Canada's Eyes and Ears in Northern Communities: Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Rangers

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> Mr. Speaker, for the past 50 years the Canadian Rangers have acted as guides and advisors to the Canadian Forces as well as performing search and rescue duties in northern remote and isolated communities often in harsh weather conditions. The majority of Canadian Rangers are aboriginal, often unilingual, who have served Canada for more than 50 years … I congratulate all Canadian Rangers for their outstanding dedication, and on behalf of all Canadians, thank them for their work and contribution to our great country. *Mutna*. Thank you.
>
> – Nancy Karetak-Lindell, MP [Nunavut],
> to the House of Commons, 14 February 2000

The Canadian Rangers remain one of the least known elements in the Canadian Forces, despite their unique contribution to Canadian defence. Officially established as a component of the military reserves in 1947, the Rangers continue to serve as the military's 'eyes and ears' in isolated, remote, and coastal regions of this vast country. Aboriginal peoples make up more than half of the force's strength, and their service is an important, visible contribution to Canadian sovereignty and security. This overview introduces the history of Aboriginal peoples' participation in the Rangers since the Second World War and provides a brief analysis of recent activities and contributions. The partnership that underlies the Canadian Rangers allows this force to fulfil operational requirements that are vital to the Canadian Forces, and contributes to capacity building in Northern communities.

The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers

Little attention was devoted to domestic defence in the first four decades of the twentieth century. 'Canada is a fireproof house, far from inflammable materials,' Senator Raoul Dandurand proclaimed in the 1920s (Lackenbauer

2007, 34). Most shared his view until the Second World War. Following the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Canadian government faced increasing pressures from worried residents on the west coast, who cried out for protection from possible attack. Although a full-scale Japanese invasion was unlikely, the federal government had to find a way to create a military presence in remote and sparsely populated areas where it would be too expensive to station full-time soldiers. As a result, the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR) was formed in August 1942. The Rangers would be voluntary 'citizen-soldiers' who would help to defend Canada while pursuing their ordinary jobs and lifestyles. Their explicit duties were to patrol their local area, to report any findings of a suspicious nature, and to fight using guerrilla tactics in the case of enemy invasion. At its peak the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers comprised 14,849 British Columbians – many of them trappers, loggers, and fishermen – in 126 companies located in isolated communities from the Queen Charlotte Islands to the American border.[1]

Given the demographic and geographical realities of British Columbia, Aboriginal peoples made 'natural' Rangers in the eyes of journalists. 'Indians, with knowledge of trails that are charted imperfectly,' the *Vancouver Sun* noted on 6 March 1942, were 'given a chance to do heroic work in defence of a province … impregnable against the yellow menace through intelligent, understanding manning of its contours and natural barriers.' During the war, journalists readily embraced opportunities to highlight Indian patriotism, holding this up as a model for all Canadians to emulate (Sheffield 2004). The Native Rangers were depicted accordingly. 'Indicative of the way the Indians are backing the war effort,' one journalist highlighted, 'was the 102-year-old Dog Creek Indian who offered his services as a guide or marksman and pointed back to a long, successful career as suitable qualifications.' He was made an Honorary Ranger for his sincere offer (Angus 1943). In general terms, the PCMR gave Aboriginal peoples a chance to serve in the defence of their communities, while continuing their daily employment and traditional activities.

The community-based nature of this wartime force makes it difficult to generalize on a province-wide level. Perhaps the best way to give a sense of what the Rangers meant to Aboriginal communities is by looking closely at one region in particular. The Nisga'a have lived in the Nass Valley on the northwest coast since time immemorial. Volunteers rallied to defend their villages against Japanese attack; after all, 'the Nass Valley is the closest part of the Canadian mainland to Japan and a long way from the cities to the south' (Boston 1996, 240). In this light, Nisga'a representatives approached the Indian agent at Prince Rupert in mid-1942 and told him

that they wanted to be organized into a PCMR company. The agent began to organize the Rangers in several Nass Valley communities and found a great deal of enthusiasm (Kardex Collection 1942–3). In late February 1943, Ranger instructor Brendan Kennelly arrived by boat at Kincolith Bay. He was greeted by eighty Kitkatla Rangers from the local community, who were flying the Union Jack, as well as by a twenty-five-piece brass band and forty members of the Indian Women's Red Cross Society. The officer commanding the 'all-Indian' Ranger company, fisherman Arthur Nelson, marched the procession through 'the village to the sounds of martial music and the beating of drums.' The Nisga'a community was evidently patriotic and involved, with 'Indian chiefs of their respective districts' serving as Ranger officers. At the same time, these leaders were strongly against the government conscripting their young men (forcing them to join the military) for overseas service, claiming that 'they have shown their loyalty and that Queen Victoria told them they would never have to fight unless they wanted to.' This stated, the Aboriginal communities fully supported the defence of their homeland. 'All the Indians of these parts are strongly and enthusiastically … for the Ranger organization,' Kennelly reported. 'They see in it their opportunity to do their bit & to be prepared to help in home defence in country … and in terrain & surroundings with which they were familiar and in which they would be most useful.' Over thirty more Rangers joined up during his visit, bringing the strength of the Kincolith unit to more than two hundred people (Kardex Collection 1943a).

On 26 March 1943 the *Globe and Mail* reported to its national audience that BC coast Indians had formed two complete PCMR units. 'At Port Simpson and Kincolith … the members of two companies meet regularly to drill and study the tactics of modern war,' it explained. 'Fully aware of the role they will play if the Japanese attack the west coast and imbued with the spirit of their warrior forefathers, they take their training seriously.' Captain Kennelly reported that on one occasion 'several of the Indians travelled 52 miles on foot over the frozen surface of the Nass River to tidewater, then rowed eight miles to meet him.' The leaders of the Aiyansh, Greenville (Laxgalts'ap), and Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw) Rangers were anxious to discuss guerilla tactics with the instructor, who 'pleased them by saying we advocated the Rangers train to fight like "Indians" and not like soldiers and they began to recall their forefathers' days of fighting with the Alaskan and outer island tribes (Kardex Collection 1943a; *Globe and Mail* 1943; Boston 1996, 63, 65). In due course the Rangers in the communities along the Nass River elected their own officers and non-commissioned officers by secret ballot, and the respective Indian councils and Indian agent approved these recommendations (Kardex Collection 1942, 1943b).

On the whole, Aboriginal peoples represented a minority of the enlistments in the entire PCMR, but they did make a vital contribution in several areas, particularly along the extensive – and vulnerable – Pacific coastline. They served as guides and scouts for soldiers on active service and shared their homeland expertise. When six Nisga'a Rangers attended the training school at Sardis, reports of their exceptional performance so impressed the commander of the army's mountain and jungle warfare school that he requested they serve as instructors for soldiers who came through to train (Kardex Collection 1944; Steeves 1990, 57). More typically, PCMR members from Aboriginal communities provided important operational intelligence to the military, reporting unusual activities and phenomena (such as Japanese bomb-carrying balloons) until the war's end in September 1945 (Kardex Collection 1945).

Thankfully there was no large-scale invasion of British Columbia during the Second World War. Nevertheless, the Rangers played an important role in reassuring their communities that they would be safe in case of attack and in providing other military units with intelligence on local areas and unusual occurrences. In the words of official historian C.P. Stacey, 'had there been any active operations on the coast, this force would certainly have played a useful part' (1955, 174). As the war in the Pacific drew to a close, the government decided to disband the PCMR. In peacetime they would reassess whether the need existed for a voluntary home defence force along similar lines.

The Canadian Rangers

Canadians hoped that the end of the war would bring a period of peace and international stability, but instead, the superpowers of the atomic age – the United States and the Soviet Union – became locked in a cold war. The federal government in Ottawa had hoped to avoid the costs and complications of maintaining a large military force in peacetime, but in the Cold War the Arctic took on greater importance than ever before. The Canadian North[2] was the likely front in a future war between the superpowers, and the Americans lobbied Ottawa to have access for defensive purposes. The Canadian government faced a dilemma: the country had to be defended from potential enemies, and if Canadians were not prepared to do so themselves, the Americans would do it anyway, thereby threatening Canadian sovereignty. Furthermore, the government did not want to pay large numbers of combat forces in the North, so they sought an inexpensive solution. As Kenneth Eyre explains, 'neither the United States nor Canada looked on the North as a *place* to be protected because of some

intrinsic value. Rather it was a seen as a *direction*, an exposed flank' (Eyre 1987, 294).

The Canadian Rangers, a new force created in 1947, provided a feasible solution. It drew upon the tradition of the PCMR but was extended nationally rather than being limited to the Pacific coast. Like its predecessor, the Canadian Rangers comprised part-time, unpaid volunteers who carried out military duties on a daily basis alongside their civilian lives. Each armed with only a .303 rifle, one hundred rounds of ammunition each year, and an armband, they had – and have – as their official purpose the provision of a military presence in the northern, coastal, and isolated areas of Canada that are sparsely settled and cannot be covered conveniently or economically by other elements of the Canadian Armed Forces.

In peacetime the Rangers had several roles. They acted as guides for southern troops on exercises in their region, drawing upon their intimate knowledge of the local area. This was important, given that the regular airborne troops, who would be dropped into the North in case of invasion, would require guidance from people who actually knew the lay of the land. Furthermore, the Rangers prepared local defence schemes with police authorities to discover and apprehend enemy agents or saboteurs and to report other suspicious activities. As the Rangers, in their civilian jobs, were out on the land in their local areas on a daily basis, this detection role seemed logical. Furthermore, the Rangers could provide rescue parties for civilian and military purposes when required. In wartime their roles also included watching the coast and providing local defences against small enemy detachments or saboteurs (Hitsman 1960, 4–5).

Given the demographics of isolated and remote areas – particularly in the North – military officials contemplated the role for Aboriginal Canadians in the force. Opinions were mixed. Major-General Chris Vokes dismissed the Aboriginal population of northern Ontario as worthwhile contributors to Canadian defence. 'The population is for the most part Cree Indian, some with Scottish names and blue eyes who exist by trapping and guiding for goose and duck hunters in the Autumn.' His derogatory assessment drew upon prevailing stereotypes: 'They are most indolent and unreliable and born lazy. Hunger is the only motivating force, plus the propagation of their race, at which they are very adept … I doubt the value of these Indians in a paramilitary organization.' The tenor of the general officer commanding at Quebec headquarters was much more positive regarding potential Aboriginal contributions. He recognized that 'the Eskimos and Indians living in isolated communities were excellent marksmen and probably would use the annual 100-round allotment of ammunition (the only remuneration they received) for hunting seal and reindeer' (LAC 1948a). This would

be perfectly acceptable, in his eyes, as these hunters would be out on the land honing their rifle skills while at the same time providing food for their communities. The integration of Aboriginal peoples into the Rangers, with their intimate knowledge of the land and northern survival skills, was a perceived benefit. This latter, more encouraging view prevailed over the long term.

To turn the Rangers from a concept into a functioning organization, with only a shoestring budget, took time and dedication. The military, with little presence in northern and isolated regions of the country – particularly north of the tree line – had to draw upon regional and local expertise to establish Ranger units across this vast area. Members of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachments, Hudson's Bay Company factors, and missionaries helped to organize local platoons and often served as platoon and company commanders. These were the rare non-Native individuals who stayed in northern communities long enough to maintain stability in the organization, and the federal government still believed that only 'White' men made suitable Ranger commanders (Hitsman 1960, 6–7, 10, 13, 14, 16).

Ranger units, their ranks filled with northern Aboriginal peoples, began to spread across the Arctic in the late 1940s and 1950s.[3] In 1949, for example, an intelligence officer with the army's Western Command tagged along with a medical doctor from Indian Health Services and established Ranger platoons in the western Arctic at Coppermine (Kugluktuk), Bathurst Inlet, Cambridge Bay, King William Land, Read Island, Holman Island, Aklavik, and Norman Wells (LAC 1949–50). Similarly, the military authorized the formation of companies on Baffin Island in 1951 – senior officials in Ottawa responsible for Eskimo Affairs believed that Ranger service would also be good for the Inuit. One official stressed that the Inuit were 'reliable, honest and intelligent and would make good Rangers,' but he also wanted to make sure that rifles issued to them were not 'free handouts.' After all, a rifle was 'a major asset to an Eskimo and something he had to earn by hard work,' and bullets for hunting cost significant money (LAC 1951). To others, the weapon and ammunition provided to the Rangers was seen as a quid pro quo – the Rangers served their country, and this was the remuneration they received. 'Nobody has ever attempted to calculate, or could if one wanted to, the number of caribou, moose, and seal that fell to Ranger marksmen,' Kenneth Eyre noted (1981, 178). Undoubtedly, the number would be substantial.

By the early 1950s the Canadian Rangers organization had taken its basic shape, and several Ranger units began to participate in annual training exercises with full-time, professional soldiers. The Rangers 'easily outdistanced and outpaced the enemy' – a product of their knowledge of both the land

and the movement in their home environment – even if they had difficulty passing along accurate information (Hitsman 1960, 19–21; LAC 1948b). In February 1954, Exercise Loup Garou was held near Sept-Îles, Quebec, to test the military's airborne capabilities in winter. However, it was not the professional soldiers that captured the attention of journalists. The 'local Canadian Rangers outfit made up of Indians, woodsmen and trappers … are emerging as the heroes of this fast-paced Arctic exercise,' the *Ottawa Citizen* reported. The Rangers served as the local defence force against the Royal Canadian Regiment and used cover and concealment in the surrounding woods, which they knew intimately, to take out their 'enemy's' positions. 'During the night Col. Trudeau sent out probing patrols aided by Indian Rangers who played a key role – even if these night operations were somewhat "restricted" by the Indians' inability to read maps' (*Ottawa Citizen* 1954; Kardex Collection 1945–54). In numerous exercises the Rangers earned praise from army officers for their roles as guides and scouts (Taylor 1956). The cooperation was intimate, and mock exercises allowed both the regular force and the Ranger units to learn from one another.

There was no discussion of dismantling the Ranger program in the 1950s and 1960s. For very minimal cost the military had a permanent presence in the North, and the popular articles that appeared on the Rangers were laudable. In 1959 Larry Dignum told readers of the *Beaver* magazine that this 'Shadow Army of the North' quietly performed its valuable duties to defend Canada and maintain law and order in isolated areas. The Rangers' mystique was clear: 'When on duty they wear a scarlet armband with the three maple leaves of the Canadian Army superimposed on a crossed rifle and axe. They have no uniforms, receive no pay, seek no glory, but these men of known loyalty, Indian, Eskimo and white, take pride in standing on guard in the empty and remote parts of Canada with vigilance and integrity, and in silence' (Dignum 1959).

In contrast to Vokes's earlier pessimistic appraisal of potential Aboriginal contributions to the Rangers, the *Beaver* article and others highlighted the vital Indian and Inuit cooperation. 'Some of [the Rangers] can't read their own names but they are the real scholars of this country when it comes to reading signs on the trails of the north,' *Star Weekly Magazine* reported in 1956. 'Eskimos, Indians, whites and all the mixtures of these races, they are united in one task: Guarding a country that doesn't even know of their existence.' They were not only 'the least expensive military force any nation has today' but also a useful source of reports on suspicious activities, and critical guides for regular forces on exercises in the north (Taylor 1956, 2).

By the 1960s, however, the Rangers were left to 'wither on the vine' (Eyre 1987, 296). In an era of thermonuclear weapons, citizen-soldiers seemed

obsolescent. How could an Inuk or Cree hunter, armed with a rifle and an armband, defend against a long-range Soviet bomber or intercontinental ballistic missile? Technological solutions, like the mid-Canada and the distant early warning (DEW) radar lines across the Canadian North and strategies of 'mutually assured destruction,' placed a higher priority on electronic detection and vast arsenals of nuclear warheads than on part-time ground forces. As a result, annual visits to resupply the Rangers and to provide minimal training became increasingly scarce, lost and damaged rifles were not replaced, individuals who left communities were not replaced on the nominal rolls, and most units became moribund (Eyre 1981, 180). Nevertheless, the Rangers did survive, simply because they cost little if anything to retain on paper, and they were largely self-administered on a local level. In Ottawa it was easier to ignore their continued existence than to bear the political burden of dismantling the force.

A New Focus on Sovereignty

At the onset of the 1970s the federal government under Pierre Trudeau found renewed interest in the Canadian North. In 1969 and 1971 an American supertanker, the *Manhattan*, transited the Northwest Passage to study the possibility of using this route to transport oil from Alaska to the eastern seaboard. Canada considered the Northwest Passage to be internal waters, but the United States did not agree and considered the passage an international strait. Understandably, officials in Ottawa became concerned about Canadian sovereignty and took symbolic steps to assert Canadian control and effective occupancy of the Arctic. The government gave primary importance in its defence policy to the surveillance of Canada's territory and coastlines and to the protection of sovereignty. Thus it created a northern region headquarters in Yellowknife. This headquarters was responsible for the largest military region in the world but had almost no operational units under its direct command – except the Rangers, who had been badly neglected and needed revitalization. Politicians and military officials in the North recommended upgrades to the Rangers 'so as to use [better] the talents and knowledge of northerners for surveillance purposes and to assist the military' (Kirton and Munton 1987; Canada 1971). Limited progress was made in getting several northern units back on their feet. The Rangers still seemed appropriate: its members lived in the North (and thus demonstrated Canadian occupation), could provide surveillance in their homeland at little cost, and protected sovereignty without being overly 'militaristic.' The United States – our closest friend and ally – posed the most immediate threat to Canadian sovereignty, yet it was absurd to envision a war with them.

Revitalizing the Rangers in the Far North also fit with a broader federal government agenda to increase northern Aboriginal participation in Canadian society. Beginning in the 1970s the military launched initiatives to increase Aboriginal peoples' representation in the armed forces. 'He has his own culture but is the sort of man who could become Western very easily, become one of us,' one officer wrote of the northern Aboriginal peoples whom the military sought to recruit. 'The ones we're looking for are mobile and have a self-navigating capability and roam a lot,' another added. 'They can take a trip of 800 or 1,000 miles and know exactly where they are … with no gear, maps, or charts' (Balfour 1971; Kardex Collection, n.d.). By official standards these efforts to recruit northerners for the regular military failed. Few had the required education, and even fewer completed basic training. Perhaps this was a good thing. As Kenneth Eyre aptly observed, to take the best educated young people out of their communities to serve in the armed forces ran against 'the developing set of Inuit priorities of that period.' They needed lawyers to pursue their land claims, politicians and businessmen to run their communities and cooperatives, and teachers to educate their children. 'Surely, in terms of the federal government's northern goal of meeting native peoples' aspirations these latter professions should have taken precedence over military service that would have taken Eskimo soldiers out of the mainstream of Inuit life' (Eyre 1981, 289). Canadian Ranger service avoided this predicament. A northern Aboriginal person could remain in and serve his or her community, while at the same time serving as a Ranger.

When the Americans abandoned their oil transportation plans, the threat to Canadian sovereignty subsided, and Ottawa again lost interest in the Rangers. During the 1970s the promised commitment to expand the force proved more rhetorical than tangible (Canada 1973, 15–16). Nevertheless, the Rangers visibly asserted sovereignty at minimal cost – important considerations at a time when the government was cutting back military spending and personnel. Patrols already spanned the breadth of the Arctic, from the most easterly patrol at Broughton Island to the most westerly at Aklavik, and represented every Aboriginal group in the North (though the majority of members were Inuit). The Northern Region briefing book trumpeted the Rangers' involvement, although it too appeared to be shrouded in ambiguity and platitudes:

> The role that Rangers have as a component of the Armed Forces is not well understood even within the Armed Forces [and] far less by the populace as a whole. Nevertheless, their contribution to the defence of Canada and maintenance of sovereignty should not be underestimated. Given the circumstances and environment, it is a role that could only be filled by other components of

A regular force instructor and Canadian Rangers in traditional dress read a map near Grise Fjord, 1988. Photo courtesy of Department of National Defence.

> the Forces with very much difficulty and more expense. It is significant also that the Ranger concept capitalizes on those attributes of native northerners that they themselves espouse as their traditional way of life – their knowledge of their environment, their ability to live and survive on the land, their hunting instinct. In sharing an important defence commitment, the Canadian Rangers fulfill a role no less important than any other component of the Canadian Armed Forces, and have a justifiable pride in doing so. (Canada n.d. c, 16–18; n.d. b)

The Rangers' interactions with the military contributed to greater cross-cultural awareness and the sharing of skills. Training programs in remote communities generated additional Inuit interest in the Ranger program during the early 1970s. Yearly or biannual Nanook Ranger exercises trained individuals to basic Ranger standards, and annual ammunition resupply visits provided more sustained contact between the military establishment and the Rangers than had existed for decades (Canada n.d.

b; 1971–2). Regular force units resumed training with the Rangers in the North, learned about Indigenous cultures and survival techniques, and stressed that the Rangers had taught them invaluable skills – even if they did have 'a non-military way of doing things. We must remember that the Rangers have a different culture [and] have worked under arctic conditions for many generations,' one infantry officer wrote, 'and in order to survive, we must be prepared to accept their advice and assistance.' He continued:

> The Ranger's sense of loyalty is very high and we found that they watched over our well-being. We also learned a great deal from the Rangers by watching them do maintenance on stoves, lanterns, and skidoos. Their methods are quite unorthodox; however, no one blew themselves up and the end result was that the piece of equipment was normally fixed in half the time it would have taken us.
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> The [Inuit] were willing to share their food while on the trail. Several members of the course tried eating pieces of raw frozen caribou covered with hair. It was different, filling and not unlike beef jerky. Eating raw char however, did not sit well with any of the personnel. The [Inuit] version of bread (banik) was excellent. We ate over 50 pounds of it in five days. Several people even took some loaves home along with the recipe. The purpose of existing on the native diet was to prove to everyone that we could survive on what was available in the North. (Reumiller 1985)

The message was clear: Aboriginal Rangers had much to teach members of southern units, and the soldiers were there to learn.

In 1985 the voyage of another American vessel, the *Polar Sea*, through the Northwest Passage renewed concerns about Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. External Affairs Minister Joe Clark's statement on sovereignty encapsulated the growing concern and linked it to the Northern peoples: 'Canada is an Arctic nation … Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic is indivisible. It embraces land, sea and ice … From time immemorial Canada's Inuit people have used and occupied the ice as they have used and occupied the land … Full sovereignty is vital to Canada's security. It is vital to the Inuit people. And it is vital to Canada's national identity' (Canada 1985a). Low-level-flying controversies, environmental concerns, and public appeals by Aboriginal leaders to 'demilitarize' the North in the 1980s ensured that discussions of security and sovereignty had to acknowledge their particular interests in their homelands. Georges Erasmus, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, saw 'no *military* threat' to the Canadian North but worried that a military build-up would jeopardize the cultural survival

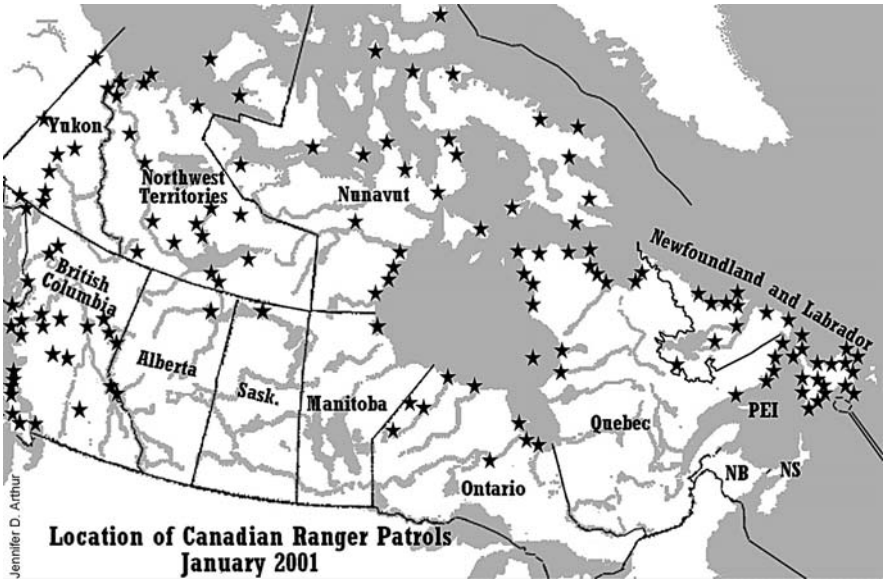
of Indigenous peoples. Mary Simon, president of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, explained that traditional military activities 'often serve to promote our [Inuit] *insecurity*' and pushed the idea that they should cease in the Arctic (Erasmus 1986; Simon 1989).

It is important that the Canadian Rangers were never included in the arguments put forward about demilitarizing the Arctic. After all, most of the Rangers in that region were Inuit, and their activities were not a threat to the environment or to Aboriginal cultures. Instead, the Rangers represented inherent cooperation. Mark Gordon of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada stressed that the Inuit had 'a valuable contribution to give' to northern security, and praised the Canadian Rangers for acting as 'the eyes for the Armed Forces' and for providing 'valuable services to our communities, such as search and rescue,' as well as 'help[ing] our communities a great deal in providing us with food.' The Rangers, 'who in most instances are the most experienced and the best hunters of the communities and the most knowledgeable of the area surrounding their communities,' already represented a 'vehicle' for constructive dialogue and partnership (Canada 1985b, 48–9, 56–7). Rhoda Innuksuk of the Inuit Tapirisat also saw the Inuit and the military as joint partners who had much to contribute for mutual advantage through this 'innovative' program (Canada 1985b, 28, 50–1).

With strong backing from the Aboriginal community, the government indicated in 1987 that the Ranger program would be continued and enhanced. The minister of national defence deemed them 'an important expression of sovereignty,' and the Standing Committee on National Defence expected that by 1995 the strength of the Rangers in the North would rise to about one thousand (Canada 1987, 29–30; 1988). In fact, the expansion was even more rapid and profound. By 1992 they had already reached 1,362 in the region. In contrast to most of the other military projects promised by the federal government in 1987, which were subsequently cancelled when the Cold War ended in 1989, the Rangers continued to grow and flourish in this new context. Almost every community that could sustain a patrol in the Far North had one by the end of the century. Moreover, units were again formed in Labrador and Nunavik (northern Quebec), along Hudson and James Bays, and along the BC coast. The Rangers had re-emerged from the shadows to play an increasingly prominent and symbolic role in promoting sovereignty and security.

Current Status, Roles, and Activities

In 2009 there were more than 4,100 Rangers in 163 patrols across Canada, organized in five Canadian Ranger patrol groups (CRPGs). The largest



Location of Canadian Ranger patrols across Canada, 2001. Map by Jennifer Arthur.

patrol group, 1 CRPG, encompasses fifty-eight patrols in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut, with 1,575 Rangers. The 2 CRPG includes the twenty-three Quebec patrols, totalling 696 Rangers. 3 CRPG covers the fifteen patrols in Ontario, numbering 422 Rangers. 4 CRPG encompasses thirty-eight patrols in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, with 695 Rangers. Lastly, 5 CRPG includes the twenty-nine Ranger patrols in Newfoundland and Labrador, with 743 Rangers. While official statistics do not break down the membership along ethnic lines, more than 50 per cent of all Rangers are of Aboriginal descent, and patrols are representative of northern Canada's ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity. North of the tree line, for example, the vast majority of Rangers are Inuit, and many speak Inuktitut as their first (and sometimes only) language. South of the tree line, Rangers speak Dene, Cree, or Oji-Cree, and Montagnais, as well as English and French (Canada 2009a).[4]

The only formal entry criteria for men and women wishing to join the Rangers stipulate that they be over eighteen years of age, Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, in sufficiently good health to carry out their duties, and willing to be members of the Canadian Forces. In 2002 the average age of the 1,430 Rangers in 1 CPRG was thirty-nine – the youngest was eighteen and the oldest seventy-eight. Nearly 16 per cent of the Rangers in this region were women, varying from 60 per cent in Tsiigehtchic, NWT, to less

Ranger Millie Hatogina inspects her .303 Lee Enfield rifle during weapons practice on Lake Aptalok, 70 km east of Kugluktuk, Nunavut. Photo courtesy of Department of National Defence.

than 10 per cent in several patrols. One Ranger had served since 1952, and several since the 1970s, but the median date of enrolment was 1996.[5]

The Rangers remain a unique component of the Canadian Forces. Their role is, first and foremost, to provide a military presence in northern, coastal, and isolated areas of Canada. Each Ranger patrol remains rooted in the local community and operates on a group basis. Patrol leaders are elected by the other members – they are the only military units in Canada that get to choose their commanders – and operate according to local customs and norms. In Inuit communities, for example, patrol sergeants defer to elders' advice and direction rather than following a rigid command hierarchy. The accommodation of Indigenous practices and leadership styles is one of the key reasons that this military force proves to be so successful and popular in northern communities.

The commander of Land Forces Central Area remarked in 1999 that the Rangers 'are a truly multi-purpose component of the military that handles a myriad of tasks and acts in a variety of capacities for the people of the North' (Canada 1999). In what is perhaps their primordial purpose, they

make several important contributions to support Canadian sovereignty. As the 'eyes and ears' of the Canadian military in isolated areas, they report unusual activities and suspicious persons in their communities and areas. For example, they have frequently reported submarines operating off the Arctic coast – and even taken the occasional potshot at them (Pugliese 2002, A1)! As local experts, they also provide the military with important information to support military operations, such as advice on weather conditions. In the North, individual patrols conduct surveillance and sovereignty patrols (SOVPATs) designed to 'show the flag' around patrol communities. About thirty of these patrols are conducted each year and provide a cost-effective, visible assertion of Canadian sovereignty in the North. Most important, they are run by a Ranger patrol without any outside Canadian Forces presence. More recently, the 1 CRPG Rangers have undertaken an annual enhanced SOVPAT, a long-range patrol in the Far North to a remote part of their area of responsibility to show the flag. For example, thirty-four Rangers ventured to the north magnetic pole in April 2002, and twenty Rangers and regular force soldiers set out on a gruelling 1,300-kilometre trek to the remote northern tip of Ellesmere Island two years later. These long-range patrols have become increasingly ambitious, demonstrating that the Rangers have gone from providing a quiet presence in the North to a bold, symbolic one. Operation Nunalivut 2008 also demonstrated the ways in which the Rangers provide practical support to national activities. In this case, they guided, sheltered, and assisted scientists who were conducting research on Ellesmere Island ice shelves. These enhanced SOVPATs allow Rangers to operate in unfamiliar environments, share skills, develop relationships with other Rangers from across the North, and build confidence (Humphreys 2004, A1, A9; Canada 2003b, 21; 2008b).

The Rangers also continue to provide vital assistance to Canadian Forces activities. For example, their local expertise and advice is crucial to regular and reserve force units that come to train in the north. On sovereignty operations (SOVOPS) Rangers frequently act as guides and teach southern-based units practical survival skills, such as how to hunt and skin animals or build a snow house, that are necessary to maintain a fighting capability in the region (Canada n.d. a; Couch 2000). 'It is an outstanding cultural exchange when that happens,' former 1 CRPG commanding officer Major Yves Laroche explained. 'We end up with better soldiers and better Rangers as a result of shared skills and knowledge' (Costen 2002). Ranger patrols near unmanned North Warning System sites and airfields also monitor the condition of these installations on a regular basis.

Over the last decade the Rangers' local assistance to search and rescue activities has attracted significant media attention and support. As a part

of their training, Rangers learn warning procedures, wilderness first aid, crash-site security, communications, and navigation. In practice 'Canadian Rangers provide a range of specialized services to the peoples in their area,' the commander of the Northern Ontario Rangers explains, 'including humanitarian assistance, local search and rescue, rapid response for disaster situations, such as aircraft crashes, and support for evacuation in natural emergencies, such as forest fires and floods' (Canada 2008a). They act first and foremost as members of northern communities, seldom waiting for an official tasking before heading out to look for lost hunters, or helping communities cope with major disasters. On 1 January 1999, for example, members from eleven of the Ranger patrols in Nunavik responded immediately to news of a massive avalanche in Kangiqsualujjuaq. For days they made vital contributions by supporting local authorities in rescue efforts, securing the area, and assisting with funeral preparations. Additional support was provided by patrols that were as far away as Coral Harbour (nearly one thousand kilometres to the west), where Rangers harvested and shipped fresh caribou to the disaster site. The head of the Canadian Forces testified: 'Without their dedication, the toll in human suffering would surely have been higher … The leadership and moral support the Rangers provided in the face of this crisis was invaluable' (George 1999). For this extraordinary effort, 2 CRPG was awarded a Canadian Forces unit commendation – the highest honour accorded to a military unit (Canada 2000b).

In these roles the Rangers provide an important outlet for Aboriginal peoples wishing to serve in the defence of their country without leaving their communities. Ranger activities also allow members of Aboriginal communities to practise and share traditional skills, such as living off the land, not only with people from outside their cultures but also across generations within them. These skills are central to Aboriginal identities, and there is a persistent worry that these will be lost. 'Often traditions are no longer passed on to the next generation in the North,' a thirty-one-year-old Ranger sergeant, Levi Barnabas, in northern Baffin Island explained. 'Until I joined the Rangers five years ago, I could barely build an igloo' (*Ranger Report* 1997). It is the unique nature of the Rangers that facilitates the transfer of Indigenous knowledge among members of a patrol and thus aids the overall retention of traditional knowledge within communities and cultures. In turn, the unique knowledge of northern peoples is integral to military operations. It is this partnership, rooted in mutual learning and sharing, that has made the Rangers a long-term success on the local and national levels.

This partnership was extended to future generations when the Junior Canadian Rangers were established in 1996. The cadets had enjoyed a long

The Junior Canadian Rangers Program, a partnership between the federal government, northern communities, and Canadian Rangers, facilitates the transgenerational transfer of traditional skill and knowledge. Photo courtesy of Department of National Defence.

history in the North, but many Aboriginal communities could not meet the formal requirements of the cadet program. As a result, the Junior Canadian Rangers was conceived to provide a structured, community-based program for youth in remote and isolated communities. It was planned that the federal government would provide financial resources and instructors, but the local community – represented through the Ranger patrol and an adult committee – would determine more than half of what the Junior Rangers would be taught. The community would select the traditional and life skills to be taught to their youth, allowing the curriculum of the Junior Canadian Rangers to 'incorporate the diverse cultural and natural attributes of the North, cultural norms, local language, and particular social needs.' Traditional skills would include activities such as 'making shelters, hunting, fishing, living off the land, using sleds, Native spirituality, singing, dancing, and talk circles with elders.' Through life skills, youth would learn about healthy living, sexual and substance abuse, community responsibilities, and public speaking. Another component dealt with Ranger skills such as first aid, navigation, and weapon safety (Canada 1998a). The program proved extremely popular and has expanded rapidly throughout northern

Canadian Rangers at the magnetic North Pole, Operation Kigliqaqvik Ranger I, 2002. Photo courtesy of Julian Tomlinson.

Canada, particularly in Aboriginal communities. There are now 119 Junior Canadian Ranger patrols across the country, with more than 3,400 youth participating (Canada 2009b).[6]

Conclusion

The Canadian Rangers program represents a practical solution to Canada's rich cultural diversity. By accommodating multiple identities, it allows Aboriginal peoples to represent both their peoples and Canada simultaneously; they serve their country and their communities. For example, when Inuit members of the Rangers in Nunavut set out on exercises, they do so as Nunavummiut, as members of their local community, and as representatives of the Canadian Forces. Communities and people who would strongly oppose other forms of military operations readily accept the Rangers and their activities. This is very important, as the Department of Foreign Affairs has succinctly explained:

> Demilitarization of the Arctic would make it more difficult, and perhaps even impossible, for our military personnel to provide defence services available

> to Canadians in other parts of the country. The Canadian Forces, for example, would be unable to conduct operations to protect our sovereign territory … or to provide humanitarian assistance … Additionally, the cultural inter-play of service people serving in our North has an intangible benefit in promoting a sense of national awareness among the military and those northern residents who come in contact with the military. A military presence in the North also provides Canada's Aboriginal peoples with an opportunity to serve their country and community through participation in the Canadian Rangers. (Canada 1998b)

By virtue of their disparate locations, Canadian Ranger patrols are representative of Canada's geographical and cultural diversity, and their presence is an important contribution to the assertion of Canada's national interests in northern, isolated, and coastal communities.

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Notes

1 For an overview of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers see Steeves (1990) and Lackenbauer (2007).
2 The Canadian North can be defined in several ways. For the purposes of this chapter, it will refer to the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec), and communities along Hudson and James Bays.
3 Ranger units along the west and east coasts, which were formed in this same era, tended to be non-Aboriginal in their composition and, therefore, will not be described in this chapter. My forthcoming book on the history of the Rangers will provide a fuller picture of the Canadian Rangers' development in these regions.
4 Statistics as of October 2008.
5 Statistics provided by 1 CRPG, April 2002 (Canada 2002b). The percentage of women in the Rangers in 2002 slightly exceeded that in the Canadian Forces as a whole, in which 11.9 per cent of Canadian Forces' serving members were female (Asmar 2002). One out of every three Rangers in 3 CRPG (Northern Ontario) is a woman (Canada 2003a, 2).

6 Statistics as of February 2009. Of the 734 Junior Rangers in 1 CRPG in 2002, 440 were young men (60 per cent) and 294 young women (40 per cent). Statistics provided by Major Claudia Ferland (Canada 2002a).

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