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ADP010373

TITLE: The Canadian Forces Officer Selection
System

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The Canadian Forces Officer Selection System

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Summary: This paper provides a brief overview of the officer selection process for the Canadian Forces. The current size of the Canadian Forces and officer applicant and enrollee statistics for the main enrollment plans are included. The applicant processing sequence is described in general. Applicant attributes assessed in the selection interview and areas used to assign a specific occupation are discussed. Specific selection instruments, including aptitude testing, medical evaluation, the selection interview and fitness testing are described, and the use of these sources of information in the decision process is reviewed. Finally, the Naval Officer Assessment Board and the Air Crew selection procedures are described.

1. Overview of Officer Selection in the Canadian Forces

While Canada is a large country, it has a small population (estimated to be just over 30,300,000 in 1998) and maintains a relatively small military, called the Canadian Forces. The Canadian Forces is made up of two main components: the Regular Force and the Primary Reserves. The Regular Force is Canada's standing full-time military service; while it is mandated at a strength of 60,000 members, as of July, 1999, the effective strength was approximately 57,500 members, of which approximately 12,800 are officers. The composition of the Regular Force reflects the linguistic make-up of the country, with approximately 27% of the Regular Force Canadian Forces being Francophones and 73% Anglophones. As of April, 1997, the approximate strength of the Primary Reserve was 31,000, of which approximately 4300 were officers. Where the Regular Force entails full-time, career oriented military service, the Primary Reserve predominately involves part-time military employment. Reserve members typically parade one or two evenings a week with a Reserve unit and participate in weekend exercises. Full-time employment is usually available in the summer; however, some Reserve members do serve on full-time contracts, and often augment the Regular Force.

Applicants to the Canadian Forces are processed at Canadian Forces Recruiting Centres, which are located in major cities throughout the country. Selection processing of Regular and Reserve Force officer applicants is the same, and trained Reserve officers are able to transfer into the Regular Force. In the 1998-1999 fiscal year, there were 1869 Regular Force officer applicants of which 842 were

enrolled in the Regular Force. In the 1998-1999 fiscal year there were 398 Reserve Force officer applicants. The files of suitable candidates are forwarded to the Reserve units to make an enrolment decision; 201 files were forwarded.

There are a number of Canadian Forces officer entry programs. The primary Regular Force entry program is the Regular Officer Training Plan. Approximately 400 officer candidates were enrolled through this program in the 1997-1998 fiscal year, with 450 forecast to be enrolled in the 1998-1999 fiscal year. This plan includes education at the Royal Military College or at civilian Canadian universities. The next most common means of entry is as a Direct Entry Officer. These applicants already hold a university degree or technologist diploma in a suitable discipline; 223 applicants enrolled as Direct Entry Officers in the 1998-1999 fiscal year. The Officer Candidate Training Plan is a program for applicants with a high school leaving certificate to enter certain occupations that do not have specific university degree requirements. This plan will be phased out by 2002 in order to comply with the policy that officers have a university level education; only 42 applicants enrolled under this program in the 1998-1999 fiscal year. The final type of entry program includes subsidized special education. This applies to such programs as the Medical Officer Training Plan and Dental Officer Training Plan, where medical and dental students can have up to the last three years of their program subsidized, followed by a period of obligatory service in the Canadian Forces. Only 15 applicants enrolled in these programs in the 1998-1999 fiscal year.

Applicant processing follows the same general sequence for all officer entry programs. Processing is a blend of multiple hurdle and compensatory models. The first step is a check of basic eligibility requirements. All applicants must be between the minimum and maximum enrolment ages, must be Canadian citizens and must not have outstanding obligations to the judicial system; applicants who have engaged in sexual misconduct will normally not be enrolled. All applicants must be willing to comply with the Canadian Forces policy on discrimination, harassment and racism. If a candidate meets the basic eligibility requirements, they must meet the standard on the Canadian Forces Aptitude Test. If they meet this standard, a reliability check is performed. This procedure includes a check of criminal records and a credit check. The applicant receives a medical examination and must meet military medical standards.

If the applicant meets the medical standard, the applicant is then interviewed. The interviewer generates a report, in which the applicant is given a Military Potential rating and, if the program includes academic subsidization, an Academic Potential rating. Included in the interview is an assessment of drug use, which can affect eligibility for enrolment.

Following processing at the Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre, candidate files are sent to a centralized board. This documentation includes the selection interview report, two letters of reference and academic transcripts. For the Regular Officer Training Plan, documentation is also sent to the Royal Military College for an additional assessment of academic suitability. The purpose of the board is to compare all officer candidates on a consistent, national standard. The board produces a "merit list", which rank orders the applicants on the basis of suitability. The final selection decision made at the Canadian Forces Recruiting Services Headquarters, which uses the merit list provided by the selection board. Prior to enrolment, all applicants must meet the Canadian Forces minimum physical fitness standard.

2. Officer Candidate Assessment

The selection interview is conducted by two Military Career Counselors whenever possible. The Military Career Counselor is typically a junior officer from a Canadian Forces operational occupation. The Military Career Counselor receives specialized training in recruiting procedures and will serve from three to five years at a Recruiting Centre before returning to an operational environment. In addition, specialist Personnel Selection officers are also employed at major Recruiting Centres.

The "Recruiter's Handbook" clearly lays out the assessment process. The handbook states that "the aim of the assessment process is to evaluate the applicant's potential for successful integration into the Canadian Forces, particularly during basic and initial (military occupation) training". The selection interview format is semi-structured. Applicants are assessed on the following attributes, which are considered as contributing to success in initial military training and employment:

- a. Academic Achievement,
- b. Accepting Criticism,
- c. Conformity to Rules,
- d. Initiative,
- e. Motivation towards the Canadian Forces,
- f. Oral Communication,
- g. Performance under Stress,
- h. Perseverance,
- i. Physical Endurance,
- j. Team-work,
- k. Learning Potential, and
- l. Leadership Skills.

The Recruiters Handbook describes the following as Leadership Skills: "willingness to assume responsibility for group activity; and performance; the ability to prepare and plan group activities; effective communication to a group; the ability to direct and organize others towards the completion of a tasks; the ability to stimulate high group morale and performance; the ability to resolve disputes and maintain group harmony".

Assignment to a specific occupation is also addressed in the selection interview. The Recruiter's Handbook lists the following areas to be probed when assessing suitability for a particular occupation:

- a. Motivation,
- b. Work experience,
- c. Education,
- d. Occupation knowledge, and
- e. Applicant interests, likes and dislikes.

These factors must be considered in assigning an occupation, and the Handbook summarizes the process by stating "particular care shall be taken to ensure that the applicant has a thorough understanding and realistic expectations of the occupation being considered".

3. Selection Instruments

A. Canadian Forces Aptitude Test

The Canadian Forces Aptitude Test is used as a screening measure to ensure officer candidates demonstrate a minimum level of cognitive ability. The test covers three domains: verbal ability, spatial ability, and problem solving ability. The applicant has the choice of writing either the English or French version of the test. Currently, the test is paper and pencil only and takes about an hour to administer; a computerized version has been developed but has not yet been implemented in the Recruiting Centres. The minimum standard is the twenty-fifth percentile relative to the officer applicant normative sample. Separate norms are maintained for the two languages.

B. Medical

All applicants must meet the medical standards for their respective occupation and the common enrolment medical standard for the Canadian Forces. Six factors are assessed, and these are referred to as a medical category. The factors are visual acuity, colour vision, hearing, geographical limitations, occupational limitations, and the air factor. The geographical factor is "based on the effects that environment, accommodation, living conditions and medical care available would have on the medical status of a member". The occupational factor reflects the limitations that physical or mental disabilities place

upon a military member's capability and performance of duties. The air factor assesses medical limitations to serving as aircrew.

C. Selection Interview

The attributes described above in the officer candidate assessment are considered in giving an overall rating of Military Potential. The Recruiters Handbook defines the Military Potential rating as the "probability of initial military success". The rating is given on a nine-point scale, ranging from "1" being substantially below average to "9" being substantially above average. Applicants assigned a rating of "1" or "2" (below average) are considered unsuitable for

enrolment. In addition, for programs that include academic subsidization, an Academic Potential rating is also assigned. This rating is also given on a nine point scale, and is based on the applicant's academic achievement.

D. Fitness Test

A physical fitness test was introduced in June 1997. Prior to enrolment, all applicants must meet the minimum physical fitness standard. The test is conducted primarily by contractors registered with the Canadian Society of Exercise Physiologists. The standards are given in the following table.

<u>Test Item</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Push-ups		
Under 35 years of age	19	9
35 and older	14	7
Sit-ups		
Under 35	19	15
35 and over	17	12
Hand Grip		
Under 35	75 kg	50 kg
35 and over	73 kg	48 kg

Aerobic Fitness Equivalent to acceptable rating for 2.4 km run

Aerobic fitness is measured using a step test, which involves the candidate walking up and down a step apparatus at a regulated speed. The candidate's heart rate is measured at prescribed intervals to determine

the fitness level. The step test equivalent is the time required to complete a 2.4 km run, with the acceptable and superior standard given in the following table.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	<u>Acceptable</u>	<u>Superior</u>	<u>Acceptable</u>	<u>Superior</u>
Under 30 years	11:56-10:13	Under 10:13	14:26-12:36	Under 12:36
30-34	12:26-10:35	Under 10:15	14:55-12:57	Under 12:57
35-39	12:56-10:58	Under 10:58	15:25-13:27	Under 13:27
40-44	13:25-11:12	Under 11:12	15:55-13:57	Under 13:57
45-49	13:56-11:27	Under 11:27	16:25-14:26	Under 14:26
50-54	14:25-11:57	Under 11:57	16:54-14:56	Under 14:56
55 and over	14:56-12:27	Under 12:27	17:24-15:27	Under 15:27

4. The Decision Process

All officer applicant files are reviewed by a central board. The board uses rationally developed protocols for each officer occupation which reflect the relative importance of key factors for success. The board members are usually members of the occupation for which the candidate is being assessed and an "honest broker" from another occupation. The board places the applicant on a merit list, from which candidates are selected in a "top-down" method.

5. The System Utility

Present research focuses on the ability of the candidate to pass the Basic Officer Training Course. This is one of the first training "hurdles" that a new officer candidate must complete when accepted by the Canadian Forces. The present research program includes testing of students on the course with various cognitive and personality measures, followed by the correlation of test results with course performance results. The Royal Military College conducts its own research on the factors that predict success, with a focus on academic success. Recently, an analysis has

been undertaken of the Naval Officer Assessment Board (described in the next section) which was reinstated in 1996. Finally, validation of the Canadian Automated Pilot Selection System (described in the next section) is ongoing.

smoothness of operation and avoidance of over-corrections; and, co-ordination of flight controls.

6. Special Interest Topics

A. Naval Officer Assessment Board

The Naval Officer Assessment Board replaces the selection board in the processing of naval officers. The Naval Officer Assessment Board follows assessment at the Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre. The Naval Officer Assessment Board is typically used in assessing naval officers who will proceed directly to military training, rather than to subsidized academic training.

The Naval Officer Assessment Board is made up of two main components: candidate orientation and assessment. The orientation component is intended to give candidates a realistic expectation of naval training and service. The most recent board included formal and informal information sessions with senior and junior naval officers, and ship tours. The assessment component includes the "Passage Planning Tests", which is intended to measure the cognitive abilities relevant to performing the duties of an entry-level naval officer. The assessment also includes a structured interview board, which is made up of senior naval officers. The stated purpose of the board is to assess "such elements as decisiveness, initiative and achievement motivation". The board also conducts a file review, which evaluates the candidate's background and experience, "addressing such factors as employment history, educational achievement and learning ability".

B. Air Crew Selection

Aircrew selection is an additional step in applicant processing which follows assessment at the Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre; the results are central to the final selection board decision. Air Navigator applicants write a battery of five cognitive tests, which require a total administration time of two hours. Pilot applicants are assessed using the Canadian Automated Pilot Selection System, a single engine light aircraft flight simulator. The Canadian Automated Pilot Selection System syllabus consists of four sessions, each of approximately one hour duration. Over the course of each session, the system monitors and records the output from 10 flight instruments twice per second. The resulting 250,000 data points are converted into Summary Measures, which research found to be predictive of outcomes at Basic and Primary flight training. The Summary Measures assess the following broad areas: accuracy in maintaining prescribed flight parameters; speed of response to errors/warnings; variability in performance;