

Forces missing in action

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As if all the bad economic news was not bad enough, it has now come to our attention that one-third of Canada's armed forces of 82,858 is missing.

According to Ministry of National Defence spokesmen, no two of whom can seem to agree on the exact numbers of soldiers assigned to specific units, our forces are comprised of 19,000 soldiers, 11,000 sailors and 23,800 airmen, a total of 53,800. An additional 13,000 soldiers are in support, service and headquarters units. The remaining 16,000 cannot readily be identified by assignment.

A more illuminating view is offered by England's Institute for Strategic Studies, the world's leading authority on military affairs. Using Canadian government data, the institute shows our actual combat and direct support units as amounting to 13,000 on land, 5,500 in the naval forces, and 15,300 in the air command, a total of only 33,800. The institute reports that, because of the armed forces unification, the remaining 49,058 are not able to be directly associated with specific combat units.

Some of these "missing" 49,058 soldiers are assigned to support and service units, such as the bloated Training Command's 8,600 troops or to communications and headquarters. But a substantial number, probably 33% of the armed forces, have simply been absorbed into the vast military administrative bureaucracy.

These "missing legions" have not gone AWOL. They are safely behind their desks across the nation, writing reports, holding meetings and generally behaving in the manner of other civilian bureaucrats. These myrmidons have become part of the ever-growing, gargantuan civil service superstructure, uniformed functionaries more familiar with a copy machine than a bayonet.

While all armed forces require administrative support, Canada has managed the unique feat of employing 49,058 soldiers plus an additional 40,000 civilian workers in the national defence ministry to support a tiny force of 33,800 combat troops. One would have to turn to landlocked Bolivia, with its admirals and field marshals, for a suitable comparison.

Most Canadians are probably unaware that their once mighty armed forces have been reduced to virtual impotence or that their army is comparable in size to the New York City Transit Police. Today, by the measure of deployed combat troops, Canada is on a military par with Denmark, Kenya and Bolivia and behind Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

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The unpleasant revelation that the Liberal government has quietly and effectively almost disarmed Canada has been cleverly concealed by Ottawa's campaign of TV and billboard advertising, which promote scenes of charging tanks, advancing infantry and screaming jet fighters. "There's no life like it," proclaim these ads and, indeed, it is true. Surveyed two years ago, 48% of Canada's soldiers were reported to have said they were in the armed forces for job training and would absolutely not fight in the event of a war. Public opinion surveys have also shown that the majority of the public has been led to believe that the major function of the armed forces is in international peacekeeping rather than the defence of Canada and the Western world.

What we have here is a sort of military version of the famous "Potempkin Villages," billboards which, like the painted, one-sided buildings put up by the Russian prince to impress the Empress Catherine with his supposed vast housing programs, lull Canadians into believing that we are protected by a strong military.

This illusion cost Canadian taxpayers over \$7 billion last year. The lion's share of the defence budget is going to pay the salaries of the swollen military bureaucracy rather than toward the procurement of badly needed arms and supplies. Canada, a nation of great wealth, spends less per capita on defence than any member of NATO except the tiny Duchy of Luxembourg, with whom it is now tied for the distinction of last place.

This situation would represent just another routine example of the Liberal government's fiscal profligacy were it not for the critical situation of Canada's tiny combat forces. The ground forces, with an embarrassing 114 tanks, lack ammunition and supplies for more than a few days fighting, are low on transport and have no modern air defence. The navy's ships are almost sinking at their moorings from old age and neglect; a recently retired admiral said that for the navy to put to sea in wartime would be "suicidal." Even the air command, the best financed of the services, finds that half of its 208 planes are ready for the museum. Canada, today, simply could not defend itself and certainly could not aid its NATO allies in time of war. Officers who have openly protested this situation have been retired or posted to Inuvik.

When the defeated Consul Varus returned to Rome and reported to the emperor that he had lost his legions in the forests of Germany, the anguished Augustus cried out, "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions, Varus." Today, we may well ask Trudeau, who has lost his legions in the forests of the defence bureaucracy, the very same question.

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