

REVIVING THE CITIZEN'S CONNECTION WITH THE MILITARY

Rob Roy

This article highlights Breakout Educational Network efforts to revive military training in civilian universities.

A hundred years ago this year, a military training program was launched at McGill University to help students develop the initiative, self-discipline, and sense of citizenship they would need to become leaders in the military, business and politics. In due course, the program spread across the country. At its height in the mid-1950s, it had approximately 3000 officer-cadets undergoing training in some 60 reserve units at 35 universities.

The program was known variously as the Canadian Officer Training Corps or COTC, the University Naval Training Division or UNTD, and the University Reserve Training Program or URTP. When it was abolished in 1968, leadership, citizenship and service were no longer part of a university education.

The reason for the demise of the program had nothing to do with its merits. Mostly, it was a short-sighted effort to economize. But the program's abolition was not cost-free. One of the consequences was the progressive disconnect between the universities and the Canadian Forces – and, inevitably, between citizens and the men and women in uniform who serve and defend them. That disconnect led directly to a decline in general knowledge about the role of the Canadian Forces in society, to lower defence budgets, to a decrease in military capabilities, and to what General Hillier once described as “the decade of darkness”.

Now a unique public policy organization called the Breakout Educational Network is organizing a citizen-based effort to re-launch the training program under the name of the Canadian National Leadership Program or CNLP. It is an effort that has been meeting with interest and success, largely due to two considerations which have driven Breakout's approach.

The first is that Breakout is committed to putting ideas into action. In Canada, too much public discussion of policy issues that matter to Canadians never gets beyond illuminating prob-

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lems. The second, as Dr. Douglas Bland often reminds people, is that responsibility for the defense of Canada ultimately rests with the citizens of Canada.

The Seven Year Project

This initiative is the culmination of seven years of work by Breakout, whose motto is “policy you can see.” Breakout uses “video research” to investigate policy, and to inform and influence Canadians. And it is through video research and development that Breakout's 7 Year Project was set-up to re-connect Canadians with the military as a national institution. See www.sevenyearproject.com

The venture began with a five-part documentary series “A QUESTION OF HONOUR” which took a critical look at “the decade of darkness” through the eyes of those who were there. The series was nominated for two Gemini Awards in 2004; for Best Documentary Series and for Best Director.

The work on the series produced the insight that the largest and most important problem facing the Canadian military was its disconnect from the Canadian public. To bring the issue to wider public attention, Breakout produced television documentaries on Canada's whole-of-government campaign in Afghanistan, on defence procurement, and on the role of the Reserves. The initiative benefitted greatly from the support of an advisory board of prominent Canadians led by Senator Pamela Wallin, currently the chair of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, and such notables as William Rompkey, Hugh Segal, John Fraser, Bill Graham, John Rankin, Jean Thérèse Riley, John Scott Cowan, Jack Granatstein, and Neville Poy. Doug Bland is a member of Breakout's Board of Directors.

Students of strategy are familiar with Clausewitz's observation that the “remarkable trinity of the people, the army and the government” forms the essential basis of military operations and the nation's center of gravity. So Breakout set out to rectify the civil-military disconnect, not through urging the government or the military to fix the problem, but through undertaking a citizen-based initiative in the citizen's own interests. The initiative took two forms: the Canadian National Leadership Program and the Garrison Community Councils.

The Canadian National Leadership Program (CNLP)

The CNLP targets universities and students, Canada's future leaders, with a revived and contemporary version of the earli-

er university-based training programs focusing on leadership, citizenship and nation-building.

What would an officer training program on university campuses look like today? When Breakout set out to find the answer, it turned out that the experience of the earlier programs wasn't shrouded in the mists of time. A large number of today's most prominent Canadians in business, academia, politics, the arts and the military point to their formative experiences with the COTC, UNTD and URTP at university to help explain the successes they achieved in life and the contributions they were able to make to Canada. Breakout's film "NO COUNTRY FOR YOUNG MEN" traces the rise and fall of the earlier programs, in the words of people instantly recognizable to most Canadians. "A Canadian success story that was thrown away."

Also, it turned out that programs like the COTC in other countries, begun around the same time, continue to thrive today. Breakout's second film in this series, "FOR QUEEN & COUNTRY", tells the story of the highly regarded leadership program at Cambridge University in the UK. This film was based on original research by Dr. Neville Poy, the internationally renowned surgeon and Hon. Colonel Emeritus of the Queen's York Rangers. The film follows students in the British Army's university officer training program, and speaks with graduates, leaders in industry and government, and military officers about the remarkable achievements of the program.

A third film is due to be completed shortly on the role that the university-based Reserve Officers' Training Corps program in the United States has played in advancing civil-military relations in that country. Banned from some Ivy League colleges since the era of the Vietnam War, ROTC has recently returned to campus at Harvard, Yale, Columbia and other "elite" institutions.

In Canada, the films have been generating a good deal of support for the idea of returning a COTC-like training program, with suitable updating, to Canadian universities. Renamed the Canadian National Leadership Program (CNLP), Canadian universities are becoming aware of the leadership training potential of the program and beginning to look at how to bring it on campus.

In the lead is the University of Alberta which has committed to running a four-year pilot project on a cost shared basis. Breakout has also received expressions of interest from several other universities and endorsements from university presidents at Guelph, McGill, UNB, Brock and Dalhousie.

As Breakout has drawn attention to the benefits which university-based leadership training could generate across society, interest is clearly on the rise – from the highest levels of government to Parliament, business, the military and the media. In December 2011, the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence recommended action. In its interim report Answering the Call: The Future Role of Canada's Primary Reserve, the Committee wrote:

The Reserves' longstanding role as the Canadian Forces' link with Canadian communities should be formally and more clearly defined. As part of this, DND/CF should consider re-establishing a military presence on the campuses of educational institutions, as used to be the case with the Canadian Officer Training Corps. The Canadian National Leadership Program provides a private-public partnership model for the training of Canada's future leaders.

In January 2012, the Conference of Defence Associations (CDA) applauded the Senate report. In February, CDA provided Breakout an opportunity to air a short film on the CNLP and GCC initiatives at this year's Ottawa Conference on Defence and Security.

The Garrison Community Council

The Garrison Community Council initiative also promotes the enhancement of ties between Canadians and their military through the parallel objective of reinforcing grassroots connections between local communities and Canadian Forces establishments and personnel present in those communities. The intent is to offer citizens avenues for expressing their interest and support for the military in very practical ways.

The GCC concept first took root in London, Ontario, where civic and community leaders took the initiative to connect with local military garrisons and units in the region. In just a few years, the concept has been successfully transplanted to half a dozen other communities and interest is now being shown from Victoria to Pictou and places in between such as Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Regina, Winnipeg, Montreal, Hamilton and the Niagara Region.

Each GCC is autonomous, organized locally, with programs to match local requirements. Most reflect interest in one or more of three areas of activity:

Enhancing and sustaining cultural and historical links between the civilian and military communities;

- Providing visible and tangible means of support to military families;
- Developing, promoting, publicizing and coordinating events, projects, celebrations, and educational programs for the mutual benefit of both communities.

GCCs have hosted military appreciation days, reintroduced military levées, restored historical monuments, constructed community park and recreational facilities, launched service programs for military families and veterans, funded Military Family Resource Centres, opened up educational opportunities, and the like.

Conclusion

As Canada's mission in Afghanistan winds down and fiscal conditions impose their constraints on Canadian defence budgets, it is more important than ever that relations between citizens and the Canadian Forces remain strong. The CNLP and GCC can help ensure that Canada will have the leaders it needs in future generations, that civilians and their military will understand how important is the role each plays in the fortunes of the other, and that Canada remains the secure democratic society it is today.