Strengthening the Primary Reserves – the Royal Canadian Artillery Perspective
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Supporting the Canadian Army (CA) through the provision of Firepower, Surveillance Target Acquisition, Air Defence and Air Space Coordination, The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery (RCA) is committed to the strengthening and integration of the Primary Reserves. From the Regular Force Close Support Regiments, The General Support Regiment, and The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery School, the RCA is leading the way through bold initiatives that are increasing interoperability and Corps capability; this article will briefly surmise some of the issues, actions, history and successes in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the RCA Primary Reserve.

While training, retention, and force generation concerns are common across all Corps within the CA, the RCA faces unique challenges due to the demands of Firepower. It is important to note that the organization of the three Close Support Regular Force Artillery Regiments is comprised of 20% Primary Reservists, and are an integral part of their establishment. There are three streams within the RCA (Field Artillery, Surveillance Target Acquisition (STA), and Air Defence); however Field Artillery is the predominate stream within the Artillery Reserves. Therefore, augmentation to the Regular Force is generally limited to Field Artillery. However, under the recent Army Reserve Employment (ARE) review, the RCA is boldly moving forward to introduce STA as an entirely new stream for Primary Reserves, which will maintain symmetry between the Regular and Reserve Force. This initiative will also allow for Primary Reserves to support 4th Artillery Regiment (General Support), RCA in their mandate.

Equipment differences and the consequential training disparities between the Regular and Reserve Force is another area where identified issues are being aggressively minimized through Divisional partnerships. For example, whereas the Regular Force has transitioned to the 155mm M777 howitzer, the Artillery Reserves continue to use 105mm guns, creating a delta in terms of capability, capacity, and training. 4th Canadian Division, under Operation REINFORCEMENT, is leading the way in Strengthening the Primary Reserves, as 2nd Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery is working with their Primary Reserve counterparts to run conversion courses. This training enables the Primary Reserve to provide Gunners that can potentially deploy as ROTO 0 augmentees, far above-and-beyond the mandated ROTO 1 role they currently fulfil.

The Chief of Defence Staff, through an Initiating Directive, identified the Strengthening the Primary Reserve as a critical component of the Canadian Armed Forces’ ability to contribute across the full spectrums of operations, with Public Duties listed as a required capability. Further, the Commander of the CA has determined that his element will take the lead in establishing a self-sustaining, year-round Public Duties capability in the National Capital Region (NCR). In this vein, 30th Field Artillery Regiment, RCA, located in Ottawa, Ontario, continues to operate a high-visibility program that positively frames Gunners as an integral part of National events and celebrations. With an aim of continuing current and identifying additional potential Public Duties, the RCA is well poised to maintain pan-Canadian awareness of the Primary Reserve, with High School Co-op programs as a growth market. 42nd Field Artillery Regiment
(Lanark and Renfrew Scottish), RCA, in Pembroke, Ontario, has capitalized on the potential of this program, as they have set and met ambitious recruitment targets, and serve as a model for other RCA units to follow.

It is clear that despite some of the aforementioned challenges, the Canadian Armed Forces, Canadian Army, and Corps leadership are taking bold action to strengthen the Primary Reserves and close the divide between the Regular Force. Further, both the recent history and institutional makeup of the RCA has demonstrated the ability of Gunners to surmount equipment and training issues. Artillery Reserve units across Canada successfully reinforced the Regular Force Close Support Regiments during the War in Afghanistan, and provided over 20% of Gunners deployed on expeditionary duty. These augmentees were imperative to mission success, and returned to their home units replete with new experiences, qualifications, and abilities. Institutionally, the RCA is supported by The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery School (RCAS), which as a Centre of Excellence, provides world-class Individual Training to both the Regular and Reserve Force Gunners. The RCAS, in conjunction with the Canadian Division Training Centres, ensures that Artillerymen across Canada receive relevant, common, and realistic instruction to enable mission success and operational excellence. Further, the RCAS offers trimestral employment opportunities to Primary Reservists, who provide vital support to National Calendar training by augmenting W Battery. Upon their arrival at Base Gagetown, these Gunners are qualified on the M777 howitzer, and receive other unique experiences and qualifications that they are able to bring back to their respective home units.

Ultimately, the RCA depends upon a family of Regular and Reserve Artillerymen to deploy and sustain operationally effective Artillery units. While the high-readiness Regular Force components of the RCA span a broad spectrum of capability, they depend upon a well-trained, well equipped Primary Reserve force to provide vital augmentation. Therefore, the strengthening of the Primary Reserve is a vital component of ensuring the sustainability of the RCA for success during enduring missions. Strengthening the Primary Reserve continues to provide additional capacity in the training of a competent and capable Reserve Force that provides vital Fire Support, STA, and AD to the Canadian Army.

Photo Credit: Tactics School ALSC
Photo Caption: Integration in Action: W Battery of The Royal Regiment of Artillery School qualified both Regular Force and Primary Reserve augmentees on a recent Gun Detachment Second-in-Command course.