de leurs efforts pendant le déploiement, les pénuries de personnel et d'autres problèmes organisationnels, les problèmes liés aux politiques de congé et aux RAP, un sentiment d'inutilité au sein de leur unité ou de leur escadre, les problèmes entourant le suivi psychologique et médical et l'absence de processus structuré de post-déploiement. Sur le plan de la réintégration culturelle, des participants ont dit apprécier davantage la vie au Canada et l'appui manifesté par la population canadienne après le déploiement. D'autres participants ont cependant affirmé qu'ils supportaient moins, après le déploiement, les plaintes « futiles »

formulées par l'entourage ou qu'ils étaient déçus par le manque d'appui du milieu civil en général. Outre les questions touchant le post-déploiement, des questions concernant le pré-déploiement (p. ex. préparation préalable au déploiement inadéquate pour les membres et leur famille; sélection préalable au déploiement inadéquate) ainsi que le déploiement (p. ex. soutien au groupe arrière inadéquat pour les familles) ont également été soulevées. Il a également été question des problèmes particuliers auxquels les renforts sont confrontés (p. ex. isolement social, manque de reconnaissance, difficultés d'intégration à l'équipe). En général, les constatations de la présente étude corroborent les recherches antérieures sur la réintégration et d'autres problèmes liés au déploiement dans d'autres contextes militaires, comme l'armée canadienne et l'armée américaine, de même que les études antérieures selon lesquelles les renforts doivent surmonter davantage d'écueils lors du déploiement et de la réintégration.

Recommandations : Les recommandations font ressortir la nécessité de mettre en place un processus structuré de post-déploiement comprenant un appui psychologique et médical confidentiel, du temps pour la « décompression » et un exercice de réflexion sur les « leçons tirées » de l'expérience; un briefing avant et après le déploiement pour les membres et leur famille, afin de les aider à mieux comprendre les questions entourant la réintégration et le déploiement et à mieux s'y préparer; une formation préalable au déploiement afin d'aider le personnel de la FA à travailler au sein d'équipes de déploiement multi-services; un meilleur soutien à la famille/au groupe arrière pendant le déploiement; une reconnaissance et un soutien accrus de la part des chefs; le développement des qualités de chef et une formation à cet égard (p. ex. afin de favoriser une meilleure compréhension des difficultés que doivent surmonter les renforts et les autres membres du personnel en déploiement); et un examen des politiques organisationnelles (p. ex. en ce qui concerne les types de rotation, les politiques de congé, les RAP et la sélection préalable au déploiement), de façon qu'elles permettent à la fois de répondre aux besoins du personnel de la FA et d'améliorer l'efficacité organisationnelle.

Sullivan-Kwantes, W., Febbraro, A.R. & Blais, A.-R. (2005). Air Force post-deployment reintegration: A qualitative study. DRDC Toronto TR 2005-159. Defence R&D Canada - Toronto.

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Introduction

Most of the deployments that Canada has embarked on in the last number of years have involved peacekeeping, which has been described as involving fewer risks and less stress than traditional warfare (Moldjord, Fossum, & Holen, 2003). In fact, the role of a peacekeeper is to act as a safeguard between hostile parties. This responsibility often exposes a peacekeeper to dangerous, provocative and humiliating situations where there are few options for releasing anger and frustration (Moldjord et al., 2003). Having to confront such situations while on deployment, combined with poor post-deployment reintegration and adjustment, may have wide-ranging consequences for military personnel and their families (Benotsch, Brailey, Vasterling, Uddo, Constans, & Sutker, 2000; Bolton, Litz, Glenn, Orsillo, & Roemer, 2002; Ruscio, Weathers, King, & King, 2002).

Whatever the nature of the deployment, whether peacekeeping or other type of deployment, there are many issues that returning military members may face. They may feel isolated or disconnected from the rest of the world (Bolton et al., 2002). Their children have matured while they were away, and their families may have developed new routines to which the returning military member must adjust (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). At an organizational level, returning military personnel usually face a return to in-garrison bureaucracy, red tape, and decreased work challenges, relative to deployments. Returning home is also associated with significant organizational disruptions (e.g., unit reconfigurations, postings). For example, if military members return to a unit where others did not deploy, they may face a lack of support from others (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Moreover, military culture has traditionally discouraged expressions of distress, which may significantly affect the willingness to admit problems and can therefore affect post-deployment adaptation.

In short, the process of post-deployment reintegration can lead to intra- and inter-personal changes that may modify the quality of the returning members' relationships with their immediate and extended family, friends, co-workers deployed with the individual, non-deploying co-workers, other members of the military, and even members of the general public. While some of these changes may be negative and may lead to adverse outcomes for the returning member (e.g., distress, anxiety, depression), other changes may be positive (e.g., increased self-confidence, political understanding; Melhum, 1995). In fact, military research has recently begun to investigate the possibility that participation in a peacekeeping mission, for example, may lead to potential benefits (e.g., increased self-confidence and self-tolerance, expanded political understanding, and improved military qualifications; Melhum, 1995). Indeed, peacekeeping duty constitutes a prime example of a stressful event that can be perceived as both a potential threat and an opportunity. Thus, the unusual and extreme nature of the stressor and its potential for trauma makes it a valuable topic of interest (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001).

Our review of the existing post-deployment reintegration literature revealed several concerns, however. Most of the information on reintegration was collected from Vietnam veterans (many of them suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD) years after their return. Thus, the results may have been affected by recall and clinical biases. Although several measures exist that assess closely related aspects of reintegration (resulting in a great deal of redundancy in the measures), other measures tend to confound reintegration with

social support, especially with respect to family and community support. Available measures also show incomplete information concerning the reliability of their scores, their underlying factor structure, and their validity with respect to other constructs. Lastly, virtually all of the published research in the area involves American military samples; we know much less about the experiences of Canadian military personnel in this regard.

In order to develop a solid program of research in the area of post-deployment reintegration, the Stress and Coping Research Group at Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) Toronto undertook, through a series of studies, the development of an instrument focusing on post-deployment reintegration experiences, initially looking at the experiences of Land Force personnel.

Scale development (Army version)

Our initial scale development efforts were built upon the results of the above cited literature search, as well as the findings from a previous focus group study of Canadian Forces (CF) army personnel (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Together, these suggested that four main themes characterized post-deployment reintegration: *personal*, *family*, *work*, and *cultural* (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Additionally, the focus group study also indicated that military personnel have both *positive* and *negative* reintegration experiences in each of these four domains.

Personal

The first theme, *personal* reintegration, has to do with aspects of “feeling like oneself again.” Positive aspects of personal reintegration include, for example, being better able to deal with stress as a result of the deployment, while negative aspects refer to experiences such as confusion or bad memories. The clinical literature shows that significant post-deployment problems include alcohol abuse and dependence, generalized anxiety, antisocial behaviors, social isolation, hostility, and anger (Orsillo, Roemer, Litz, Ehlich, & Friedman, 1998). At least one further study has shown that homecoming stress is the most significant predictor of PTSD (Bolton et al., 2002). In addition to the literature on the potential negative outcomes of stressful life events (e.g., combat), recent trauma research has paid more attention to the potential benefits of coping with such events (Britt et al., 2001). That is, even when exposed to the most traumatic events, people may perceive at least some good emerging from their struggle, which is, in turn, associated with subsequent psychological and physical adjustments (Britt et al., 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Aldwin, Levenson, and Spiro (1994), extending Elder and Clipp’s (1989) earlier work, examined the relationship among combat exposure of veterans in early life, perceived positive and negative service experiences, and PTSD symptoms in later life. Although combat exposure in early adulthood related to PTSD symptoms in later life, the valence¹ of the appraised effects of service mediated this relationship, possibly through independent pathways. The authors concluded that military

¹ Valence in this case refers to the perceived positive or negative nature of the service experiences.

experience has maturational, developmental effects, such as broadening one's perspective on life and increasing one's self-discipline and independence.

Family

The second theme involves reintegration back into *family* life. As noted earlier, poor post-deployment reintegration and adjustment may be wide-ranging and may have considerable long-term consequences for both military personnel and their families (Benotsch et al., 2000; Bolton et al., 2002; Ruscio et al., 2002). Positive aspects of family reintegration are seen in new feelings of closeness and appreciation for family life, while negative aspects include adjusting to new roles and routines.

According to Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler (2005), the emotional cycle of deployment experienced by family members at home comprises five distinct stages: *pre-deployment*, *deployment*, *sustainment*, *re-deployment* and *post-deployment*. Each stage is characterized by a time frame and specific emotional challenges, which must be negotiated by each of the family members. Failure to adequately master these challenges can lead to significant problems, both for family members and the returning member. For example, studies from the US Gulf war indicate that 19% of veterans experienced moderate or severe family adjustment problems (Figley, 1993). Because the present research focuses on the post-deployment stage, which is probably the most important for both member and spouse (Pincus, House, Christenson & Adler, 2005), we discuss it in more detail below.

The post-deployment stage typically lasts from 3 to 6 months and begins with the military member's arrival to their home station. At first comes the "homecoming" of the deployed member, which can be a wonderfully joyous occasion but also an extremely upsetting and frustrating experience (Pincus et al., 2005). That is, the date of return may change repeatedly, or units may travel home over several days. Re-entry can be as sudden as deployment was, with no known return date and/or few days' notice, resulting in little time for the returning members and their families to sort, label, and process reactions (Figley, 1993). Furthermore, despite best intentions, spouses may not be able to meet the returning members who, despite high expectations, find that they have to make their own way home without much pomp or celebration (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994).

A "honeymoon" period usually follows in which couples reunite physically, yet perhaps not emotionally (Pincus et al., 2005). Some spouses express a sense of discomfort mixed with excitement: "Who is this stranger in my bed?" For most, re-establishing intimacy, familiarity, and connectedness will take time, and numbing responses may complicate readjustment. This is a time of heightened ambivalence, conflict, and marital risk (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994). Reunion with children can also prove to be quite a challenge, and family issues unresolved at the time of deployment (e.g., frequency and quality of contact with home; potential or real extra-marital affairs) may also get exacerbated. This extra accumulation of stressors may lead to mental or systemic disorders within the family unit (Figley, 1993).

Typically, a sense of stabilization will eventually set in, with the family members resuming their coherence as a functioning unit again. However, recurrence of

emotional after-shocks can be triggered at times of later transition and crisis, with enduring reactions as long as 12-18 months later (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994).

Work

The third theme of *work* reintegration relates to adjusting back into garrison life. Examples of work reintegration include positive experiences such as skill development, but also negative experiences such as boredom and frustration. For example, many of the CF members who participated in the focus group study conducted by Thompson and Gignac (2001) commented that after their deployment they felt bored and found their current work duties less meaningful than their deployment duties. In fact, such statements alarmingly resemble those made by individuals experiencing job burnout (e.g., What am I doing? Why?). Questioning one's accomplishment and effectiveness, combined with exhaustion, cynicism, and detachment, can lead to negative responses to one's job, such as decreases in performance, standards of working, thoroughness, and creativity, and increases in absenteeism and job turnover (Maslach, 2005).

Cultural

The fourth theme we termed *cultural* reintegration and refers to returning from settings of extreme deprivation into a land of the "haves" (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Although, to our knowledge, there is little military literature directly addressing what we term "cultural" reintegration, some literature touches on this issue (e.g., Britt et al., 2002; Johnson, Lubin, Rosenheck, Fontana, Southwick, & Charney, 1997; and Wilson & Krauss, 1985). Positive cultural reintegration can be seen in a greater appreciation for the rights, freedoms and conveniences taken for granted in Canada, while negative cultural reintegration is typified by the idea of going through a "culture shock" after returning home. Thus, returning members may feel enlightened after their deployment, yet frustrated by those who were not exposed to cultural differences, poverty, and lifestyles in other less privileged countries. Other aspects of negative cultural reintegration may include returning members' perceived lack of support for the CF in general, and specifically for its role in peacekeeping deployments, from the civilian community; and a decreased tolerance for complaints from the community and co-workers regarding matters perceived by returning members as having trivial importance.

We used the positive and negative aspects of these four themes to develop a preliminary, 64-item version of the *Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale (Army)*. An initial study of CF personnel who had returned from a six-month overseas deployment revealed that these respondents reported significantly higher levels of the positive aspects than the negative aspects associated with each reintegration theme. Moreover, there was often only a small relationship between the positive and negative experiences within each reintegration domain. Thus, it was entirely possible for soldiers to report experiencing both the positive and the negative aspects of personal, family, work or cultural reintegration.

In terms of our scale development efforts specifically, the results supported the notion that reintegration was best depicted by an eight-factor solution, in which the positive and negative aspects of the four themes were represented as distinct experiences (Blais, Thompson,

Febbraro, Pickering, & McCreary, 2004). As encouraging as the initial findings were, item analysis indicated that several items could be improved upon through rewording. Additionally, although an eight-factor model provided the best fit to the data, some items on the cultural and personal subscales appeared to fit into both subscales, suggesting some redundancy in the constructs.

The findings of a second study (Blais, Thompson, & McCreary, 2005) that used 36 of the best items from the original 64 item scale, showed that a separate sample of CF personnel again tended not to differentiate between the personal and cultural reintegration dimensions. The findings continued to support the contention that positive and negative attitudes are distinct aspects of each reintegration domain, suggesting that a six-factor model most accurately described the reintegration experiences of these soldiers. The results of Study 2 also supported the validity of the reintegration measure with respect to measures of, for example, stress in military service and symptomatology. As in Study 1, respondents reported greater levels of positive attitudes than negative attitudes across all domains of reintegration, with the most negative reintegration experiences being in the work/occupational domain.

As enlightening as these findings may be, to date these results are specific to land force personnel. Although a good start, it was important to expand the groups of Canadian Forces military personnel who complete the survey. For instance, neither augmentees (i.e., individuals or small groups who are drawn from units around the country to supplement or support a deployed unit), nor members of the other service elements (i.e., Air Force, Navy) were included in Studies 1 and 2.

Air Force augmentees

In particular, the use of Air Force (AF) augmentees has become increasingly commonplace in the CF in recent years. In fact, it has been suggested that reservists and augmentees may comprise up to 30% of the deployment membership in future operations (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Augmentees may well face more chronic stress compared to members of formed units, since they usually deploy alone, sometimes with little knowledge of the tasks required for the job they are taking on, and with few pre-established interpersonal relationships within the deploying unit. This type of deployment leaves them socially isolated and can result in a negative perception of the deployment. Previous research has shown that augmentees may have less social and organizational support and that this may, in some cases, be associated with greater stress for augmentees than for personnel in formed units (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). The perceptions of augmentees may also be due in part to lack of support from their home units and co-workers, either during deployment or upon reintegration. As we will discuss, the majority of the participants in the present study had served as augmentees on at least one deployment and their experiences pointed to some reintegration and leadership issues that were important for AF augmentees (for a more in-depth examination of the leadership issues that emerged, see Sullivan-Kwantes, Febbraro, & Blais, 2004).

Aims of the present research

Our initial goals in conducting the present research were threefold:

1. To increase our understanding of reintegration issues in the AF context by building upon and expanding previous post-deployment reintegration work carried out with Army units (Blais et al., 2004; Blais, Thompson, & McCreary, 2005; Thompson & Gignac, 2001).
2. To begin the development of a measure of post-deployment reintegration experiences specific to AF support personnel, based on the Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale (Army version; Blais et al, 2004, Blais, Thompson, & McCreary, 2005).
3. Lastly, to identify, with the help of AF members, recommendations for changes that might help alleviate short- and long-term reintegration problems.

We chose focus group interviews as our favoured method of data collection in order to obtain rich and personal accounts of the post-deployment reintegration experiences of AF members. The interview process with the AF extended far beyond a simple replication of the work that had been already done with Army personnel. That is, AF personnel commented on the Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale (Army version) in terms of its relevance to the particular AF context (e.g., regarding terminology), but they also provided us with their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions with respect to their own personal, family, work, and cultural reintegration experiences, using the Scale as a point of departure for discussion.² It is the qualitative analysis of these experiences that comprise the focus of the present report.

² Although Study 2, as previously discussed, found that a six-factor solution best fit the data, and therefore, that the personal and cultural reintegration domains may be partially confounded, we still thought it important to investigate members' perceptions of the current (Army) version of the Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale, and moreover, to explore their experiences in the four reintegration domains.

Method

Ninety-five Air Force personnel from seven Canadian Forces bases (i.e., CFB Trenton, CFB Comox, CFB Cold Lake, CFB Winnipeg, CFB Bagotville, CFB Shearwater, and CFB Petawawa) participated in Air Force reintegration focus groups. We held a total of 14 focus groups, 2 at each base. One group at each base consisted only of non-commissioned members (NCMs) and 1 consisted only of officers.

The 95 participants (i.e., 20 women and 75 men) in this study were aged between 27 and 55 years ($M = 40$, $SD = 6.9$; see Table 1). The 7 NCM groups consisted of 37 junior and 21 senior NCMs, whereas the 7 officer groups consisted of 25 junior and 12 senior officers. All participants had been deployed at least once in their career, with over half having been deployed on Operations Apollo and/or Athena (Afghanistan and Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf) regions). Seventy-nine (83%) of the participants were currently married, and 81 (85%) had children living with them. The majority of the participants had a university/college degree (36%) or a high-school diploma (34%). Nineteen participants (20%) had completed some university or college, whereas 6 (6%) had some high school education. Three (3%) had acquired a graduate degree.

We chose the Air Force bases in this study for their location (i.e., to provide a cross-country sample), size, and resident aircraft. Each base received a letter through the military chain of command requesting volunteers for the study. Prior to their involvement, participants received an Information Letter describing the purpose of the study and the goals and potential applications of the research, and explaining the confidential and voluntary nature of the study (see Annex A).

Blais and Sullivan-Kwantes conducted the focus groups in meeting rooms on each base in the Fall of 2003 and Winter of 2004. We gave the participants at CFB Bagotville the choice of having the focus groups conducted in either French or English; they chose French. We conducted all other focus groups in English. Prior to beginning the focus group, we asked the participants for their permission to audiotape the session. We explained that they could leave or ask to have the tape turned off at any time, and that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer. All participants agreed to the use of the tape-recorder. We used a semi-structured format, and each focus group averaged approximately 90 minutes in length.

After signing the Voluntary Consent Form (see Annex B), participants completed an Air Force Support Personnel Demographic Survey (see Annex C). All groups filled out this questionnaire with the exception of participants at CFB Trenton who, due to technical problems, filled out a slightly different version. After participants completed the demographic questionnaire, we briefed them on the history of the project and past findings with the Army (see Annex D, Introduction to the Focus Group Session). We then asked them to state their name, rank, occupation and deployment history for informational purposes.

We distributed the 81-item version of the Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale (Army; see Annex E), and we gave participants 10 minutes to read over the Scale. The Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale is a measure assessing soldiers' perceptions and appraisals of the ease or

difficulty they have experienced readjusting to the personal, family, work/organizational and cultural/community aspects of returning home after their deployment. Responses are indicated on a 5-point scale representing how true each statement is for the soldier (Not at All True – Completely True).

We used this questionnaire as a starting point for discussion in the focus groups. After their reading of the questionnaire, we asked participants about the format (i.e., overall format, instructions, and rating scale) and content of the questionnaire. We reviewed and evaluated, with the participants, the questions in each category, focusing on their relevance/applicability to the Air Force. We also asked participants about their personal experiences with regard to reintegration.

A third party transcribed the tape-recorded interviews. Each transcript was reviewed by one of the moderators (Sullivan-Kwantes) who made corrections when needed.

Data-analytic approach

Two research assistants independently entered and coded the data into the qualitative data analysis software tool NUD*IST (i.e., Non-numerical Unstructured Data with Indexing, Searching and Theorizing, version N6). They coded each focus group transcript into the coding scheme that we devised based on our a-priori research questions regarding broad reintegration experiences. We then carefully examined themes that consistently emerged in the a-priori determined categories (i.e., personal, family, work, and cultural reintegration, differentiating between positive and negative experiences), but we also explored other interesting findings that we had not identified initially (e.g., pre-deployment and deployment issues, such as the new 56-day rotation). Thus our analysis took on a confirmatory as well as an exploratory approach.

Results

Focus group dynamics

All of the focus groups lasted between 1 and 2 hours. There were two instances where a member of the focus group chose to stay behind and continue speaking with the moderators about his or her reintegration experiences. This appeared to be due to the sensitive nature of the discussion.

Each group had different interpersonal dynamics. A likely reason for this could be attributed to interpersonal style, gender, rank, deployment experience, and group familiarity. There were some groups who, due to the aircraft that they supported, worked as teams. The majority of the other participants were augmentees.

Group One: This group consisted of officers and non-commissioned personnel.³ A range of occupations were represented in this group, including both aircrew and ground-based personnel. Participants in this group had deployed at least once and most had deployed multiple times.

Group Two: This group was about evenly split between junior and senior NCMs. Again the number of deployments for the individuals in this group ranged from one to over five missions.

Group Three: This group consisted of aircrew. They had deployed on at least three tours and to a variety of locations.

Group Four: This group consisted of senior and junior NCMs. They had deployed a number of times, with the majority having experienced two tours. The group members brought experience from a variety of deployment locations. This group also tended to deploy as a unit, and all the participants knew each other.

Group Five: The participants in this group were all officers from a variety of ranks. All had experienced at least one deployment, although in general this group had fewer deployments than the other groups in this study. A range of military occupational classifications (MOCs) were represented. The members of this group had deployed to a variety of regions, including some in North America.

Group Six: Senior and junior NCMs participated in this discussion group. Participants had deployed at least twice, and some more than five times. A variety of occupations and deployment locations were represented.

³ Attempts were made to have each focus group contain only officers or NCMs, but this was not possible in this case.

Group Seven: This group had approximately equal numbers of junior and senior officers and also reflected a variety of military occupations. Members of this group had deployed in a variety of operations.

Group Eight: This group consisted of junior and senior NCMs. The participants in this group experienced a range of tours, both in terms of number and locations of deployments.

Group Nine: This group contained junior and senior officers. The members of this group had deployed between one and five times to a variety of deployment locales, including within North America.

Group 10: This was one of our largest groups and was comprised of NCMs. They represented a range of occupations and deployments, bringing a variety of experiences to the group.

Group 11: This group consisted of junior and senior officers, who had deployed between one and three times to a variety of locations.

Group 12: This focus group was made up primarily of junior NCMs. A range of occupations and deployments were reflected.

Group 13: This group contained junior officers, and were mainly aircrew. They had deployed between one and three times. Some had been deployed on 56-day rotations.

Group 14: This group consisted of junior ranks exclusively. A range of occupations were represented in this group. These individuals had deployed between one and three times. The majority of participants had deployed on 56-day rotations and the members of this group had deployed both outside and inside North America.

Personal

Positive

As expected, many AF personnel reported that the deployment experience affected or changed them personally in some way, with most of these changes being positive. Some of the members felt that they emerged from their experience with more confidence, self-awareness and empowerment. The following quotes are some examples of changes and realizations of some of the members:

“I’ve learned a lot more positive things about myself.”

“I found personally that I was empowered, very much empowered.”

“Definitely more self-reliant... You gain confidence.”

Prior to going on deployment, some of the AF members claimed that they had questioned their role in the AF, the CF, and even the world, but came back changed.

“I had a very positive experience and learned we make a difference.”

“I had a great experience over there...I wasn't too keen on the military before I went, but it really helped me since I came back.”

“...A lot of times you'll work in the AF for many, many years, doing the same thing and wondering why you are there...and then you get deployed and you do have a better understanding of what role you play in the overall planet.”

Some AF members were faced with particular challenges on their deployments either due to location, personal, or work issues. Some AF members who experienced challenging events showed positive coping skills and appeared to be able to turn some of their negative deployment experiences into positive life lessons. They felt that this was key in keeping a positive perspective on life.

“Some visions from things that I've seen that have come back [from] time to time, certain instances will trigger them, but it doesn't bother me because I know I can turn it into something useful. A useful experience for somebody else to learn from.”

Negative

Although many focus group participants reported experiencing positive personal changes after deployment, a number of participants spoke of negative personal changes. Some felt that they were different people upon return, while others felt that it took time to feel like they were “themselves” again.

“It has taken time to feel like myself again. I'm still not myself.”

“...What we have lived...we're not the same. We've progressed and they've stayed the same.”

“A number of occasions for the first 3-4 months I was back, my wife was saying ‘Geez, have you changed, you're shorter-tempered.’ I didn't feel well at all.”

“...Coming back, it took me 6 months to sit down one day and I went ‘Oh, my god, I'm bad.’ But it took me 6 months before I realized that I was okay.”

Family

Positive

As we had anticipated, our research found that there were a number of positive comments regarding families and family issues from some of the AF members. A

number of participants found a new appreciation for their family after being separated from them.

“For me I find I tend not to take my family for granted anymore.”

“I found I really appreciated my family a hell of a lot more when I was on tour.”

Recent years have seen a rise in the number of women, single parents and dual military couples in the military (Figley, 1993). There were a few AF members who were married to a service spouse that participated in the focus groups. The comments of those with a service spouse regarding the effect of deployments on family life tended to be more positive than the comments of those who were married to a non-military spouse.

“In my case, my wife, we both do the same thing so when I go away she takes over and there is no problem.”

“I have a service spouse and I have no children, so this is our life. You come back and go on deployments... It’s what we signed the dotted line for. It’s just what we do.”

“In my particular situation, both my husband and I are in the military. He went on deployment in [year]; I guess I didn’t really understand some of the things he went through. He didn’t really understand the aspect of the difficulties of being home... What it seemed to me, at that point, well, you’re having a great time over in theatre...and when I went over the reverse happened, so it gave us a bit better understanding...of each other’s situations. So it was a bit of a positive for us in that way. He understood that being at home is not all it’s cracked up to be. And I understood that being overseas isn’t all it’s cracked up to be either.”

Negative

Understandably, deployable military personnel (especially single and dual-career military couples) can face extra challenges if they have children, especially if they are deployed on short notice. Many parents in the AF focus groups also commented that leaving for deployment was often very stressful for their children.

“My [child] ended up with shingles. They said it was brought on by stress before I left and now he’s got them again because my husband’s leaving.”

Although having limited family responsibilities allowed some members to go quickly on a deployment, it also often meant coming home to an empty house after deployment. Many CF members do not live in the same province, city, or even country as their extended family. Arriving back home after a deployment to an empty

house was a noted disadvantage of being a single person serving in the CF, leading to loneliness, as the following participant describes:

“My family’s in [province or city]...I would really love to have a family member here that I could actually sit and talk with... And so when I come home, I walk into my house, there’s no one there.”

What added to loneliness was the fact that many were forced to take weeks of leave after their deployment. Many complained about being forced to use up the rest of their vacation upon returning from a deployment. This was a problem for those who do not live near their families or friends.

“I came back to work and they were forcing me to use my leave, which I had 20 days. There is only so much I can do at home. My family is in [a different city]...so just sitting at home watching television. I’d rather be at work and do stuff.”

Upon the return home, the families again reorganize and try to reintegrate the deployed member back into their family unit. As mentioned previously, and as echoed by the participants, some of the problems associated with this reintegration may include: reorganizing their lives upon return, dealing with any changes/issues in the family (such as family conflict over the running of the household, or rearrangements in roles, routines, or rules), jealousy (e.g., regarding any extramarital affairs), resentment over the member's absence, disappointment over the homecoming reception, and the pressure to return to a “normal” family life.

“You just came out of an extremely hyper level. You can’t do everything at home because they have control. So you have to slowly get that part back. You’re not responsible for anything at home. None of the kids want anything to do with you because they have their routines. You have no work. It’s like you totally shut down your whole life and your whole way of being.”

“If you’re with someone who says, ‘I hate the fact that she’s gone on tour,’ your tour is going to be miserable. Your reintegration to family is going to be harder.”

“My wife can’t stand it here and it is extremely difficult... If you leave your wife here and she’s not happy...you’re the reason she’s here to begin with...and then you go away, it’s like you’re cutting your own throat.”

“...I deal with the families and the fantasy of what it’s going to be like when they get back...but then it’s not how they pictured the homecoming to be and now there’s this tension because it didn’t live up to what they expected.”

Reintegrating back into a family that has changed since the member left for their deployment can often be stressful. Service members made comments to the effect

that families were not placed on hold during their absence but went on with their lives during this time.

“When I came back...I was a stranger to my family.”

“I have a 2-year-old and just trying to figure out what your role is when you come back... You just can't come back because everybody has a routine except for you...so you kind of have to jump into their routine. You can't have them jump into yours.”

There were a number of AF focus group participants who either personally experienced a family breakdown after their deployment or had friends who experienced it. Some members changed so much while being away that they felt that they could not return to relationships they held before their deployment and got divorced after their return.

“For the first 6 months coming back I was a totally different person. I got divorced... There was all sorts of things going on [while on the tour]... It was just driving through the streets and seeing really poor people on a daily basis. People that will risk their lives to steal your watch off your arm...people coming up to you with knives and threatening to kill you... I saw dead bodies in the street.”

“People I know have come back and totally lost everything. Their spouse and their kids have gone... In the last tour there were probably five that I know of.”

“What's the point of staying together? ...I'm pretty damned content by myself. Or the family conversely says, 'I don't need him being gone that long. I'm content by myself.' 'Cause I've seen that happen to a couple of people...I redefine that statement ...absence makes the memory grow weaker.”

A number of participants' comments regarding deployment pertained to the new 56-day deployment schedule and the effects of this schedule on their family. Typically in the AF there are 6-month and three 56-day rotations. The 56-day rotations were implemented within the past number of years for a variety of reasons (e.g., to maintain qualifications). The majority of the focus group participants claimed that they found this scheduling more stressful on them and their family than the regular 6-month schedule. A number of AF members found the 56-day rotations to be too short and they found that they would have to leave either the deployment or home as soon as they became reintegrated back into work or family. This continual reintegration on the family was stressful for many AF members. Some claimed that they did not feel fully welcomed back into the family until they completed all their deployment rotations.

“You could just adjust to a 56-day tour and then bang, you're back home. Then you got to readjust to that, and then you got to pull back again.”

“If you leave for 56 days and you come back, your family will not take you back the way you were before...not until you're back for good because they know you are leaving again.”

For some focus group participants, the 56-day rotation did not appear to allow enough time between rotations for people to work out any family or marital problems that may have existed prior to deployment or that may have occurred while the member was separated from the family.

“People that go for 56 days...only home for 56 days and then you go again...your family life never catches up and any problems seem to get compounded after the return of every one... So when you come back from your last one it may not take 3 months, it may take 6 months or it may never be resolved.”

Some focus group participants found that they initially liked the idea of the three 56-day rotations, but that as they were required to actually deploy on their second and third deployments, they found it more difficult to leave. They realized that although the 6-month deployments were long, they did not have to leave their family and reintegrate three separate times.

“The first one's great because they are coming home right away, second one's bearable, the third one, when they're walking out the door, there's no motivation to go to that third one and the family just can't stand it when they're going for the third one. The kids are, 'You're abandoning us for a third time this year.'”

Another drawback to the 56-day deployments was the feeling of being unsettled. This often hindered or prevented members from fully planning and living their life:

“I've done a lot of short deployments between 1 and 3 months. You go out and come back and go out and come back... You can never plan your life... And you really want to piss off your wife? That's how to do it... They think all they're there for is to do your laundry, repack your bags and take care of some other stuff.”

The AF members who found the three 56-day deployments more disruptive to their family, personal and work life reported that they felt that the AF and CF were not paying attention to any impacts of the 56-day deployments on the reintegration process for work and family. The lack of reintegration processes in place was interpreted as a lack of concern for the mental, physical and family well being of AF members.

“...We're all worried about this pre-deployment and post-deployment, but if you are going to split up a tour, you should pay attention to what's going on in the middle here.”

“They're treating this 56 thing more like a TD ...They're not looking at it seriously. I left for 4 months and when I came back my wife

wouldn't have anything to do with me because she knew I was leaving again.”

“...What they're doing in those 56-day tours, they're treating...it all adds up to one tour...so you DAG⁴ at the beginning and you're good for that year, so nothing else bad can happen to you in that time... The reality is they don't know how to handle the 56 days. They've never done it and they don't know what goes on in the middle and it's creating a whole new set of issues.”

On another note, we heard comments to the effect that *families* of augmented members can find the deployment particularly isolating as they do not have other families with whom to share the experiences, whether positive or negative. Such families also might not be invited or notified of unit gatherings while their spouse is deployed.

“When you're a onesies gone and you've got a spouse there who's living not in PMQ⁵, your neighbours don't have any clue or understanding of what it means to deploy and what the stressors are in the family.”

“When they have a family day in the unit they don't call the family and make them part of the unit while the individual's gone.”

Research exploring different types of separation has also found that families exhibit higher stress levels when they perceive the deployment to be illegitimate (Rohall, Weshler-Segal, & Segal, 1999). This was echoed in the focus groups. One participant commented that their family would resent them even more if they knew that the member had a good time while on deployment. The stay-at-home spouse may become irritated because he or she is going through stressful times while imagining the CF member vacationing in foreign ports.

“I feel my family resented my absence' is a really good [survey item]. You go on a NATO [tour]and you come back, you don't tell them how good a time you had.”

Work

Positive

In addition to attaining a more positive personal outlook on life, serving on a deployment also had positive implications for some members' careers. It enabled some AF personnel to attain promotions and move up in the AF.

⁴ DAG (Departure Assistance Group – a screening process that is designed to ensure all personnel are prepared in all aspects to deploy)

⁵ PMQ (Private Married Quarters)

“I did that job so I could do my next job, so mine was definitely evolutional. It built up my career.”

“I found it helped my career.”

One focus group participant stated that his commitment to the CF has increased due to his deployment experience:

“I had a great experience over there. I wasn’t too keen on the military before I went. But it really helped since I came back.”

The CF has been making some initiatives to improve the quality of life and well being of its members. A number of AF members have recognized this over the past number of years. Initiatives such as phone cards, extra money to spend while on deployment, trips back to Canada for family emergencies and some decompression time (after the deployment but before they return home) were all given very positive reviews from the focus group participants.

“That week or two in between when they come home is nice for them to go on a bender. They’re protected somewhat. They won’t go and do something stupid to embarrass themselves, their buddies will look out for them and they can get it out of their system before they come home.”

“That’s the first time I ever saw the military being proactive with regards to bringing some people back.”

“I had a couple of weeks to let off steam and that was very prudent I think.”

There was only one participant who reported feeling properly screened, at least by her Commanding Officer, before going on deployment and upon return:

“My CO was the exact opposite. Every single person that left there needed a signature from the CO, had to have an interview with the CO when they went, and when they came back, they all went in and saw the CO.”

Negative

Many AF personnel held certain expectations regarding their deployment, its outcomes, and their return back home. Some felt disappointed that they were not able to make more of a positive impact in their deployment location, and some were disappointed about the reception, or lack of recognition from the rest of the military community, that they received upon return. They had expected yellow ribbons, welcoming parties or parades, or at the very least, congratulations for a job well done.

“Over there I felt very important in that I was making a change or helping to make a change. When I came back I was disappointed.”

“Coming home, you have certain expectations... You see the thing on the news where the CDS greets everybody, and you just show up, take the [public transport].”

“In the military community there are people who were upset when they came back from tour... They weren’t recognized when they came back from tour and they’re upset that there wasn’t an acknowledgement of the work they did there.”

When expectations of a positive homecoming reception are not fulfilled, it can be a major letdown for the person who has been imagining a momentous welcome (Bolten et al., 2002).

“I came back out of rotation because my job had a longer handover, so I was on a plane by myself. I showed up in [city] and you kind of have the expectations that there’s going to be banners, ‘Welcome Back!’ ...In some respects it’s very much a letdown.”

“You go from being someone to being no one. It’s pretty hard on your psyche.”

“They’ve been away for all this time. They’re not going to call their unit. Quite frankly, it’s not that they want us there to meet them, because a lot of times people who have family don’t even want...it’s the appreciation that they want. To at least have the respect to come there and shake their hands... It’s all they want is just, welcome home. They’re still waiting for that one on Roto 0.”

Indeed, the importance of recognition became quite clear during the AF focus groups. For some, recognition meant being sent special parcels and cards while away; for others it meant being picked up at the airport or greeted by their leaders and co-workers upon return to work. Parades, welcoming back parties, interest in learning about the deployment on the part of co-workers and leaders were other examples of recognition that were not always received.

“A bit of a pet peeve is other squadrons got Christmas parcels whereas [our unit] got nothing.”

“There’s something that I think is very important. To recognize people that have come back and what they had to live through is very important to the people.”

“Did they even know we were gone? There was no yellow ribbon for us. That’s right...they didn’t even know we were gone.”

“You’ve been gone 6 months and...you don’t belong. You don’t feel like you belong...and you’re not recognized for what you did in theatre. Your boss doesn’t want to know what you’ve done.”

As stated previously, the use of AF augmentees has become increasingly common in the CF in recent years. The majority of the participants in this study had augmented on at least one deployment, and their experiences point to some reintegration and leadership issues that were of great significance for AF augmentees (see Sullivan-Kwantes et al., 2004). Augmentees' deployment experiences may differ substantially from the experiences of AF members who deploy as a unit. These differences may begin at the pre-deployment stage and may carry through the whole deployment process. In particular, reintegrating back into their home base after deployment did not appear to be an easy task for many AF augmentees. Work-related issues emerged when the AF augmentees discussed what it was like for them to return to work in their home unit. Many reported feeling ignored when they were not welcomed back by their unit, co-workers and leaders. Many came home expecting a welcome back party, a welcome home sign, and some acknowledgment of their return, but most did not encounter any of these. This lack of recognition was insulting, disheartening, and disappointing to several augmentees.

“I was one of two people from my unit here that went over and coming back home, I basically was not thought of the last 6 months...I basically had to remind people that I exist.”

“I think you have to have a question from the DND perspective. I don't think that I was welcomed back from my unit... I think we should be making a big deal when you or anybody else comes back. And yet, we have a tendency not to do that. Just show up to work and start working.”

“When the Army gets back from deployment, there's banners and welcome home, blah, blah, blah. Did they welcome back the clerks? Did anybody? There's nothing.”

Many augmentees experienced disorganization upon returning to Canada from their deployment. They felt that this was the result of being an augmentee and of not really belonging to the deploying unit or their home unit. There were organizational problems with flights, hotels and transportation. This was extremely frustrating for the AF augmentees.

“...It's that going and coming...you don't know what's going on. We had our coming back to Canada briefing. We still didn't have our flights. We were leaving the next day and we don't have our flights.”

“We didn't know once we land in [North America] how we're getting home... They don't seem to care, we're getting you to [North America] and after that you're on your own.”

“As it turned out...we got to [North America] at...night. My flight wasn't until the next morning and I didn't have a hotel or anything... I waited at the airport until my flight... That's a long wait.”

Inadequate staffing can have other consequences for returning AF members, both augmentees and non-augmentees. The focus group participant quoted below commented that on a couple of occasions, due to staff shortages, he was expected to return to work the very next day after returning from a deployment.

“I know when I get deployed, I come back, I’ve done it once or twice now, I’ve come back on a Saturday and I’m on the schedule Sunday...because we’ve got people rotating out.”

In general, work reintegration was an area that focus group participants felt was not supported or recognized by the AF or the CF.

“The next day you go into work, you’re expected to work. There’s no ‘How was your deployment,’ there’s no ‘Good to see you back.’ There’s nothing...no consideration that you just came off a long deployment.”

Leave policy was one aspect of military bureaucracy that emerged as an issue in virtually every focus group. Although some participants commented that they did not feel that they had enough leave, most were satisfied with the *amount* of leave but dissatisfied with the *policy* for taking their leave, especially after a deployment. The majority of the focus group participants resented having to take leave during inopportune times.

“Leave is for your enjoyment...for relaxation and spending time with your family. You should be able to choose when you take your vacation, not be ordered to.”

“If you have to use that leave up you’re told to be on leave... They make you go off...your spouse isn’t off...your kids are in school... So there you are in January at your house with 2 weeks off. Well, if you don’t have any rooms to paint or if you have an apartment or you live in barracks then you just sit there and watch the snow fall... Or you take up another hobby called alcohol and now you have another problem when you come back to work.”

“I was getting to the point where I needed to get back to work. I’d been working 6 months and came back in November, came back to work in January and they were forcing me to use my leave, which I had 20 days. There is only so much I can do at home... So I’m just sitting at home watching TV. I’d rather be at work and do stuff.”

The majority of the focus group participants agreed that allowing members to have more flexibility as to when to take leave would allow members to spend more time with family and allow them to spend their time off doing activities that they enjoy. This change to military bureaucracy would not only help with family bonding, especially after the member has been absent for months, but would aid with work reintegration upon return.

“Some of the policies and orders that govern our life and our operation and training back here need to be rethought and tailored to coming and going. That might alleviate some of the frustration that those of us feel when we come back.”

“They told the COs that yes, work a deal and try to get them to take leave so that it’s beneficial to them, but if they accumulate it and if it goes over... then whatever’s over the CO has to pay for it out of his budget. So obviously what’s his mandate? Not allowing you to accumulate any leave because he ain’t paying for it. So they sort of forced him into a situation.” “In my case I was able to accumulate them. In some cases people had a little bit more and they were told they had to burn it.”

Another organizational issue that was raised is the issue of AF members’ PERs. A number of focus group participants complained about missing promotions and not being ranked in their wings because they were unable to have timely PERs due to being away on deployment.

“Volunteering is actually hurting... I had an out-of-season PER so I can’t be ranked in the wing.”

“You get boned on your PER, which nobody ever tells you when you leave because now you get an out-of-season PER. There’s all sorts of issues that need to be addressed and they just seem to be forgotten no matter how many times you bring them up... I got back to work in the [Spring] and didn’t get my PER till [Fall].”

“I got mine the day before I left. I couldn’t get anything changed on it.”

Still other work reintegration problems emerged from the focus groups. For example, some participants felt disconnected from their unit upon return from deployment:

“You go away and then you come back and it’s...you’re kind of an outsider. People have been posted in, people have been posted out... You don’t belong to us anymore.”

“Everyone else stayed the same and carried on... So you come back and it’s almost like you have to try and fit in again and to remind people who you were or what position you held prior to leaving.”

Others spoke of the need for decompression after deployment:

“We do need some decompression time immediately, then there has to be a phasing out into a prolonged period of rest and relaxation and then a phase back in, even if you only come back to work for half-days... That’s when you could have the Padre in.”

“But get some other Padre, because half of the time the Padre you talked to for the past 6 months, you went to the bar with him and stuff. You might not want to talk to them... I think our Padre needed a Padre when [they] got back.”

It appears as though the experience for many AF members was to return to work after being away for a long deployment to an office that either wasn't prepared for them to return (e.g., there was no office ready for the member); or their office staff let the work for the member pile up so that the AF member faced an enormous amount of work upon return; or their department changed policies and procedures while the member was away but did not inform them of these changes; or their department did not welcome the member home or acknowledge that they had just returned from a deployment. This can be a very frustrating and overwhelming environment within which to try and reintegrate.

“I was trying to catch up with everything that had changed and they're not subtle changes... You go to work and ask, 'Well, how are things different,' and they say 'Oh, nothing's changed in 6 months'... Then all of a sudden you have to actually sit and do your job and they say 'We don't do it that way anymore' and you go do something else and it's 'Oh, they changed that, too.'”

“Did you feel the leadership supported you reintegrating into the workplace? Because that was a big issue. Nobody there to meet you. Your desk wasn't ready. You moved and nobody told you. You didn't have a key. No transportation.”

“Some other people might have taken over that position while you were gone, but it wasn't theirs to keep forever and you come back and you take it from them. That is your position, so it is a little bit distressing because it's almost like you have to prove yourself again.”

The participants in the AF focus groups expressed many comments regarding their work both on deployment and in their home unit. Many participants reported feeling that it was more stressful working on home base compared to base camp on deployment because home units are not properly staffed. Not being staffed properly can also be stressful for the returning AF member who returns to an office where work has piled up and co-workers are resentful that the member was away on deployment because this has put an extra burden on their daily workload.

“I'm happy that I went on tour...for my own personal experience. But, I think hindsight is 20/20, if I was to be asked the same question 'Do you want to go on tour?' because it was my choice to go...I would probably say no, given the work situation that I had to leave, because the people that worked for me were in a minimum manning situation. That put a lot of stress on them the entire time I was gone. So, for me to have been away for that 6 months caused them more stress. And I don't think I could consciously make that choice again.”

“I found throughout that whole year...I wasn’t able to do my job, with the bare minimum, so that flight that I was working with suffered a great deal because there was no replacement.”

“Well one thing we have here in [this base] that’s a big issue is...when she went away...things just piled up. There is a huge burden when you come back...particularly at this base because we’re not manned to 100%.”

Indeed, reintegration into the workplace can be frustrating and stressful, especially when returning to an environment in which one is faced with a considerable workload. Being placed on a course immediately after returning from a long deployment, or in-between the 56-day rotations, can add extra stress to the lives of both AF members and their families. A number of frustrated AF focus group participants questioned why this was a common practice.

“...If you are on a three-56-day tour, why are you being placed on a course? That has happened to four individuals right now and I was asked to bring that up.”

“One person just got back and he was sent away again for 2 months on a training course.”

Many AF participants commented that after their deployment they felt bored and found their current work duties less meaningful.

“Current work duties less meaningful? That’s pretty strong for me.”

“Yeah, that should be in bold.”

“The thing is, it’s less meaningful. For me, it’s less meaningful here.”

Disappointment was often amplified for those AF personnel who were on deployment as augmentees. Not only did these members often arrive back in Canada to an airport devoid of familiar faces, many returned to a workplace where they were not missed, welcomed back, or even asked about their deployment experience by either their co-workers or leaders. Not being able to share or discuss their deployment experience with co-workers who either had been with them on deployment or had been left behind often created a lack of sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

“From a personal negative...one of the things is a sense of accomplishment. Because you’re not coming back as a group sharing your experiences with other people... There isn’t much sense of accomplishment.”

Many AF participants commented that the workload that they experienced while on deployment was either easier or more enjoyable compared to their home unit because they were able to actually get their job done with little resistance or bureaucracy. This can cause resentment and bitterness among the co-workers back in the home unit

who now have to work harder because they are responsible for covering the augmentee's work as well as their own, without reaping any of the perks of deployment.

"The people who get selected to go...the workload is much lighter. You might be pulling longer shifts but you're manned to do that one job... There's other benefits...the people back home are resentful of that. If you go to the [Golan] you can take some of that free money and end up buying a lot of nice stuff."

"And while you're over there, taking advantage of everything, that poor sucker is doing your job."

One of the big differences regarding reintegration for augmentees (or reservists) versus regular members is that augmentees often return as onesies and twosies, and therefore they must go through the reintegration process alone. Once again, this means that they do not have the opportunity to share their deployment and reintegration experiences with their fellow co-workers.

"When you come back, you're usually one or there may be two...but it's not a group. It's very much an isolated individual. I've had some problems with that, too."

"The battalion has a real rear party... The onesies and twosies that are leaving don't have that, they don't have anybody to talk to, to share that experience with them."

"Reservists...that would be hard because they have no one, even military, to talk to."

In addition to the reintegration challenges that are faced when returning from a deployment, organizational problems, such as payroll problems, can also occur for augmentees. The quote from the following augmentee illustrates this point:

"Because we are onesies and twosies, Air Force connected with the Brigade out of Edmonton, we went over in the [Summer], I came back in the [Winter] and my pay was still screwed up in the [Summer]. Literally my pay, week to week, month to month, I could not count on... When they shut the pay off for the Army...they shut my pay off and I had to go in and get it turned back on. And that was very frustrating."

Another theme that emerged from augmentees, as well as from other AF personnel, was that AF personnel feel that there is inadequate physical, psychological and work follow-up upon reintegration after deployment.

"The mental health for people in the CF when they are coming back from deployment is a low priority. That's my feeling...because if it was a high priority, these tools would be in place."

“We’re doing medicals at the 3-month mark that are supposed to be done immediately upon return. So that’s an irritant right there.”

“When I came back from my tour I had nothing. I just went to my next job. There was not a question asked. This is the first time I’ve been asked any questions about when I came back from my tour, so that’s 9 years... In all honesty, it should be literally within weeks of getting home.”

“There’s no tracking in-between. If I never did any of my follow-ups...if I never went to a social worker or did my screening, no one would know.”

A number of focus group participants reported that they needed the military support services regarding stress, but unfortunately, found the services to be either lacking or unavailable to them.

“No matter how much you read or how much people stand up and talk to you about the possibilities of things that may happen, you need to talk to somebody and I think every deployment affects everybody differently and I would have loved to have been able to get in sooner to see somebody but I was told I cannot see somebody because it’s not been long enough.”

“I felt like I was neglected and I got to the point where I thought ‘I’m a[n NCM] and I went out and said ‘Somebody help me. I need a social worker, I need somebody. I’m losing it.’”

“Nobody really wants to see you. I don’t see a social worker. I’m home. I’m away again for 3 months, then come home. I know I’m leaving again. That is the most stressful part. I clear everywhere else on base but I don’t need to see a social worker to go away again? So they’re just assuming everything’s going well for me at home. I could have had marital problems. I could have had all sorts of problems and now they’re sending me back home without anybody talking to me.”

Overall, compared to issues regarding other areas discussed in this study, there were relatively few comments or concerns regarding the physical health of AF personnel. However, many of the AF personnel felt that the check-up for physical and mental health, whether pre-, during, or post-deployment, was lacking. Regarding physical symptoms, a lack of sleep was one of the most common complaints AF personnel experienced upon their return to Canada. Many members explained that on deployment they had worked 16-hour days, 7 days a week and therefore felt exhausted after the high operation tempo. This was often compounded by the change in time zone.

“For me, 2 weeks when I came back was not enough. I was still physically and mentally tired.”

“The only thing I did during these 10 days was sleep. Just sleep. That’s all I did.”

“It took me a couple of weeks just to get used to the time zone.”

As mentioned, most of the AF personnel complained about the lack of an adequate medical and psychological examination both before and after deployment. The timing of the medical and psychological follow-up was another issue of concern for personnel. As indicated above, there were many cases where the post-deployment medical check-up did not happen for months after the member’s return or did not happen at all. Concern about being sick or even contagious was an additional source of stress for members and their families. Timing was also an issue for those members who deployed with the 56-day rotation. Many felt that they should have had a medical and/or psychological check-up in-between rotations. Many AF personnel claimed that no one in the AF would have been aware of whether they had obtained a post-deployment medical or not.

“Another thing that is not present is a good medical and psychological follow-up.”

“We do a screening before we go and I’ve done a number of them now and I think every one was a failure.”

However, one reason why many personnel either do not go for a psychological follow-up, or are not completely honest with their answers if they do complete one, may be because they are afraid that there will be negative consequences. It was noted in a couple of the focus groups that members were apprehensive about disclosing too much to the social workers or doctors out of fear that their personal problems would be revealed to either their superior officers or co-workers and that therefore they would be black-listed or labelled as “weak” in the squadron.

“You know people that have gone on stress leave before for serious problems and they’re blacklisted in the Squadron and I don’t want that. Even though I could use the help but...I don’t want to do that to my career.”

“There’s always the pressure of what are people going to think?... You are blacklisted.”

“You’re being marked as weak...from this point on, you’re walking around...are these people talking about you? What types of comments are being made about you?”

“I think with the support services...when you come back it was accessible for you to see a social worker... You were given the time to go and do that... If you did you were perceived as having a problem... You were reluctant to go do that.”

“The stigma attached to that.”

Some augmentees who returned from their deployment were particularly reluctant to seek and use the psychological support services provided, as they felt that they would stand out and therefore be perceived as having a psychological problem.

“I think with the support services...the onesies and twosies at your workplace...where you were given the time to go...you were perceived as having a problem.”

There were many complaints that AF leaders did not seem to want to ask any questions between deployments. Focus group participants speculated that leaders did not wish to find out that there were problems (e.g., the deployable member was not able to return to deployment), because then leaders would be forced to find someone else to send on short notice.

“...But they don’t want to hear about that because I would DAG red and then someone else would be forced to go on short notice.”

Another focus group participant asserted that they felt unable to bring up any problems or issues that they experienced while on deployment after their return. Again, it was as if no one wanted to hear about any work problems, and if they did bring them to the attention of the leaders, one ran the risk of being labelled ‘whiney.’

“When you go to the social worker, she’s going to ask you how things are going with your family...has nothing to do with work. The work part doesn’t get touched because they don’t want to hear about any problems...and if you bring them up, you’re just whiney.”

Many work and leadership problems were discussed during the focus groups. Unfortunately, however, there does not appear to be a formal process through which the issues and concerns that the AF members experienced on deployment can be documented and reported to the leaders and AF post-deployment. This lack of formal post-deployment process affected their reintegration experience, particularly as it related to work or organizational issues. One focus group participant mentioned that there was an “after action report,” but that members were not given the opportunity to contribute to or even read this report.

“My After Action Report, I haven’t seen the one that our little group produced and it was extensive. One person wrote it. I, we didn’t even have any input. So, how the heck do I know my concerns were met?”

Cultural

Positive

Especially while on deployment, culture for AF members is experienced on many levels – not only on a Canada-versus-foreign-country level, as we initially anticipated. In terms of its support trades, the AF not only deploys to foreign countries, but it also

often deploys with one of the two other services as augmentees. Thus, AF members not only associate with their own squadron culture, in addition to the AF and Canadian cultures, they are also exposed to the Army or Navy cultures.

In fact, going on a deployment in a formed unit can often be a time for AF members to bond and strengthen their AF culture.

“We rely heavy on that family feeling. It’s a nice thing and you can rely on it... We’re lucky that way I think.”

“We’re a lot more cohesive group [the Air Force].”

“We’re a lot more of a family even with our officers than you would find in the [Navy]. They’re more strangers to themselves than we are to ourselves... Kind of goes back to [Navy] and the Air Force. To stick with people that you know.”

Conversely, going on a deployment also provided AF personnel with the opportunity to experience working and living with the other services, and to be introduced to their leadership styles and traditions.

“From working with other forces you can get a better understanding of how they operate and they have some good ideas that we could certainly use.”

Other positive changes associated with cultural reintegration had to do with how AF members felt as Canadian citizens. Being exposed to other less privileged cultures gave these members a new appreciation for life in Canada.

“...I have a greater appreciation for life in Canada because of my experiences overseas.”

“You really do grow to appreciate who you are as a Canadian.”

“It was positive in the sense that we were seeing new cultures and being exposed to a different part of the world.”

Some AF members felt supported by the broader Canadian community after they returned from their deployment, which played a role in their reintegration experience.

“To give you an example, they were appreciative here, like in [Trenton] they said, ‘My god, you guys just came back’. They drove us over for a meal, I don’t know who they were, I think they were firemen but somebody here took care of us until we had a call and got a duty driver.”

“It’s very nice when you see stuff that’s put in the paper that they support the troops.”

“When the guys came back from Afghanistan to Edmonton after losing four people everybody in Canada knew they were coming back. It’s really nice to see parades and yellow ribbons and everything.”

Negative

Although many AF personnel spoke of positive experiences in relation to their deployment, this was not the case for all, and unfortunately, there were many more negative comments than positive ones. One common side effect of going on deployment was that when the members returned, they found that they were less tolerant of hearing complaints from their community and co-workers. Many members felt enlightened after their deployment, yet frustrated by those who were not exposed to cultural differences, poverty, and lifestyles in other less privileged countries.

“I find people here to be more concerned about trivial things.”

“Sometimes when I hear my friends and family talk about something that they think is pretty important, you add perspective to what I saw from where I lived for a year...then all of a sudden going, ‘That’s not so important.’”

“When you go on tour like I did...where everything is operationally focused, you come back and just the regular whining...got on my nerves.”

Coming back home to the “land of the haves” did appear to have a significant effect on a number of the focus group participants. Some found that their perspective had changed regarding the number of material goods that they possessed in Canada and what they considered important issues in life.

“And the worst part is, you try to talk to the general public about stuff like that and they say, ‘You’re just a grinch or you’re negative.’ I’m just telling you a reality.”

“Well, when my kids say there is nothing to eat... ‘You want to see nothing to eat? I’ll show you nothing to eat.’”

“...How much poverty these people had, it does affect you in a negative way when you come back.”

“Needless waste...and it’s not necessary and when you know that where you’ve come from, three people could have lived off that for a day. That’s sinful. It’s wrong.”

Mixed views were presented in the focus groups on the feeling of Canadian community support of the CF in general, and specifically of their role in international peacekeeping deployments. Many of the focus group participants complained about

the lack of support from the broader civilian community or Canadian population, which affected their cultural/community reintegration.

“I don’t think anybody really cares whether we’re here or not. We go on deployment, we come home, because [we] don’t feel the people of Canada are aware of actual deployment and things that we do.”

“Yeah, I don’t think they’re aware, I don’t think they really care.”

“Was there any type of recognition other than our little sign at the base? You know, welcoming people back? Had the city been more aware of our contribution then maybe something could have been done to show the appreciation for our troops.”

Focus group participants also felt that the Canadian government was partly to blame for this lack of acknowledgment. They felt that if the Canadian government had recognized and supported the Canadian military more (monetarily, politically, etc.), then this would in turn positively influence the view of the military, and especially the AF, held by the Canadian public.

“The problem is we don’t get out enough in the public and I think the public doesn’t appreciate some of the stuff we’ve seen or care to hear about it. They have no idea when we go to these places the stuff that we see. I think they would be shocked. Has one of these newspapers ever come over to us and said, ‘Hey, you were in this country, tell us about it. What were some of the things you saw and did?’”

“You look at the Americans and see some of the things that they do when they deploy. They have the high-profile corporate sponsors, the Wal-Mart...Coke. You go to the bases and they have Burger King and Popeye’s Chicken and all that stuff. They have McDonald’s on ship. How hard would it be for us to deploy with a mini Tim Horton’s? I’m serious!”

“They appreciate the green guys more than they appreciate anything else. That’s because they get more PR.”

Other Deployment-Related Issues

Pre-Deployment

Although the focus of this research was on post-deployment or reintegration issues, a number of other deployment-related issues, specifically *pre-deployment* issues and issues during the *deployment* itself, also emerged in the focus groups. As noted by the following quote from a focus group participant, the pre-deployment process that members and their families experience has an impact on how the deployment is viewed and ultimately how they cope with post-deployment reintegration.

“There is a pre-deployment process that has an impact on the whole picture on how you view your deployment... It can set the scene with the family.”

“I think preparing to leave could be handled a lot better...like in the Army.”

Pre-deployment training, especially for augmentees, was a sensitive topic discussed during the focus groups. Many AF members were annoyed with the pre-deployment training regimen. Often, it required them to be away from their families for an extra 2 months, extending the 6-month deployment to 8 months. This was stressful for both members and their families. Adding to this frustration was the fact that many considered the pre-deployment training to be either redundant or irrelevant.

“So, I’m thinking why in the hell I am in Trenton for the entire weekend for an eight and a half hour meeting. So I asked the Sergeant, ‘Where’s the Trenton people? I thought this was a briefing everyone had to attend?’ ‘Oh well, we’re going to brief them on Sunday.’ So, I’m away from my family 4 days. I have to pack winter clothes to be in Trenton in January, which I’m not going to need while I’m over in the desert... Stuff like that should be looked into more.”

“Where their tours are 6 months, and augmentees’ is in a sense 8 months. Full training and there is usually a minimum of 2 months.”

“Here’s a question that may be pertinent. ‘Do you find that the training you received before you left to prepare you was suitable?’ There’s a sense of frustration with many people saying, ‘What are you doing? This isn’t relevant. We’re learning about Yugoslavia and we’re going to the desert.’”

“Well, in the past few years, the jobs that we’ve been deployed on and we’re talking about things we were training for...it’s just that it has nothing to do with what we actually do. The training syllabus doesn’t really reflect what we get tasked to do once we leave Canada. So when you come back you have to learn your job all over again.”

Pre-deployment screening was another area of concern discussed in the focus groups. AF participants were concerned about the lack of validity that the process held if one can fail the screening and still be sent on deployment. Focus group participants felt that this negated the whole purpose of the screening.

“We do the screening before we go and I’ve done a number of them now. I think every one was a failure... The process itself is very flawed. When I went to [three different deployment areas], all those times, they were failures... You can get through it so quickly... There should be a harder look at those types of things.”

Another criticism about the screening process expressed by focus group participants is that it allows healthy deployable members to get out of going on deployments too easily by claiming false medical problems. This was raised as a significant problem at one particular base. Such a situation not only causes tension and resentment among members, it consequently means that there are fewer AF members available for deployment, which in turn increases the number of deployments that other members must go on. All of this further stresses members and their families and contributes to job burnout. The following is a conversation among NCMs:

“But I’m not going away for this. Whether it’s their family or not, they just don’t want to go. So they’ll go down and talk to the padres or talk to the people that will listen and say, ‘I can’t really go. I got bad wrists or I hurt myself...’”

“I got stressed out. I used the wrist thing.”

“What happens is all of a sudden these people get DAG red. What that means is they can’t go on tour, they can’t do their deployment... So they come off and get paid the same amount of money.”

Deployment

As was the case with pre-deployment, experiences during the deployment itself can also have an impact on post-deployment reintegration. The CF acknowledges that members and their families need assistance coping with deployment and separation issues. One AF member commented that while the military family resource centre (MFRC) at their wing provided support to the families in the form of deployment briefings, many families do not attend such briefings.

“The MFRC here did run deployment briefings because I attended one and it was dismal. There were five people there. There was more staff.”

“We put these things in place and they don’t come because I’ve gone to do those talks and nobody showed up and you’re waiting for someone to come... We can identify the need but then how do you make sure, what is the way of disseminating the information... You build it into part of the sign-out package. The DAG package.”

“The...briefing for their families, I bet you in this wing there might be 5% will tell you that they heard it. In the Army everybody goes.”

“I organize those things, that’s my job. We advertise those things to death... We’d be lucky to get 10 family members.”

Single members complained about the lack of family support available to them for their extended families during deployment. They complained that their families had difficulty obtaining information concerning them while they were on deployment.

This was especially an issue for people who had families who did not speak English as a first language.

“For anybody who has family outside...I think it’s not geared, I think it is geared for direct family here.”

“...At the time I wasn’t married. I wasn’t online. Nobody called her [mother]. As far as they were concerned, out of sight out of mind. And that is one big thing with single people.”

There were many instances where AF members complained about the lack of support they received from their units while on deployment. For the AF members a tangible example of support was the care packages sent from the unit or the local MFRC. Many AF members watched while other people in their camp opened packages sent from their home units. This was especially true for the augmentees who watched formed units receive packages from their home base, while augmentees were neglected.

“...Just to give you an adjective – resentful – where purple people really experience some of these things... The MFRC here spent all kinds of time making sure that the Christmas boxes and things got over to the battalion members, the Army... In some of those areas of operation, the purple people plugged in would see these people getting from their same location at MFRC sending the Army guys Christmas packages. They wouldn’t get it... Now that can be fixed.”

“...They were sending stuff because my roommate was from [another base] so she always got these packages. I was okay because my spouse sent two parcels a week...but [that base] would send like, ‘Oh, it’s St. Patrick’s Day’...Every couple of weeks there was a parcel from [the base] with the names of each person from [there].”

“And our messes are supposed to be doing this kind of thing. That’s why we have a mess and they failed as well.”

“She has a valid complaint that she was there over the Christmas period and didn’t even receive a Christmas card from her unit, let alone from Wing [Number], which should be supporting their people that are deployed. She should have had a Christmas card from the Wing Commander.”

“This base failed miserably to support the people that they sent overseas and when they came back. Terribly. It’s the worse I have ever seen in my career.”

Focus group participants gave examples of rear party support from other squadrons or Army units:

“The [number] squadron – different mentality. They kind of got together and said ‘You are his sponsor.’ You could go if you need help with the family, go clean the driveway. When you were back you did it for somebody else.”

“We had a rear party in the Army that phoned and did odds of organizing stuff for the family.”

“On Roto (Number) they had a rear party...and I remember going around to a number of houses blowing snow and anything they wanted. Sometimes wives/dependents won’t call. There’s pride.”

One AF participant was particularly upset over the lack of rear-party support for his family while he was sent away on an unexpected deployment. He mentioned that they were new to the area and that his wife was new to the military lifestyle. This situation illustrates the importance of support from a unit in the form of a rear party, and the problems that may occur without such support.

“I got a phone call at night. We were told we were flying out in the morning, to take everything you got, don’t know where you’re going, don’t know when you’re coming back. I vanished for 3 weeks. Nobody knew where I was. OPS didn’t know where I was, nobody knew. You think anybody would check up with my wife to see how she’s handling that? Nobody cared or bothered. I vanished for 3 weeks...and she was new to the military world. Did someone check on her? No.”

Many AF members commented that improvements in technology have allowed them to have more contact with their family members, and that this has helped to ease the stress of separation, for both members and their families, as well as assisted with the reintegration process.

“We had voice over the Internet...now with email...it was big.”

“The big difference...would be the fact that you now have Internet. That helped a lot.”

“I think coming back was probably a bit easier because you knew all the things that your family was going through... So it’s not like you’re coming back and you missed 6 months. You have an idea of what’s going on.”

Instant communication and daily updates with activities on the home front are very positive consequences of technology; however, that technology also has a downside. Constant communication also allows for day-to-day stresses to be shared. According to one AF member:

“It does have a negative connotation because not only did you get to talk about the good stuff...you’ve got the negative stuff every day

too...and you can't do anything about it because you're there...rather than the spouse get on... Maybe if they didn't get the immediate contact they could have handled it in a couple of days... It would be...little Johnny's got a cold... That's nice, but what can I do about it?"

In addition to up-to-date information provided via electronic media, AF members were subjected to rumours, misinformation and their own imaginations, as were their families:

"It's the stress of not knowing because there is the CNN effect. They see what they see on the news and they think you're in that situation. I had that when I was in the [Golan Heights] and my wife would be watching CNN and see something happen somewhere else and would be thinking that I'm next door to that and I could have been literally playing golf or something that day and living quite a normal experience."

Some AF members felt that the Canadian government and the media had the choice of portraying the deployment as positive or negative. If the media presented the deployment as a worthy cause, then the family members would feel proud that their spouse/family is serving. If the media put a negative spin on the deployment or did not give it any attention, then the family would tend to feel less proud and therefore less supportive of their family being away from the home for 6 to 8 months.

"The point I was making, it's not the deployment that affects whether your family is proud of you or not. It's the media attention that they put on the deployment."

Effective teamwork during deployment was an issue in the camps for the augmentees. Many AF augmentees felt that productivity really suffered while on deployment due to lack of organization surrounding the reality of bringing together a group of augmentees and expecting them to work as an effective team when often they did not know the expertise and job of their new co-workers and they themselves were unsure of the role that they should play in the team. The AF members found this extremely frustrating and stressful.

"I think it takes us longer to work as a team because we're separated... At least the Army comes in and they can start from the get go and they know exactly who is doing what and where everything is going and how to do it, but we're talking 300 people walking in a unit...and who are you? What do you do? So we have a big learning curve at the beginning because we're mis-mashed together. That's the hard part."

"They take people from all these little bases and put them in one big pot. How we're supposed to work together? That works good and fine, but there are going to be problems and when you get back no

one wants to hear about them because they don't care. Like I said, this base failed miserably to support the personnel they sent over."

"I think you need to concentrate more on people that are augmented. Concentrate on setting up something so they know how to treat the people they are bringing in. Because the biggest stress and the biggest problems I had in my tour was that co-ordination... It just doesn't work."

Joining a group full of "mismatched" augmentees can be very problematic as described in the above quotes. Joining an already formed group as an augmentee can also be challenging. The following quotes describe the isolation and rejection that some of the AF augmentees experienced on deployments.

"On the support trade...if I get attached to a battle group, I'm an outsider coming in."

"Just from being on an Army base and I was with the group and if we ever had augmentees, you always kind of pushed them aside. It is harder if you are the augmentee because you are not necessarily part of the group. They're a bit ostracized."

"Welcome to the Air Force... You find out you're the United Way chairperson. You need to change your approach. They're not going to change the way they are. You have to become part of them or you'll be an outsider and I've seen it where someone has been completely ostracized."

The type of rotation that the AF member experienced affected the quality of the deployment in a number of different ways. As mentioned earlier, the 56-day rotations were implemented within the past several years for a variety of reasons, including the maintenance of qualifications. For example, depending on the occupation, some AF members found that after 6 months of deployment, they were no longer qualified to do their job back on home base.

"When we go away for 6 months...we come back and we're no longer qualified to do anything that we would normally do. When the Army goes away on deployment...they go back and they are a valuable addition to their unit because they have all this experience relevant to what they do for a living."

However, there were concerns regarding the negative consequences of the 56-day deployments on the condition of the camps. Some focus group participants felt that the camps were disorganized and that this was a result of the 56-day rotation.

"...The first rotation...you have to build from nothing. There's no improvements happening because guys are deploying for only 56 days... At least when you went for 6 months you had a break and had two R&Rs... You got into a routine at the beginning... You can

do some improvements for the camp... That's not happening now. You're there 56 days. You're shorter number, smaller number of guys. Not there long enough to do anything."

"When I went to [Op Apollo], I went 'Holy Christ, is this the first deployment the military has ever done?' They are so unorganized."

"The same thing every tour... Ours was terrible."

"We had a lot of crappy things happen on our deployments from an operational perspective. Like airplanes that don't work and parts that don't arrive and support that you don't get. That has for me personally tainted my opinions a little bit."

Although the three 56-day rotations solved some qualification problems, in the opinion of some focus group participants it has caused other challenges, including apathy and lack of productivity:

"You don't care. All I have to do is make the next 56 days. Next guy picks up the slack."

"...They're doing the 56-day and its not working for 90% of the people who are over there... ... There's no improvements happening because guys are deploying only 56 days."

There were other mixed views concerning the benefits of the 56-day deployments. Some focus group members preferred them over 6-month deployments as they found 6 months to be a long time to be away from home and work.

"The overall impression was that we would rather do it in 56-day chunks... People felt 6 months was too long."

"The positive side of having a one-56-day tour or a two-56-day tour is that you've got that break."

Fifty-six day deployments were, according to some focus group participants, less taxing on the family. The break between the deployments meant that members were only away from their families for a short period of time and some found that this made reintegration much easier. It also provided the opportunity for some AF members to have flexibility in scheduling when they wanted to take their three rotations.

"I found that the 56-day tours were good... Then I came back, really no change in the family status."

"I had it pretty good, I picked my dates and I actually got all my dates. I got Christmas, I got all the birthdays."

Focus group participants commented that deployment and reintegration stresses varied depending on both the location and length of the deployment. A number of AF members were exposed to or experienced stressful situations while on tour. There were the stresses of having to deal with the reality of other cultures along with the stresses of being exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals.

“If you try to help, your life won’t mean nothing. So sometimes you are forced, I have to look away, walk away. Don’t stay there. You don’t mingle. If there’s a beating or anything...walk away... You might be surrounded with people and your life will mean nothing.”

“When I was in [the Balkans] we flew with a helicopter over a site that had been bombed. After we flew many times over that site, they said, ‘Oh, you have to stay 2 miles away, we found radioactivity in there.’”

“We were in a hangar where we groomed the floor everyday because there was so much dust. After about a month he came out and said, ‘Everybody has to wear a mask when they groom now because there is cyanide in the dust.’”

“That kind of stuff happens often.”

Recommendations from focus group participants

Rohall et al. (1999) states that if the trend continues in downsizing, then over the next number of years, operational tempo will increase and this will have an even more negative impact on military members and their families. The military and its leaders can help counter these effects by continuing (and in some cases improving) support to military families, such as leaders listening to members’ families’ needs, being flexible and allowing for time off at appropriate times, and providing unit activities that include members’ families.

A number of the focus group participants echoed these recommendations. They also suggested that the CF recognize the role that families play in supporting members and therefore the military.

“I felt too that in some cases the spouse left back should get a deployment medal... recognition for them because they do the kids with the broken leg when you’re gone and the furnace breaks. They deal with it all while you’re not there.”

“The spouses and family do deserve some recognition formally because they are worth their weight in gold. If we didn’t have them at home in as good a shape as they are we wouldn’t be able to do as much as we’re doing out on tour.”

“It would be nice if maybe before people went if they had the spouses brought in a group and say ‘You are going to be running your own show for 6

months' and when you come home it might not be a good idea to kick the door open and take over."

One focus group participant suggested that we interview the families to see how the deployments affect them and to ask them for recommendations on how the CF and the AF can support them in dealing with deployments and reintegration.

"I've heard the exact same thing from four other people at the tours... That was the biggest thing... Why isn't there anything for our spouses? That was the key thing that they want addressed... It was supposed to be a new military where we're concerned about family life as well, everything all around it. Things have changed over the years. Let's start involving them. Let them have a voice in it, too."

"I've spoken to two spouses in particular that are not military and they've said, 'How come we're always hearing about how the military feels? I want my word heard.'"

Many of the focus group participants stressed that they felt a need for a rear party to help their family when they were away on deployment. This was especially felt by AF augmentees.

"That squadron had a different mentality. They kind of got together... You are his sponsor. They would go help with the family and when you were back you did it for somebody else."

"In future tours they should have a rear party person."

"The unit family for support structure... It does not exist in the AF where it does in the Army... We are a small unit. You just don't have the personnel to do that."

"It's not the personnel, it's the focus. You can make the personnel available as a primary function. This unit carried on here as if we didn't have a deployment ongoing at the same time...as if we were not on deployment... So there was no ability to have a rear party whose duties are to take care of the family. We never had that focus whatsoever."

Maslach (2005) suggests that one way to help prevent job stress and burnout is to focus on the workplace and change the conditions that are causing worker stress. This would include changing workplace policies and practices to help alleviate stress. The participants in the focus groups suggested a number of changes that the AF could make to help reduce the stress they experience, such as laying out clear policies regarding the role of the AF, and introducing a standard post-deployment/reintegration process.

"Well, if this gets taped and it ever goes to someone that can do something about it...we have never had any real policy on what the Air Force is responsible for. We seem to be at the whim of the Navy... If they are going to ask us to do things, there's got to be a policy set down so these people can get the proper training. And that's where I believe the Air Force and the Navy

have to get together and say okay, the Air Force will be doing this, they will not be doing that.”

“When a CF member comes back I think everybody should be going through the same process.”

“I think we need to be slowly eased out of work and then slowly eased back into work.”

“There needs to be a phasing out into prolonged period of rest and relaxation and then a phase back in. Even if you only come back to work for half days for three days because after being off for a month you wander around, you don’t know where anything is, you’re not going to be on the flying program, you’re not going to be doing anything.”

“Having a group session or something where you get to talk to people that came back months ago and how they felt ’cause a girl down the hall just got back and she came up to me and said, ‘I need to talk with you,’ so I sat with her and she felt she was losing control of her life and I said, ‘That’s exactly how I felt’...It’s normal, I’m not different, odd or I’m not losing control.”

Some focus group participants acknowledged the need for the AF to start documenting and capturing the experiences, both positive and negative, of their deployments, in order to help with future planning and deployment operations, and reintegration.

“For us, it was one of the first ones [deployment]. We don’t want to lose that experience or those lessons learned in the operation side but also in terms of reintegration and pre-deployment. The Army is really good at it because they do it all the time. The Navy is getting good at it because they do it all the time. For our community, we never do it, so are we going to lose that? That’s the important thing. And for you guys [the researchers] you’re part of it I think...the lessons learned. If you can bring up good points and suggestions for the next deployment...to apply for the reintegration, it would really be appropriate.”

Many focus group participants suggested that one way to add to the lessons learned for the AF, as well as to improve AF deployment operations and relationships with leaders, was for commanders to have a meeting with the deployed group or augmentees upon return from deployment, in order to welcome back and discuss what worked and what didn’t work during pre-deployment, deployment and reintegration. The following is a conversation among AF NCMs:

“You come back from a tour, a whole group of people are sent from this base to the tour. You come back. You would think the Base Commander would assign somebody and say, ‘Hey, lets get all these guys together, sit down and meet with them and find out what the heck is going on. What went good? What went bad? What can we do better?’”

“Not going to happen.”

“No.”

“No.”

“It’s pretty sad, it shouldn’t be hard for the Wing Chief and the Base Commander to get a list to contact his subordinate officers and say, ‘I want to know when all your guys are back, we’re going to set a date, we’re going to bring them together, and we’ll have a formal welcome’ ... Why the hell wasn’t it done?”

One suggestion offered by many focus group participants was to have group discussions focused on family, work, and individual reintegration issues, or briefings given by AF members who have gone through deployment and reintegration. Information such as this was viewed as beneficial in helping other AF members prepare for issues that might arise from deployment and in helping them not feel abnormal should they find themselves experiencing any problems after their deployment.

“The biggest way to combat some of that stuff is getting our guys out and talk to people about it. That way, they don’t feel like, ‘Oh, my God, I just came from a lousy place.’ ... Turn that around, turn it into something positive. That avoids a lot of issues down the road... I’ve seen a lot of fatalities in my time and if I dwell on that part of it, I’m going to get pretty messed up. But if I take that and put a positive spin on it then it doesn’t bother you as much... There’s some visions from things that I’ve seen that come back from time to time, certain instances will trigger them, but it doesn’t bother me because I know I can turn it into something useful, a useful experience for somebody else to learn from. I think we can do the same thing here.”

“We used to always have someone come in and tell us what it was like when they were there and it’s usually just one Roto prior to what we did so it’s current and it really helped us. It gave us a lot.”

As mentioned, there were also many comments regarding the lack of a rear party for the AF. Focus group participants pointed out many gaps in their deployment and reintegration support that could be filled by a rear party. These included calling and checking up on family members of deployed members, inviting the family members of deployed AF personnel to unit functions, organizing welcoming back parties for deployed members (especially for deployed augmentees), organizing Christmas boxes and packages for deployed AF members (especially augmentees), and aiding the families of deployed members with household problems. All of these sources of support were seen as especially important to deployed personnel who were new to their location, as their families often did not know people in the community. Here is an excerpt from one conversation:

“We came back to no reception, no recognition from the press, no recognition from the Air Force, the Army... All we got was negative, ‘Well you guys weren’t even doing anything hard.’”

“I had to jump up and down and scream blue bloody murder on the tour and say, ‘It’s been 4 months and nobody from the unit has even called to see how she’s doing.’”

“My wife mentioned that as well...that nobody called.”

“And that’s especially important for those people who’s this isn’t their home... They are away from all their support.”

Increased recognition for going on deployment was an important theme that emerged time and time again from the focus groups. Recognition could be in the form of parades, welcome back parties, or simple acknowledgment by their co-workers that they had returned from a deployment. Recognition for the AF member quoted below meant receiving medals at an appropriate time.

“It seems really petty but when we were back in [Trenton] and we saw the guys on theatre who had been after us getting their medals before we did...I just, okay, well screw it... We were the first guys in and the guys who were there after us are getting their recognition. That was an Air Force thing... It’s indicative of how we were treated.”

Summary and discussion

The present focus group research documented a plethora of reintegration issues that Canadian AF members returning from deployment have faced. Consistent with prior research conducted in other military contexts (e.g., the US and Canadian armies), the deployment-related experiences of Canadian AF personnel may be understood in terms of four key reintegration domains: personal, family, work, and cultural. Further, each reintegration domain or theme encompasses both positive and negative experiences and perceptions, as described by focus group participants in this study.

Personal reintegration

The first theme, personal reintegration, refers to aspects of “feeling like oneself again.” In the literature, positive aspects of personal reintegration include being better able to deal with stresses, broadening one’s perspective on life, and increasing one’s self-discipline and independence as a result of deployment (Britt et al., 2001). In the present study, many participants reported that their deployment experience did indeed change them personally, with most of these changes being positive. Some felt that they emerged from their experience with more self-confidence, self-awareness and empowerment, and that they learned positive things about themselves. Some returned from deployment with a renewed sense of their purpose in the AF and even the world. Some AF members who experienced challenging events showed positive coping skills and were able to turn some of their negative deployment experiences into positive life lessons, an ability that they felt was key in maintaining a positive perspective on life.

On the other hand, although many focus group participants reported experiencing positive personal changes after deployment, a number of participants spoke of negative personal changes. Some felt that they were different people upon their return, and that they had grown in ways that others who had not deployed (or who had remained at home) had not, which created in them a sense of disconnection from others. Other participants reported that they had become short-tempered after deployment, or that it took time to feel like they were “themselves” again. Such experiences are consistent with previous research that has characterized negative personal reintegration in terms of experiences such as generalized anxiety, anger, and feeling isolated or disconnected from the rest of the world (Bolton et al., 2002; Orsillo et al., 1998).

Family reintegration

The second theme involves reintegration back into *family* life, or re-establishing coherence as a family unit. According to previous research, positive aspects of family reintegration may be seen in new feelings of closeness and appreciation for family life after deployment (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). In the present study, focus group participants expressed a number of positive comments regarding family issues. Some spoke of a new appreciation for their family after being separated from them. In particular, the comments of those with a service spouse regarding the effect of deployments on family life tended to be more positive

than the comments of those who were married to a non-military spouse, as there seemed to be a better understanding of deployment issues among the dual-service couples than among other couples.

In terms of negative experiences, previous research suggests that negative aspects of family reintegration may include adjusting to new roles and routines (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). Indeed, the military lifestyle can be very stressful on some families with its constant reorganization involving new rules and roles (Figley, 1993). In particular, the family dynamics can change when one of the parents is away for a prolonged period of time and the responsibility of the household and parenting is left up to the other parent. In the present study, many of the problems associated with family reintegration, such as dealing with changes in family dynamics, roles, routines, or rules, resentment over the member's absence, disappointment over the homecoming reception, and the pressure to return to a "normal" family life, were echoed in the focus groups (Figley, 1993). Many parents in the focus groups commented that leaving for deployment was often very stressful for their children. Further, a number of focus group participants had either personally experienced a family breakdown after their deployment or had friends who had experienced it. For single members, arriving back home after a deployment to an empty house was a noted disadvantage.

One contentious family-related issue pertained to the new 56-day deployment schedule and the effects of this schedule on the family. The majority of the participants claimed that they found this schedule more stressful on them and their family than the regular 6-month schedule. Some found the 56-day schedule to be too short, as it meant that they would have to leave either the deployment or home as soon as they became reintegrated back into work or family. This continual reintegration on the family was stressful and unsettling for many AF members. Some claimed that they did not feel fully welcomed back into the family until they completed all their deployment rotations, or that the 56-day schedule did not allow enough time between rotations for people to work out family problems. Further, the AF members who found the 56-day deployments disruptive to their family and work life said that they felt that the AF and CF were not paying sufficient attention to the impact of the 56-day deployments on the reintegration process for work and family, and that this reflected a lack of concern for the mental, physical and family well being of AF members.

The present study also found, consistent with previous research, that families exhibit greater stress when they perceive a deployment to be illegitimate (Rohall et al., 1999). In particular, if spouses of CF members have increased expectations for family commitment, seeing their spouse deploy on what they consider to be insignificant missions could increase their frustration with military life and decrease their support of the CF. One participant commented that their family would resent them even more if they knew that the member had a good time while on deployment. Finally, special problems arose for the families of augmentees, who found deployments particularly isolating without having other families with whom to share their experiences.

Work Reintegration

The third theme of *work* reintegration refers to adjusting back into garrison or unit life. Examples of work reintegration discussed in the literature include positive experiences such as increased pride in one's accomplishments during deployment, increased work motivation,

and enhanced career progress. In the present study, serving on a deployment had positive implications for some members' careers, for it enabled some personnel to attain promotions and move up in the AF. Other focus group participants credited their deployment experience for increasing their commitment to the CF, and still others spoke positively of the post-deployment decompression time that they were given, in helping them to reintegrate back into work.

However, according to previous research, work reintegration may also include negative experiences, such as boredom and frustration with military bureaucracy and a feeling that one's work in garrison is less meaningful or challenging than one's work during deployment. Returning home may also be associated with significant organizational disruptions (e.g., unit reconfigurations, postings), as well as a lack of support and appreciation from others, such as co-workers and leaders (Thompson & Gignac, 2001). In the present study, some focus group participants expressed disappointment that they were unable to make more of a positive impact in their deployment location. In particular, many participants were disappointed about the reception, or lack of recognition from the rest of the military community, that they received upon return. They had expected yellow ribbons, welcoming parties or parades, or at the very least, appreciation for a job well done, and felt let down when their expectations about a grand homecoming reception were unfulfilled (see also Bolten et al., 2002). Indeed, the importance of recognition, and the disillusionment associated with the lack of recognition, was quite evident during the focus groups. Some expressed disappointment at not being sent special parcels and cards while away; others would have liked to have been picked up at the airport or greeted by their leaders and co-workers upon return to work; and still others would have appreciated being asked about their deployment by co-workers and leaders. Some focus group participants felt that the homecoming reception that the Army receives was much better than that received by the AF.

For augmentees, in particular, reintegrating back into their "home base" after deployment was especially difficult. Many reported feeling ignored when they were not welcomed back by their unit, co-workers and leaders. Many came home expecting a welcome back party, or some acknowledgment of their return, but most did not encounter any such acknowledgment, and felt insulted, disheartened, and disappointed. Further, many augmentees experienced disorganization upon returning from their deployment. They felt that this was the result of being an augmentee and of not really belonging to the deploying unit or their home unit. There were organizational problems with flights, hotels and transportation, and with payroll, which was extremely frustrating for augmentees.

Indeed, this study found that organizational problems can have negative consequences for returning AF members, whether augmentees or members of formed units. For example, some focus group participants were expected, due to staff shortages, to report to work the day after returning from a deployment. Not being staffed properly can also be stressful for the AF member who returns to an office where work has piled up and co-workers are resentful that the member was away on deployment because this has put an extra burden on their workload. Leave policy was another aspect of military bureaucracy that emerged as an issue in virtually all focus groups. Although some did not feel that they had sufficient leave, most were satisfied with the *amount* of leave but dissatisfied with the *policy* for taking their leave, especially after a deployment. In particular, most focus group participants expressed resentment at having to take leave during times that were inconvenient for themselves or their families. The majority of the focus group participants agreed that allowing members to have

more flexibility regarding when to take leave would allow members to spend more time with family and allow them to spend their time off doing activities that they enjoy. Another organizational issue that emerged was the issue of AF members' PERs. A number of focus group participants complained about missing promotions and not being ranked in their wings because they were unable to have timely PERs due to being on deployment. Still other work reintegration problems emerged from the focus groups. Some participants felt disconnected from their unit upon return from deployment, while others spoke of the need for decompression after deployment (it appears that not all returning AF personnel received time for decompression). Thus, the experience for many AF members was to return to work after being away for a long deployment to an office that either was not prepared for them to return (e.g., there was no office ready for the member); or their office staff let the work for the member pile up so that the AF member faced an enormous amount of work upon return; or their department changed policies and procedures while the member was away but did not inform them of these changes; or their department did not welcome the member home or acknowledge that they had just returned from a deployment. As indicated by the focus group participants, this can be an enormously frustrating and overwhelming environment within which to try and reintegrate. Also, as expressed by some participants, being placed on a course immediately after returning from a long deployment, or in-between the 56-day rotations, can also add extra stress to the lives of both AF members and their families.

There were still other negative work integration issues that emerged from this study. Many AF participants commented that after their deployment they felt bored and found their current work duties less meaningful. Such feelings were sometimes amplified for augmentees who went through the reintegration process alone and who were often unable to share their deployment experiences with others, which created a lack of sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Many AF participants commented that the workload that they experienced while on deployment was either easier or more enjoyable than the workload in their home unit because they were able to actually do their job with little resistance or bureaucracy on deployment.

Still another theme that emerged was the feeling that there is inadequate physical, psychological and work follow-up upon reintegration after deployment. A number of focus group participants reported that they needed the military support services regarding stress, but unfortunately, found the services to be either lacking or unavailable. The timing of the medical and psychological follow-up was another issue of concern. Focus group participants reported that there were many instances where the post-deployment medical check-up did not occur for months after the deployment or did not occur at all. Timing was also an issue for those members who deployed with the 56-day rotation. Many felt that they should have received a medical and/or psychological check-up in between rotations. In general, many focus group participants felt that no one in the AF would have been aware of whether they had obtained a post-deployment medical or not. Moreover, the present study also indicated that some personnel either do not go for a psychological follow-up, or are not completely honest with their answers if they do complete one, because they are afraid that there will be negative consequences. It was noted in some of the focus groups that members were apprehensive about disclosing too much to the social workers or doctors out of fear that their personal problems would be revealed to their superior officers or co-workers and that therefore they would be labelled as "weak" in the squadron. Some augmentees who returned from their deployment were particularly reluctant to seek and use the psychological support services provided, as they felt that they would stand out and be perceived as having

psychological problems. Indeed, many participants commented on their lack of confidence and trust in the medical doctors, psychologists and social workers with which they work. Research in other nations indicates that this problem is not specific to the Canadian military. A study of the British military, for example, found that the British soldiers were so concerned with issues of confidentiality, stigmatization, and career prospects that many admitted that they would not respond truthfully to questions (French, Rona, Jones, & Wessely, 2004).

In addition, many of the participants in the present study felt that AF leaders really did not want to hear about or discuss deployment issues. Focus group participants speculated that leaders really did not want to hear about problems regarding deployment because, for example, in the event that an individual was unable to deploy, they would be forced to find someone else to send on short notice. Other participants reported feeling unable to bring up problems that they experienced while on deployment after their return. Again, the feeling among participants was that no one wanted to hear about any work problems, and that if they did bring them to the attention of the leaders, they would run the risk of being labelled “whiney”. Further, there does not appear to be a formal process through which the issues and concerns that the AF members experienced on deployment can be documented and reported to the leaders and AF after deployment. One focus group participant mentioned that there was an “after action report,” but that members were not given the opportunity to contribute to or even read this report. This lack of formal post-deployment process affected reintegration experiences, particularly as they related to work or organizational issues.

In general, work reintegration was an area that focus group participants felt was not supported or recognized by the AF or the CF. It is worth noting that most of the negative reintegration experiences that emerged from the present study revolved around work or organizational issues. This pattern is consistent with a previous CF army study that found that the most negative reintegration experiences were in the work/occupational domain (Blais, Thompson, & McCreary, 2005).

Cultural reintegration

The fourth theme, *cultural* reintegration, refers to returning from settings of extreme deprivation and poverty into a land of greater privilege. Positive cultural reintegration can be seen in the greater appreciation for the rights, freedoms and conveniences taken for granted in Canada, in the development of a better understanding of other cultures and problems in the world, and in the feeling that the broader society appreciates the efforts of those who have been deployed. In the present study, cultural reintegration for AF members was experienced on many levels, not only on a Canada-versus-foreign-country level, as initially anticipated. Since the AF deploys not only to foreign countries, as the other services do, but also typically deploys with one of the other two services as augmentees, i.e., AF members associate not only with their own squadron culture, but also with Army or Navy cultures. The present study showed that going on a deployment in a formed unit can often be a time for AF members to bond and strengthen their AF culture, but it can also provide AF personnel with the opportunity to interact with the other services, and to be introduced to their leadership styles and traditions. Other positive changes associated with cultural reintegration involved how AF members felt as Canadian citizens. Being exposed to other less privileged cultures gave these members a new appreciation for life in Canada. Some AF members felt supported by the

broader Canadian community after they returned from their deployment, which played a role in their reintegration experience.

Although many AF personnel spoke of positive experiences in relation to their deployment, there were many more negative comments than positive ones. In the literature, negative cultural reintegration is characterized by the “culture shock” experienced after returning home, a perceived lack of support for the CF from the civilian community, and a decreased tolerance by returning members for complaints regarding matters perceived as trivial. In the present study, one common side effect of going on deployment was that when the members returned, they found that they were less tolerant of hearing complaints from their community and co-workers. Many members felt enlightened after their deployment, yet frustrated by those who were not exposed to cultural differences, poverty, and lifestyles in other less privileged countries, and who they felt complained about “trivial” things. Indeed, coming back home to the “land of the haves” did appear to have a significant effect on a number of the focus group participants. Some found that their perspective had changed regarding the number of material goods that they possessed in Canada and what they considered important issues in life, and this sometimes created tension with others. Mixed views were presented in the focus groups on the feeling of Canadian community support of the CF in general, and specifically of their role in international peacekeeping deployments. Many of the focus group participants complained about the lack of support from the broader civilian community or Canadian population, which affected their cultural/community reintegration. Focus group participants also felt that the Canadian government was partly to blame for this lack of acknowledgment. They felt that if the Canadian government had recognized and supported the Canadian military more (monetarily, politically, etc.), then this would in turn positively influence the view of the military, and especially the AF, held by the Canadian public. The importance of such cultural recognition can be seen in its effects on well being. For example, a rejecting or ambivalent reception by society and lack of support from family and friends (e.g., not having someone to talk to and confide in at the time of homecoming) contributed directly to the development of PTSD in US Vietnam veterans (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1994).

Pre-deployment issues

Although the focus of the present research was on post-deployment or reintegration issues, a number of other deployment-related issues, specifically *pre-deployment* issues and issues during the *deployment* itself, also emerged in the focus groups. The present study demonstrated, for example, that the pre-deployment process that members and their families experience often has an impact on how the deployment is viewed and ultimately how they cope with post-deployment reintegration. Some focus group participants felt that pre-deployment preparation for members and their families could be handled more adequately, and that the Army does a better job of this. Indeed, other research shows that providing information early about what to expect, especially for families who have not endured a lengthy separation before, can go a long way towards “normalizing” and coping positively with the deployment experience, preparing them for reunions, and assisting military members with both family and work reintegration. Furthermore, promoting understanding of the stages of deployment helps to avert crises, minimizes the need for command intervention or mental health counselling, and can even reduce suicidal threats (Hobfoll, Spielberger, Breznitz, Figley, Folkman, & Lepper-Green, 1991); Pincus et al., 2005). Similarly, recent research investigating the work-family fit (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) proposes that if family

expectations are consistent with workplace demands, the work-family fit is enhanced (McFadyen, Kerpelman & Adler-Baeder, 2005), but that if the family as a unit is not prepared and is unable to cope with demands, or if the workplace is not supplying the needed support, then the family will likely face considerable war-related-stress (Figley, 1993; McFadyen et al. 2005). Pre-deployment training, especially for augmentees, was also a sensitive topic for the focus groups. Many AF members were annoyed with the pre-deployment training regimen, which often required them to be away from their families for an extra 2 months, extending the 6-month deployment to 8 months. This was stressful for both members and their families, especially if the pre-deployment training was perceived to be either redundant or irrelevant. Pre-deployment screening was another area of concern discussed in the focus groups. AF participants were concerned about the lack of validity of the process if one can fail the screening and still be sent on deployment. Another criticism of the screening process was that it allows healthy deployable members to get out of going on deployments too easily by claiming false medical problems. Such a situation not only causes tension and resentment among members, but means that there are fewer AF members available for deployment, which in turn increases the number of deployments that other members must go on. All of this exacerbates the stresses of members and their families and contributes to job burnout.

Deployment issues

As was the case with pre-deployment, experiences during the deployment itself also had an impact on post-deployment reintegration. Although the CF acknowledges that members and their families need assistance coping with deployment and separation issues, and therefore has established Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs) and Military Family Support Programs (MFSPs) at all locations where a significant number of Canadian military families are stationed, it appears that such support programs are sometimes not utilized. A number of focus group participants commented that while the MFRC at their wing provided support to the families in the form of deployment briefings, many families do not attend such briefings, despite being advertised. It was observed by some focus group participants that the situation was quite different in the Army, where families regularly attend such deployment briefings. On the other hand, other focus group participants (e.g., single members) complained about the lack of family support available to them for their extended families during deployment. They complained that their families had difficulty obtaining information concerning them while they were on deployment. This was especially an issue for people who had families who did not speak English as a first language. Further, there were many instances where focus group participants complained about the lack of support they received from their units while on deployment. For the AF members a tangible example of support was the care packages sent from the unit or the local MFRC. Many AF members watched while other people in their camp opened packages sent from their home units. This was especially true for the augmentees who watched formed units receive packages from their home base, while augmentees were neglected. Focus group participants also gave examples of rear party support from other squadrons or Army units, such as organizational and practical support (e.g., clearing snow from the driveway in winter), which they felt was lacking in their own squadron or base. One AF participant was particularly upset over the lack of rear-party support for his family, which was new to the area and to military life, while he was sent away on an unexpected deployment. Focus group participants also spoke of the effect that the Canadian government and the media can have on family members' perceptions of the

deployment. They felt that if the media presented the deployment as a worthy cause, then the family members would feel proud that their spouse/family is serving on deployment. If the media put a negative spin on the deployment or did not give it any attention, however, then the family would tend to feel less proud and therefore less supportive of their family being away on deployment.

Many focus group participants spoke positively about the improvements in technology that have allowed them to have greater contact with their family during deployment and therefore have helped to ease the stress of separation and the reintegration process. Instant communication through email and daily updates about activities at home are very positive consequences of technology. However, as several focus group participants described it, technology can also have negative consequences. Constant communication allows not only for positive events but also day-to-day stresses to be shared, which can create a difficult situation when a member cannot resolve problems from a distance. In addition to up-to-date information provided via electronic media, AF members and their families were also subjected to rumours, misinformation and their own imaginations (the “CNN effect”). These findings are consistent with previous research on technology and communication during deployments. On the positive side, the ability to communicate home from a deployment is a great morale boost for the military member (Pincus et al., 2005). For most military spouses, reconnecting with their loved ones is a stabilizing experience. However, for those who have "bad" phone calls, this contact can exacerbate the stress of the deployment. One possible disadvantage of easy phone access is the immediacy and proximity to unsettling events at home (children acting out, car breaking down, finances, etc.) or in theatre. Both spouse and military member may feel helpless and unable to support each other, which can add to the stress and uncertainty surrounding the deployment. Thus, while frequent communication can have positive implications for both members and their families, the military needs to be concerned about the immediate stress that family members might cause by reminding members of events that are being missed or of family problems that cannot be solved from a distance (Bell & Schumm, 2000; McNulty, 2003). Yet, military families have come to expect phone, email (and now even video) contact as technology advances. Indeed, most report that the ability to stay in close touch, especially during key milestones (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.), greatly helps them to cope with the separation.

Effective teamwork during deployment was an issue described by augmentees, in particular. Many AF augmentees felt that productivity suffered while on deployment due to lack of organization surrounding the reality of bringing together a group of augmentees and expecting them to work as an effective team, while knowing little about the expertise and job of new co-workers or about the role that they should play in the team. Many AF members found this extremely frustrating and stressful. In particular, joining an already formed group as an augmentee can be a challenging experience; several augmentees described the isolation and rejection that they experienced on deployments when trying to join a formed unit.

The present study also indicated that the type of rotation that the AF member experienced (6-month vs. three 56-day rotations) affected the quality of the deployment in several ways. On the one hand, depending on the occupation, some AF members found that after 6 months of deployment, they were no longer qualified to do their job back on home base, and therefore they preferred the 56-day schedule. Some focus group members preferred the 56-day deployments over the 6-month deployments because they found 6 months to be a long time to be away from home and work. Fifty-six day deployments were, according to some focus

group participants, less taxing on the family. The break between the deployments meant that members were only away from their families for a short period of time and some found that this made reintegration much easier. It also provided the opportunity for some AF members to have flexibility in scheduling when they wanted to take their three rotations. On the other hand, there were also concerns regarding the negative consequences of the 56-day deployments. Although the three 56-day rotations solved some qualification problems, according to some focus group participants, it has caused other challenges, including apathy and lack of productivity, and it has had a negative effect on the condition and organization of the camps.

In general, focus group participants felt that deployment and reintegration stresses varied depending on both the location and length of the deployment. For example, a number of AF members were exposed to or experienced stressful situations while on tour, ranging from dealing with other cultures to being exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals. Thus, a broad range of issues associated with the deployment itself were illuminated in the focus groups.

A note about augmentees

In addition to extending our understanding of reintegration issues beyond the army context and into the AF context, this study also reflected the extra deployment-related challenges that augmentees face. As found in previous research, the augmentees who participated in the present focus group study seemed to face greater deployment-related stresses, including social isolation, lack of support, and lack of recognition, than members of formed units. In this study, focus group members who were augmentees spoke of challenges particularly in terms of family and work reintegration. Thus, in terms of family reintegration, the families of augmentees found deployments particularly isolating without having other families with whom to share their experiences. In terms of work reintegration, augmentees found reintegrating back into their “home base” after deployment, which they typically did alone, to be especially difficult. Many reported feeling ignored by co-workers and leaders and were disheartened by this lack of recognition. Upon returning from deployment, many were also frustrated by organizational problems (e.g., transportation and payroll problems). Pre-deployment training for augmentees also emerged as an issue, as did challenges during the deployment itself (e.g., when augmentees watched formed units receive packages from their home base while they did not). In particular, augmentees faced difficulties in forming effective teams, and joining an already formed group as an augmentee was described as an especially challenging experience. Indeed, several augmentees described the isolation and rejection that they experienced on deployments when trying to join a formed unit. As is true of other AF personnel, such pre-deployment and deployment experiences affected the post-deployment experiences of augmentees in important ways.

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Conclusions and recommendations

The present focus group study of AF personnel has illuminated a number of reintegration issues, both positive and negative, within the four domains of *personal, family, work, and cultural*. Besides building upon previous reintegration research and applying such knowledge to the AF context, one of the purposes of the present research was to identify, with the help of AF members, specific recommendations for changes that might help alleviate short- and long-term reintegration problems, particularly within the context of increased operational tempo. These recommendations are articulated below in terms of the four main reintegration themes.

Personal reintegration

As some of the focus group participants experienced negative aspects of personal reintegration (e.g., a sense of disconnection from others, anger, needing time to feel like oneself again), it is recommended that confidential psychological support services be available and accessible to all returning personnel. In addition to ensuring privacy, the design of any existing or future services must take into account the stigma and other psychological barriers that may prevent some personnel from accessing such services. For example, making post-deployment psychological support, or post-deployment briefings that discuss possible personal reintegration issues, a *standard* part of the post-deployment process may help to “normalize” such services and may remove some of the stigma associated with seeking psychological support after deployment. Indeed, one suggestion offered by several focus group participants was to have group discussions focused on family, work, and individual reintegration issues. These could be in the form of pre-deployment briefings given by AF members who have gone through deployment and reintegration, aimed at helping other AF members prepare for issues that might arise from deployment and assisting them in coping with problems post-deployment.

Family reintegration

One of the ways in which the CF and its leaders can address reintegration issues is to maximize its support of military families. As indicated in the present study, this includes leaders listening to members’ families’ needs, being flexible and allowing for time off at appropriate times, and providing unit activities that include members’ families. Pittman et al., (2004) found that families of US Army members felt more capable of accommodating the demands of the Army when unit leadership was more concerned about and responsive to families. Similarly, Bourg and Segal (1999) suggest that the more family services the US military provides, the more committed both the members and their families will be to the military institution. A number of the focus group participants echoed these assertions and recommendations. Many of the focus group participants, particularly augmentees, stressed the need for a rear party to help families when they are away on deployment. Such rear parties can assist with calling and checking up on family members of deployed members, inviting the family members of deployed AF personnel to unit functions, organizing welcoming back parties for deployed members (including deployed augmentees), organizing Christmas boxes and packages for deployed AF members (including augmentees), and aiding

the families of deployed members with household problems. Focus group participants also suggested that the CF recognize the role that families play in supporting members and therefore the military. One focus group participant suggested that we interview the families to see how the deployments affect them and to ask them for recommendations on how the CF and the AF can support them in dealing with deployments and reintegration. In addition to the recommendations articulated by focus group participants, it is recommended that, where possible, pre-deployment briefings be held for members and their families in order to help prepare them for the deployment, and that post-deployment briefings for members and their families be held to assist families with typical family reintegration issues such as changes in family dynamics, roles, routines, or rules, resentment over the member's absence, disappointment over the homecoming reception, and the pressure to return to a "normal" family life. It is also recommended that the reasons why families of AF personnel typically do not attend deployment-related briefings should be explored. In addition, the effects of the 6-month versus the 56-day rotations on families should be investigated further so that any necessary modifications to these schedules can be made in order to ameliorate any negative outcomes associated with either of these rotation types.

Work reintegration

The focus group participants suggested a number of changes in workplace policies and practices that the AF could make to help reduce deployment-related stress, such as laying out clear policies regarding the role of the AF in deployments and introducing a standard post-deployment/reintegration process. Some spoke of the need for improved pre-deployment training to prepare AF personnel to work with the Army or Navy and to establish clear roles. Others spoke of the need for a "phasing out" of deployment to a period of prolonged relaxation and then a "phasing in" when returning to work after deployment, or in other words, the need to have some period of decompression after deployment. Some focus group participants acknowledged the need for the AF to start documenting and capturing the experiences, both positive and negative, of their deployments, in order to help with future planning and deployment operations and reintegration. It was noted by some participants that the Army and Navy are both better at such preparations and at disseminating "lessons learned" than is the AF. Similarly, many focus group participants suggested that one way to improve the lessons learned process for the AF, as well as to improve AF deployment operations and relationships with leaders, was for commanders to have a meeting with the deployed group or augmentees upon return from deployment, in order to welcome back and discuss what worked and what didn't work during pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment reintegration. As mentioned with respect to individual and family reintegration, one suggestion that was offered by several focus group participants was to have group discussions or briefings on family, work, and individual reintegration issues given by AF members who have gone through deployment and reintegration in order to help AF members prepare for any deployment-related issues. The timely recognition by leaders for deployment efforts was also seen as central. Recognition could be in the form of parades, welcome back parties, or simple acknowledgment by their leaders and co-workers that they had returned from a deployment.

Another set of recommendations concerns post-deployment organizational issues. It is recommended that organizational issues such as staff shortages related to deployments, leave policies, promotions and PERs, military bureaucracy, unit reconfigurations, postings, rotation

schedules, pre-deployment screenings, and the ways in which changes in policies and procedures are implemented should be reviewed so that they can better meet the needs of deployed personnel as well as improve organizational effectiveness. For example, ensuring that returning personnel are informed of changes in policies and procedures and allowing greater flexibility in leave policies may address some of the reintegration issues that returning personnel face. As discussed in terms of personal reintegration, it is recommended that timely psychological and medical follow-up become a standard component of the post-deployment/reintegration process, that all returning personnel have access to support services, and that the confidentiality of those accessing such support services is protected. It is recommended that a formal process (e.g., “after action report”) through which the issues and concerns of returning personnel can be reported to leaders be implemented. Finally, it is recommended that the special problems that augmentees face (in terms of joining a formed unit and developing into an effective team) be recognized by leaders, and that appropriate leadership training be developed to address these issues.

Cultural reintegration

Focus group participants felt that if the Canadian government were to make greater efforts to recognize and support the Canadian military (monetarily, politically, etc.), then this would in turn positively influence the public’s view of the CF/AF, which in turn would have positive effects on the well being of deployed personnel. In addition, deployment briefings (both pre-deployment and post-deployment) could help to address some of the feelings that returning personnel may experience after deployment (or help them prepare for the possibility of such feelings), such as a sense of alienation from others who have not witnessed what they have witnessed, or a feeling of “culture shock.” Such briefings may help returning personnel feel more tolerant of others who they feel are concerned with trivial matters. The provision of psychological support services as a standard component of post-deployment reintegration can also address some of these feelings.

In documenting the reintegration issues that AF members face, the present study has extended previous army reintegration research into the AF context. Moreover, the present study has identified specific recommendations that have the potential to address the needs of AF personnel in regard to four reintegration domains (personal, family, work, cultural), as well as enhance organizational effectiveness. Given the context of increased operational tempo that the CF is facing in the new post-Cold War security environment, addressing these reintegration needs will be essential.

Table 1. Air Force focus group demographics

Variables		
Age:		40.2
Gender:	Male	75
	Female	20
Education:	Some high school	6
	High school diploma	32
	Some university/college	19
	University/College degree	35
	Graduate degree	3
Rank:	Junior NCMs	37
	Senior NMCs	21
	Junior Officers	25
	Senior Officers	12
Average Years of Service:		18.4
Status:	Regular	78
	Reservist	2
Official Language:	English	58
	French	23
Deployed with OP:	Athena/Apollo	50
Marital Status:	Married (including common law)	79
	Single (including divorced, widowed, separated)	16
Number of participants with children living with them:		81

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Annex A

INFORMATION LETTER

Post-deployment reintegration experiences may be of particular concern for Air Force personnel as they often are quickly formed for a tasking or deployment with little lead-time. Moreover, when they return home, they often disperse quite quickly back to their home units. This means that support personnel may have lower levels of organizational and social support to facilitate the reintegration process. Thus, quality of post-deployment reintegration is tied to quality of life, operational effectiveness, and retention – all identified as current sources of concern in the CF.

One of the immediate objectives of this research is to identify the perceptions and appraisals of the ease or difficulty Air Force support personnel have experienced readjusting to the personal, family, organizational and community/cultural aspects of returning home. Another objective is to develop a reliable and valid scale reflecting these experiences, based on the existing Post-Deployment Reintegration Questionnaire.

In the future, we hope to use the Post-Deployment Reintegration Questionnaire to: 1) determine and quantify the relationship between reintegration experiences and various health and well-being indices, and 2) provide mental health service providers and commanders with the particular reintegration experiences identified as sources of concern for Air Force support personnel. Third, the findings will also help to suggest ways in which the Canadian Forces can better tailor post-deployment support services to the needs of Air Force support personnel.

Your participation in this study is **completely voluntary**. It will involve participating in a discussion group along with five to nine other colleagues, to discuss negative and positive experiences faced by Air Force support personnel after a deployment. It will also involve discussing and critically evaluating the Post-Deployment Reintegration Questionnaire, in order to modify and tailor it to Air Force support personnel. The discussion group will be approximately 90-120 minutes in duration. A trained researcher will facilitate all discussion.

All information you provide is considered **completely confidential**. Information collected during the discussion groups will be recorded and transcribed, with your consent, and will be kept in a secure location to which only researchers associated with this project have access. Results communicated with mental health service providers and commanders will include only general descriptions, with no identifying information. The only risks in this study are fatigue that may come with participating in a discussion group. There are no other known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If after receiving this letter you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information feel free to contact Dr. Ann-Renée Blais at 416-635-2000 x3082, or by e-mail at Ann-Renée.Blais@drdc-rddc.gc.ca. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at DRDC-Toronto (L-430).

I thank you in advance for your interest in, and assistance with, this project.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Ann-Renée Blais

Research Psychologist

Stress & Coping Group

DRDC Toronto

Annex B

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

Protocol Number: L-430

Research Project Title: Developing a measure of post-deployment reintegration of air force support personnel

Principal Investigator: Dr. Ann-Renée Blais, DRDC Toronto

I, _____ (name) hereby volunteer to participate as a subject in the study, “Developing a measure of post-deployment reintegration of air force support personnel” (Protocol L-430). I understand that I will be participating in a discussion group along with five to nine other colleagues, to discuss negative and positive experiences faced by Air Force support personnel after a deployment. It will also involve discussing and critically evaluating the Post-Deployment Reintegration Questionnaire, in order to modify and tailor it to Air Force support personnel.

I have read the information letter, and have had the opportunity to ask questions of the Investigators. All of my questions concerning this study have been fully answered to my satisfaction. However, I may obtain additional information about the research project and have any questions about this study answered by contacting Dr. Ann-Renée Blais at 416-635-2000 x3082.

I have been told that the principal risk of the research protocol is fatigue. I consider this risk to be acceptable. Also, I acknowledge that my participation in this study, or indeed any research, may involve risks that are currently unforeseen by DRDC Toronto.

I have been advised that the data concerning me will be treated as confidential, and not revealed to anyone other than the DRDC Toronto Investigator(s) or external investigators from the sponsoring agency without my consent except as data unidentified as to source. Moreover, should it be required, I agree to allow the data to be reviewed by an internal or external audit committee with the understanding that any summary information resulting from such a review will not identify me personally.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate and may withdraw my consent without prejudice or hard feelings at any time. Should I withdraw my consent, my participation as a subject will cease immediately. I also understand that the Investigator(s), or their designate, may terminate my participation at any time,

regardless of my wishes.

Volunteer's Name _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

FOR SUBJECT ENQUIRY IF REQUIRED:

Should I have any questions or concern regarding this project **before, during, or after** participation, I understand that I am encouraged to contact Defence R&D Canada - Toronto (DRDC Toronto), P.O. Box 2000, 1133 Sheppard Avenue West, Toronto, Ontario M3M 3B9. This contact can be made by surface mail at this address or in person, by phone or e-mail, to any of the DRDC Toronto numbers and addresses listed below:

- Principle Investigator or Principal DRDC Toronto Investigator: Dr. Ann-Renée Blais, 416-635-2000 x3082, Ann-Renée.Blais@drdc-rddc.gc.ca.
- Chair, DRDC Toronto Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC): Dr. Jack Landolt, 416-635-2120, Jack.Landolt@drdc-rddc.gc.ca.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form so that I may contact any of the above-mentioned individuals at some time in the future should that be required.

Annex C

Air Force Support Personnel Demographic Survey

1. What is your present Rank?
 - Jr. NCM (Pte to MCpl)
 - Snr NCM (Sgt to CWO)
 - Jnr Off
 - Snr Off

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female

4. What is your highest level of education?
 - Some high school
 - High school diploma (Sec V)
 - Some university / Some college (CEGEP)
 - University degree / College degree
 - Graduate degree

5. What is your first official language?
 - English
 - French

6. What is your marital status?
 - Married (incl common-law)
 - Single (incl divorced, widowed, or separated)

7. Excluding your partner/spouse, how many dependents live with you? _____

8. What is your status?
 - Regular
 - Reservist

9. How many years of service in the Canadian Forces have you completed?

10. How many tours have you had:

In total: _____

In the past 5 years: _____

In the past 12 months:

56-day tour: _____

6-month tour: _____

11. Have you deployed with OP Athena or OP Apollo?

Yes

No

If so, which unit have you supported? _____

12. What is your occupation? _____

13. Can you please briefly describe your most recent tour (length, location, etc.)?

Annex D

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS GROUP SESSION

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group today. I'm Wendy Sullivan-Kwantes, Research Technician for the Command, Effectiveness and Behaviour Section at DRDC Toronto. I'll be your moderator for this session. With me is Dr. Ann Renée Blais, Defence Scientist at DRDC Toronto. Each of you has been invited here today because you are experts on your own particular deployment and reintegration experience. This research we are conducting is supported by NDHQ and particularly by your ECS. We need you to identify the reintegration experiences of greatest relevance to Air Force personnel and help us develop a reliable and valid questionnaire reflecting these experiences. While this research has been undertaken on the land side, this is a relatively new initiative for the Air Force. Your experiences are very important to us and we use them to recommend changes in the Canadian Forces. In a group discussion like this, it is really important that you express yourself openly. There are no right or wrong answers; we want to know what you think. We are tape-recording this session in order to ensure accuracy when writing up a report. However, your responses will not be linked with your name or affiliation in any way. Everything will be anonymous and the tapes will be destroyed when we are finished. Because we are taping, I may remind you occasionally to speak up and to talk one at a time, so I can hear you clearly when I review the session tapes. Each time I ask a question, there is no need to respond if you do not wish to. However, it is important that a wide range of ideas are expressed. If you would like to add an idea or if you have an opinion that contrasts with those that have been aired, that's the time to jump into the conversation.

Annex E

Post-Deployment Reintegration Scale

For the next set of questions, please indicate the extent to which each of the statements below is true for you since returning from your overseas deployment. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. People may have differing views, and we are interested in what your experiences are. **Please indicate the extent to which each of the statements below is true for you since returning from your overseas deployment:**

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
1. I find military bureaucracy more frustrating.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
2. I am more aware of problems in the world.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
3. Putting the events of the tour behind me has been tough.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
4. I still feel like I am “on the edge.”	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
5. My work motivation has increased.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
6. I have felt “out of sorts.”	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
7. There has been tension in my family relationships.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
8. I have a better understanding of other cultures.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
9. I have had difficulty reconciling the devastation I saw overseas with life in Canada.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
10. I have had trouble dealing with changes within my family.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
11. I am applying job-related skills I learned during my deployment.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
12. I am glad I went on the tour.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
13. I am more interested in what is happening in other countries.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
14. Dealing with memories of death and injuries has been hard.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
15. I have experienced difficulties readjusting to life in Canada.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
16. I feel my current work duties are less meaningful.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
17. My sense of religion or spirituality has deepened.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
18. I feel my career has advanced.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
19. I feel my family is proud of me.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
20. I am mentally tougher than I thought I was.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
21. I have felt like a stranger within my family.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
22. It has been hard to get used to being in Canada again.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
23. I have become more responsive to my family's needs.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
24. I have a greater appreciation of life in Canada.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
25. I find the world to be a more horrible place than I thought it was.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
26. It has taken time to feel like myself again.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
27. I have realized how well off we are in Canada.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
28. I have been confused about my experiences during the tour.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
29. I feel my community appreciates my efforts overseas.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
30. I am more cynical about humanity.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
31. Being back in Canada has been a bit of a culture shock.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
32. I have a greater appreciation of the value of life.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
33. Focusing on things other than the tour has been difficult.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
34. I have become more involved in my family relationships.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
35. The tour has put a strain on my family life.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
36. Garrison life has been boring.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
37. I have had to get to know my family all over again.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
38. My enthusiasm for my job has grown.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
39. I am better able to deal with stress.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
40. Day-to-day work tasks seem tedious.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
41. I would have liked more leave to feel like myself again.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
42. I feel a stronger sense of teamwork within my unit.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
43. Getting myself back into the family routine has been difficult.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
44. I feel a lower sense of accomplishment at work.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
45. I have realized how important my family is to me.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
46. On a personal level, I have learned some positive things about myself.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
47. I have questioned my faith in humanity.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
48. I feel more self-reliant.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
49. I feel closer to my family.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
50. I find that my family would like me to spend more time with them.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
51. Getting back “into sync” with family life has been hard.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
52. I want to spend time with my buddies from the tour.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
53. I have been less productive at work.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
54. I have a greater willingness to be with my family.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
55. I feel my community has welcomed me.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
56. I find people here in Canada to be concerned about trivial things.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
57. People have made me feel proud to have served my country.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
58. I more fully appreciate the time I spend with my family.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
59. Readjusting to garrison routine has been tough.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
60. I feel my family resented my absence.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
61. I have a greater appreciation of the conveniences taken for granted in Canada.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
62. The people I work with respect the fact that I was on tour.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
63. I feel my family has had difficulty understanding me.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
64. Getting back to my “old self” has been hard.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
65. I wish I could spend time away from the people with whom I deployed.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
66. I feel I am a better soldier.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
67. I have changed my priorities in my life.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
68. I have a greater appreciation of each day.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
69. I am proud of having served overseas.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
70. I more fully appreciate the rights and freedoms taken for granted in Canada.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
71. I have developed stronger friendships.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
72. I feel my family has welcomed me.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
73. I have considered leaving the military.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5
74. I have a more positive perspective on what is important in life.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	O 5

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
75. I enjoy being back in garrison.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
76. I feel the tour has had a negative impact on my personal life.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

If you do not have a spouse/partner please skip the next two questions.

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
77. There has been conflict in my marriage or significant relationship.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
78. My spouse/partner has been reluctant to give up household decisions.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

If you do not have children please skip the next two questions.

SINCE RETURNING FROM MY OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT:

	Not at all True	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Completely True
79. I find my kid(s) have matured more than I expected.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
80. Relating to my kid(s) has been hard.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5
81. I feel my kid(s) resented my absence.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5

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(U) Expanding on previous research with Army personnel (Thompson & Gignac, 2001), this study investigated the post-deployment reintegration experiences of a sample of 95 Canadian Air Force (AF) personnel posted at seven different AF bases across Canada. A total of 14 semi-structured focus groups were held. The present report details the reintegration issues and experiences, both positive and negative, that these AF personnel identified in terms of four domains: personal, family, work, and cultural. Regarding personal reintegration, participants reported such positive changes as increased self-confidence, a renewed sense of purpose, and positive coping skills, but also negative changes, such as a sense of disconnection from others, a tendency towards anger, and a sense that they were "not themselves." In terms of family reintegration, participants spoke of a new appreciation for their family, but also of stresses on their children, family breakdowns, problems in dealing with changes in family dynamics, and family difficulties associated with rotational types (e.g., 56-day vs. 6-month). Regarding work reintegration, while participants reported some positive effects of deployment on their careers and commitment, they also noted numerous negative effects, such as lack of organizational recognition for their deployment efforts, staff shortages and other organizational problems, problems with leave policies and PERs, a sense of meaninglessness in their unit or wing, problems with psychological and medical follow-up, and the lack of a formal post-deployment process. In terms of cultural reintegration, some participants spoke of a new appreciation for life in Canada and of the support they felt from the Canadian public after deployment, whereas others were disappointed by the lack of support from the broader civilian community, or found that they were less tolerant of hearing "trivial" complaints from others after deployment. In addition to post-deployment issues, pre-deployment issues (e.g., inadequate pre-deployment preparation for members and families) and deployment issues (e.g., inadequate rear-party support for families) were also discussed, as were special problems faced by augmentees (e.g., social isolation, lack of recognition, and difficulties with team integration). Recommendations focused on the need for a standard post-deployment process that includes psychological and medical support, time for decompression, and a lessons learned process; pre-deployment and post-deployment briefings for members and their families; enhanced family/rear-party support during deployment; greater recognition and support from leaders; and a review of organizational policies (e.g., rotation types, leave policies).

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(U) Post-Deployment, Reintegration, Air Force, deployment

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