

Exploring the Role of the Canadian Defence Attaché: An Oral History

An Analysis of oral histories from Canadian Defence Attachés

April 23rd, 2017

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HSTR 426 : Dr. Balzer

The author of this paper interviewed three subjects on the topic Canadian Defence attachés. Military Attachés are an element of the Canadian Forces. They are Canadian diplomats who are posted to a host country under the command of the *Director Foreign Liaison* and work in collaboration with the Canadian Ambassador or High Commissioner. The subjects, Colonel John Orr, Captain Rick Town and Lt-Colonel Christopher Kilford, served as Canadian Military and Defence attachés in the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Colonel Orr served with the Royal Canadian Navy, Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1967 until the year 2000. Orr was a Canadian Forces attaché in Cairo, Egypt and was accredited to Sudan from 1990 to 1993. He served as an attaché at the start of the Gulf War (1990-1991) and during the second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005).

Captain Town joined the Royal Canadian Navy in 1971 and retired in 2008. Town served as a Canadian Defence Attaché in Australia and was accredited to New Zealand from 2003 to 2008. During his tenure, the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand military were engaged in anti-terrorism operations in the Middle East North African (MENA) such as Operation Enduring Freedom, in Afghanistan (2001-2014).

Lt-Colonel Kilford served in the Canadian Armed Forces from 1978 to 2014. He was stationed as the Deputy Military Attaché in Kabul, Afghanistan during the Afghanistan War from 2009-2010. Shortly after, he was the Military Attaché in Ankara, Turkey with a cross accreditation to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkmenistan from 2011 to 2014. He began his post in Turkey in the midst of the Arab Uprising and at the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011.

These oral histories contribute to existing literature about the Canadian attaché role. The oral histories conducted by the author parallel information garnered from the literature on the role of the attaché. This includes subtopics: training, bilateral relations, and gathering information about the host country's military. The interviews revealed common challenges cited in the literature: building relationships in a hostile environment and obtaining information that Canadian policy makers can utilize. . While the oral histories and literature usually agree about the main duties of attaches, the interviews do also show one aspect of their role missing from published accounts: dealing with emerging political crises.

There are a limited number of sources on military attachés and even fewer specific to Canada. These sources provide a high-level overview of the expectations of a Military Attaché. *The Military Attaché* published in 1967, written by German military historian, Alfred Vagts provides an in-depth analysis into the evolution of the attaché program and how its role was transformed through the development of structured warfare.¹ Many of the general sources are autobiographical, and are based on experiences from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, which help corroborate Vagt's analysis. Distinct literature on the Canadian attaché program was published in the mid-to-late twentieth century. These works are minimal in number and offer the reader broad information about the role and the history of the program, such as how the program grew robust as a result of the Cold War, and was changed thereafter.²

A Military Attaché is a designated diplomat; what occurs during their assignment is classified. As a result, there is a deficit of information available to the public on the contribution of the attaché to military and diplomatic relations. The oral histories provide first-hand insight into how these roles are actualized on the ground, but what they cannot provide is evidence of

¹ Alfred Vagts, *The Military Attaché* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1967).

² Janice Cowan, *A Spy's Wife: The Moscow Memoirs of a Canadian Who Witnessed the End of the Cold War* (Toronto, Ontario James Lorimer and Company Ltd. , 2006); J. Mackay Hitsman and Desmond Morton, "Canada's First Military Attache: Capt. H. C. Thacker in the Russo-Japanese War," *Military Affairs* 34, no. 3 (1970); Michael Owen Bennett, "The Canadian Military Attaché" (M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1978); Christopher Kilford, "The Early Years – a Short History of Canada's Defence Attaché Program 1945-1965," *Canadian Military Journal* 12, no. 4 (2012).

how this information impacted bilateral cooperation and aided with the achievement of long term diplomatic objectives. Uncovering this information will be critical to future historians as it will fill in a knowledge gap by addressing how the role has aided the Canadian government in multilateral defence relations.

Each subject came into the position as part of their career path. When asked the questions: “How did you learn about the post and what influenced your decision to become an attaché?” All indicated that the position had not been a long- term career objective, but part of their promotion trajectory, in most cases at the end of their career with the Canadian military. For example, Colonel Orr would have lost his promotion if he had not become an attaché to Cairo.³ Similarly, Captain Town decided to resign but instead accepted the position of Defence Advisor in Australia.⁴ On the other hand, Lt-Colonel Kilford learned about the position after consultation with his Career Manager. The position appealed to him because he had been searching for a career change that would blend his academic background in civil military relations and development with his military experience and interest in political affairs.

Although the subjects were offered the position, they were still required to undergo a vetting process before being awarded the position. This entailed interviews which included their spouses who would accompany them to their host country (with the exception of Afghanistan). Kilford stated that the screening process was rigorous and that his personal life was “put on the table”, “no detail [was] left uncovered” including finances in order to ensure that he and his spouse would not be vulnerable to exploitation.⁵

The oral histories help ground the information available about the attaché training program. As formerly noted, there is a limited body of literature available on this subtopic.

A Spy's Wife, written about the experiences of an attachés spouse describes field training⁶,

however the author tends to focus on sensationalist aspects of the training such as car jacking and

³ John Orr, interview by Heather Currie, March 9th, 2017.

⁴ Rick Town, interview by Heather Currie, March 14th, 24th, 2017.

⁵ Christopher Kilford, interview by Heather Currie, March 24th, 2017.

⁶ Cowan.

being held at gunpoint scenarios. This information cannot be corroborated. The subjects not only provide more detail about the development modules but offer reasons for the training and personal opinions on training effectiveness. The following section provides information on the subject's training experiences.

Orr and Kilford were required to undergo intensive language training for their respective host countries; this entailed eight hours days in a classroom with one teacher.⁷ Language skills were most effective in "breaking the ice" when meeting new contacts who were suspicious of foreigners. Kilford noted that learning the language enabled him to navigate freely outside major tourist areas.⁸

Other training modules incorporated security preparedness. This included fieldcraft such as photographic surveillance, learning how to be aware of potential dangers such as driving in "at risk" situations. Town described it as "protection based training" conducted to help develop survivability skills in "unfriendly nations" that taught them how to be aware of times they were being observed. They learned how to hone their instinctive skills which would prompt them to extract themselves from a red flag situation.⁹ Kilford also mentioned that training included being alert to "old fashioned honey traps" (sexual exploitation) that could make him vulnerable to blackmail. He said these situations have occurred, and are still a reality for people who are attached to a diplomatic mission.¹⁰ Training in combat driving was designed, as Kilford stated, to instruct him on how to respond in an emergency situation such as being sandwiched in by two other vehicles. He also pointed out this was ineffective in cities such as Kabul, Afghanistan with its traffic jams.¹¹ The oral information provided from the subjects is beneficial because it informs the academic that the role is significant enough to warrant security training.

Another aspect of training is cultural sensitivity and preparing the attachés for the

⁷ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

⁸ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

⁹ Currie, "Rick Town Interview".

¹⁰ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

¹¹ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

political climate of the host country. Here one can observe how the program evolved over time. When Orr started his position in 1990, he was not provided with an opportunity to learn about the history of the geopolitical conditions in the Middle East North African region, or the Egyptian cultural identity. Nor was he given any resource materials to supplement his training. Referencing the large percentage of Sunni Muslims and other religious affiliations such as Coptic Christianity, Orr said “you cannot touch the Middle East unless you know comparative religion.” Despite the fact that in Ottawa, the Department of External Affairs had a Middle East staff contingent, Orr’s training orientation only included visiting the foreign desk officers in the Department of National Defence. He was fortunate to obtain information from Embassy staff in Egypt. They educated him about Egyptian figures of note and the political history.¹²

In contrast, Kilford, who assumed his post to Turkey later on (2009) was fully prepared for what to expect from his host country. He underwent extensive training beyond learning how to properly use a knife and fork at a dinner reception or the right way to receive a business card. To prepare him for his assignment in Turkey, he received information from Canadian political staff. He was also sent to Washington for a week, where experts provided him with reports from the State Department, Homeland Security and the Central Intelligence Agency about issues on the ground and cultural matters.¹³

The Canadian military attachés role is global encompassing multi-faceted duties from observing a host country’s military to relationship building. There are two excellent academic sources, *The Canadian Military Attache*¹⁴ and *The Early Years -A Short History of Canada’s Defence Attaché Program*¹⁵ that provide a practical analysis of the responsibilities that comprise the role. This includes gathering information from the ground about the political stability of a host country, observing the status of a country's military, and assisting with Canadian defence industry sales. It also involves hosting events and representing Canada at military ceremonies.

¹² Currie, "John Orr Interview".

¹³ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

¹⁴ Bennett.

¹⁵ Kilford.

The interviews provide more colour by filling in detail of how these duties are actualized on the ground. The following section provides insight from the oral histories into not only what each aspect of the traditional duties entailed, but also the challenges each subject encountered.

The primary focus of the attaché program is for Canada to maintain bilateral relations with foreign military and civil authorities. Fostering relationships involves two aspects: developing connections with the host country, and networking with other foreign attachés. These connections are a critical component to the attachés ability to perform their primary duty, collecting “ground truth”. Kilford stressed that a significant function was to “keep an eye on the region” and discern the strategic level issues, such as the potential for a military coup. He also mentioned that in Afghanistan there were a many Canadians, and he had to be aware of their identity, and their purpose for traveling to the country.¹⁶

Acquiring information was either hindered or helped by relations and depended on the receptivity of the host country to brokering a relationship with Canada. The ability of the subject to connect with the host country’s military varied by the way Canada was perceived i.e. ‘friendly’, hostile, or unimportant, as noted in the following examples.

Orr stated that he was in “receive” mode, because the Egyptian military could not identify with Canada’s Western military. At a function that he attended, he was lectured by an Egyptian General on the Canadian Prime Minister’s decision to appoint a female Defence Minister (Kim Campbell).¹⁷

To Egypt, Canada was a “bit player”. Because of this perception, obtaining information such as learning about the Egyptian military was like “trying to open up an oyster.” Egyptian military officials were not permitted to socialize with diplomats from other nations. All contact was made through the Military Attaché and Intelligence branches. The only persons that could come to his home were on an approved list; others were forbidden to engage with foreigners.

¹⁶ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

¹⁷ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

Military exercises that he was permitted to observe were “canned”, put on for show, preventing him from assessing combat capability. As a result of this, his role expanded beyond military related functions to the political department.¹⁸

Relations were not completely closed off, Orr had opportunities to interact with the Egyptian military on some critical matters. For example, he was invited to attend a briefing by the operations branch on the two divisions of ground forces they were contributing to the Gulf War. In addition, he found that the Egyptian Navy was more receptive, as a shadow organization they were less significant to the military, apart from defending the Suez Canal.¹⁹

Kilfords’ relationship with Turkey was similar to Orr’s experience. There was no interest in fostering a relationship with Canada. Their military is similar to Egypt in that both are deeply embedded in state and political affairs unlike the Canadian Armed Forces. Kilford’s Turkish relationship grew frosty due to the Canadian government’s annual public commemoration of the Armenian genocide on April 24th.²⁰ Turkey still denies that a genocide has occurred.²¹

Connecting with military officials was challenging for Kilford; he would receive a business card from a military officer with only a name on it, as such he would have to contact the Foreign Liaison office. The office itself was also challenging to reach, with only a phone and fax number, when he called there was no answering machine to leave a message. As a result, Kilford spent a lot of time connecting with outside agencies and persons to obtain information.²²

In Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, Kilford was greeted with hostile and uncooperative militaries. During his visit to Turkmenistan, he had to pass through at least ten passport checkpoints in the airport, testament to the unwelcome feeling he received when visiting the country. Yet, geopolitics dictated the need for Canada to maintain military relations with each of

¹⁸ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

²¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs, "The Events of 1915 and the Turkish-Armenian Controversy over History: An Overview," Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-events-of-1915-and-the-turkish-armenian-controversy-over-history_-an-overview.en.mfa.

²² Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

these countries in order to ensure no challenges would arise. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies relied on Turkmenistan's airspace to bring in supplies to support the war effort in Afghanistan.²³

His treatment in Azerbaijan was similar to his experiences in Turkmenistan. Kilford commented that the best conversation he had was with an Azeri General that took place in a NATO cafeteria in Brussels. In Azerbaijan, he only received a “table thumping lecture” on Canada’s refusal to support the military in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1988-present). When questioned if he had visited the border, he said they wanted you to stay away from it because it was “like World War I.” He believed they did not want foreigners to witness the condition of their military. Visits to the site were staged with a “token village” designed to make the area appear “nice and tidy.”²⁴

In comparison to these negative receptions, the subjects experienced positive treatment in countries such as Sudan and Georgia. Their militaries had an open door to the Canadian attachés because they were interested in brokering relations with the West. Kilford observed that Georgia was an aspiring European Union (EU) member. It was important to their military to maintain language training exchange programs, and receive Canadian staff to teach peacekeeping to their military forces.²⁵ Similarly, Captain Town traveled without restrictions and met with senior military officials in Australia and New Zealand. He said that unlike the attaché from the People’s Republic of China who had to go “through hoops”, he could just walk in anywhere by “flashing his badge.”²⁶

In Sudan, Orr was able to freely meet with military officials. In his opinion they had less of a realistic understanding than the Egyptian officials about Canada’s military's global influence and its ability to support the Sudanese military. He was able to inquire into most matters, such as learning from the head of the Air Force about the source of their ammunition. During an

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Heather Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview " (Victoria, BC 2017).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Currie, “Rick Town Interview”.

accreditation visit, he was also able to observe their response to Hussein's invasion of Kuwait (August 1990). He recalled "guys running around" as though it was "the end of the world", but by the afternoon they were praising Hussein's act. To Orr, it was "stunning" to see how quickly their political position had completely changed.²⁷ Thus the attaché role is more easily facilitated in countries where military officials are willing to cooperate and interact with them.

While official channels may be either hostile or cooperative, attaches need to conduct outreach beyond them, an imperative to obtaining the full picture of what is happening on the ground. These external connections were significant to Kilford and Orr who were posted to countries during times of conflict. In Turkey, there were two critical issues that Kilford had to monitor: the stability of the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the Syrian Civil War. In 2013, the PKK was engaged in peace talks with Turkey. Kilford was able to meet with a Kurdish mayor and obtain first-hand insight into the status of the negotiations. From his visit, he felt there was hope for the end of the conflict that had lasted since 1984.²⁸

To be posted to Turkey was advantageous for Kilford because at that time the Syrian Civil War had just started. The close proximity to the Syrian border afforded Kilford the opportunity to meet with Syrian opposition fighters. In one meeting, he was able to receive information through an intermediary who had cellular phone contact with a fighter on the front line. He found that the opposition fighters he met were open about their organization, providing the number of people they had and the supplies they needed. He was also able to visit the refugee camps in Hatay where he observed that the Turkish military permitted ex-Syrian defectors to establish their headquarters. Kilford noted that the Turkish government and opposition fighters felt abandoned by Canada and their allies. It was for this reason he believed that the government permitted the flow of foreign fighters from countries such as Libya and

²⁷ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

²⁸ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

Uzbekistan to freely travel through their “porous border.”²⁹

Contact with organizations outside formal channels is not always initiated by the attaché. Orr recalled an experience during a trip to Juba in the Republic of South Sudan when the civil war had lessened. He was “gently captured” by the government from Southern Equatoria. They escorted him to various places where had the opportunity to meet a woman who he suspected was the “power behind the throne”. In this meeting, he was provided a description of life in the Southern Equatoria Sudan and told their government was willing to compromise on several issues.³⁰ These external interactions demonstrate the value of information that the attaches were able to obtain from unofficial sources that they could not receive from official host country representatives.

In addition to their local sources from their host countries, both formal and informal was the ability of the subjects to develop relationships with the members of the Canadian diplomatic mission, foreign attachés and other Canadian attachés. Although relationship building speaks to the heart of the role, its importance is reduced in most of the existing literature on attachés. The oral histories demonstrate why these relationships are critical to supporting Canadian stakes in upholding the state role as a multilateralist middle power.

Even though the attaché role is performed independently, the oral histories provided indicate the importance of the relationship with the Canadian Embassy and High Consulate staff. Kilford likened it to a “big family”. In Afghanistan, he was with Embassy staff “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”³¹ Similarly, Orr relied on Embassy staff to provide him with a background of Egyptian political history, information he did not receive in his training program.³²

The objectives of the Canadian legation, although not identical, had parallels with the

²⁹ Currie, “Christopher Kilford Interview”.

³⁰ Currie, “John Orr Interview”.

³¹ Currie, “Christopher Kilford Interview”.

³² Currie, “John Orr Interview”.

goals of the Canadian military. Town mentioned that through him the military was able to help facilitate work between the Foreign Affairs “side of the business” and the military. Moreover, there were also similar economic objectives; Canada had a high number of military trade programs in Australia that the Canadian defence industry wanted to “push forward.”³³

The ability for the subjects to connect with foreign military diplomats through an attaché network was also critical to their success. The interviews revealed that the network could have an informal or formal structure. Town was appointed Dean of the Attaché Corps and was responsible for coordinating monthly social functions.³⁴ Kilford also mentioned that in Afghanistan there was an attaché association, with social events. Members of the contingent would be “shepherded around by the host government.”³⁵ Comparatively, Orr stated that in Egypt there were several informal “little circles” such as one that included only representatives from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.³⁶

The networks also served different purposes. Town felt that the attaché corps was not a valuable source of military intelligence. It could be suggested that this was because he was posted to a country that was receptive to his presence. Instead he felt the network was important to help cultivate working cooperation. By developing a closer working relationship with the “American side” he was able to “parlay it into closer relations with the Australians.”³⁷

In contrast, both Orr and Kilford were able to utilize their networks to gain information that they could not get directly from their host countries’ militaries. For example, Orr mentioned that there was a NATO group that included attachés who had access to intelligence that he did not have.³⁸ Kilford’s connections with foreign attachés such as the member from Iran, provided him with invaluable information about the Syrian conflict. Contrary to popular reports, Kilford’s

³³ Currie, “Rick Town Interview”.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Currie, “Christopher Kilford Interview”.

³⁶ Currie, “John Orr Interview”.

³⁷ Currie, “Rick Town Interview”.

³⁸ Currie, “John Orr Interview”.

contacts informed him that the Syrian military had not been weakened by opposition fighters and the Syrian government was not about to collapse.³⁹ Unlike external contacts, these networks afforded the attaches with invaluable information that they could not obtain through other means.

Hosting and visitor coordination is a common function of the attaché role. All subjects interviewed stressed that this was an important component to building relationships. This included representatives from the host country as well as foreign diplomats, politicians, journalists and academics. Kilford mentioned that this was still “part of the job” in Afghanistan “even though firefighting was going on.”⁴⁰ Attending functions and hosting events enabled the subjects to acquire information that they could not obtain by other means. For example, Orr provided an anecdote of attending a function during which a Russian representative mentioned that the “KGB fellows hadn’t been paid in months”.⁴¹

The attaché was also needed to represent Canada in military events. Town was visibly present at Australia's annual Battle of Kapyong celebration, an event that marked the contribution of the Commonwealth countries to the Korean War (1950-1953). Town stressed that this element of the role added value to defence relations.⁴²

Sales of military equipment and technology is an aspect of the job that has an indirect correlation to relationship building as noted from the interviews. Town assisted with the sale of Canada’s old Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs) to the New Zealand military and the vehicle upgrades for the Australian Military. He also handled any issues that would arise such as maintenance. New Zealand had purchased an “unbelievable number of LAVs” because they had retired their entire Air Force. He felt that sales of the armored vehicles were key to how their

³⁹ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

⁴² Currie, "Rick Town Interview".

military came to understand Canadian combat and defence capabilities.⁴³ In Turkey, Kilford also had a duty to support Canadian defence and security industries. A considerable number of Canadian companies had the desire to “break into the arms market” in Turkey. He was available to provide the industry representatives with advice and guidance for their meetings with Turkish representatives.⁴⁴ These stories demonstrate why these functions (sales and hosting) while vastly different prove why they are universal to the role; without these social interactions, the attaché would not be able to cement relations between Canada and the host country.

Within the scope of an attaché’s duties including all manners of social interactions, a condition of the role is surveillance, being watched by agents of the host country and other foreign embassies. In the literature, especially the personal narratives, being watched by the host country’s intelligence agents is highly emphasized.

An attaché must always be on guard, even in non-hostile countries such as Australia. Town mentioned that he was aware that he was being watched by the Chinese Embassy which was located across from the High Commission building. He also noted that he attended a social function hosted by the Chinese Embassy in which he was intentionally positioned near a window, where surveillance photos could easily be taken of him.⁴⁵

Orr also mentioned that he assumed he was being carefully watched in Egypt. He recalled the first time he decided to walk from his apartment to a reception and there were people following behind him. He was given the same hotel room three times in row.⁴⁶ Kilford said that he was followed “overtly and covertly” but sometimes it was for his protection; because attachés are at risk of being kidnapped or shot.⁴⁷ Whereas the oral histories reveal that although this is a reality that attachés must face, it is a condition of the role and not a major concern to the subjects.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

⁴⁵ Currie, "Rick Town Interview".

⁴⁶ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

⁴⁷ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

The surveillance factor impacted the attachés ability to report to Ottawa. Information had to be relayed through a secure telephone line, or by written correspondence and sent in a diplomatic pouch.⁴⁸

When asked if their information was valued by high-level decision makers, the subject's answers paralleled the experiences written by former attachés. For example, American military attache T. Bentley Mott posted to Paris prior to World War I wrote about his discovery of a new bullet that would streamline the projectile to make the Lebel rifle more effective. This information was not utilized until the Americans went to war twelve years later.⁴⁹ The following section provides insight into how information was reported, and the subjects' perception of the importance of these reports to military and government authorities.

Kilford likened collecting information for reports to the role of a detective. He stated that it was job to utilize the various pieces of data received from allies, standard intelligence contacts and other connections such as journalists. From this data, he would "try to make sense of it." He noted that the moments of being able to fit everything together and discover a "developing issue" does not happen often.⁵⁰

Being on the ground also enabled him to fill in details that the Canadian military could not get from a piece of paper, or read on the internet. An example of this is was during a liaison visit to a Commando Camp in the South of Kabul where they were training the "cream of the crop". Kilford discovered fundamental issues, attending to the physical health of the recruits had to be addressed first. These men never had inoculations, nor been to a doctor or a dentist and were not physically strong due to poor diets. This indicated why the progress of training new recruits in the ANA was slow. Kilford said at the "end of the day, you're out there to really sit with people and understand what's going on", enabling him to interpret the reality on the ground

⁴⁸ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

⁴⁹ Thomas Bentley Mott, *Twenty Years as Military Attaché* (London: Oxford university press, 1937).105,109

⁵⁰ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

and convey this to Ottawa.⁵¹

Town felt that the information he provided was successful, especially concerning his role with respect to aiding military intelligence. He believed that during his tenure, the information flow doubled and “put Canada back on the map.” This included his ability to highlight issues that were ongoing or happening, which had otherwise escaped the attention of military authority. However, because this information was classified, he could not get into detail during the interview. He was able to note the success of his role, as expressed by the Chief of Defence in his evaluation. He was rated as the number two attaché at the time. Shortly afterwards, there was a change in military organisational structure in which the Canadian military’s *Chief of Intelligence* role was provided with more authority. Town believed he witnessed a “watershed change” in bilateral relations in which Australia and Canada were able to understand how they could “achieve common aims in a much better fashion”.⁵²

The attaché is not the only person on the ground supplying information to Canadian government officials. This meant that information imparted from the attachés experiences could contradict other expert information. Both Kilford and Orr had these experiences.

Kilford had a mixed response to the reports he submitted on Syria and Turkey. He mentioned that his insight into Turkey was deemed significant because he was sent back to Canada to brief high-level officials. However, there were also times when he did not know if his information had been received by the appropriate authorities. He felt that the reports he sent were “going into a big black hole”. Ottawa lacked the skilled personnel to be able to evaluate all of the information it received. Since his reports were handled by a young desk officer who was responsible for the intelligence from several attachés in other countries.⁵³

Orr felt that what he learned from his time in Sudan deviated from the common beliefs

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Currie, “Rick Town Interview”.

⁵³ Currie, “Christopher Kilford Interview”.

held about the political situation there. He mentioned that Canada had a limited presence, at the time, a mission had not been sent to Addis Abba in several years. His reports prompted the Department of External Affairs to send someone to assess his analysis. Although Orr said they did not agree with his evaluation, he felt he was successful because they did at least respond to his reports.⁵⁴ Kilford summed up the discrepancy by stating “you are a piece of the pie, you may or may not have influence.”⁵⁵

When information was delivered to the appropriate officials, there was always a chance that it would not be heeded due to competing information. A prime example of this was the intelligence Kilford received about the condition of the Syrian government and its military. The Foreign Affairs office had assigned a liaison officer to the Syrian opposition in Istanbul. This officer believed that the opposition was in a position to overturn Assad’s government. Kilford advised that his intelligence demonstrated that they would not be successful, because of the strength of the Syrian government. The opposition was fragmented and lacked a cohesive agenda.⁵⁶

Thus far, this paper has shown that oral histories provide a greater understanding of the type of duties compared with the functions outlined in published sources. What is absolute is that the attaché role will shift and change depending on the where the attaché is posted, and the circumstances that occur during the time period that they reside in the host country. In other words, an attaché’s time will be devoted to the priorities of the day and the directives of military and civil authorities. Orr summed this up by stating “I Represented everyone from the Minister down to a private soldier in the Armed Forces.”⁵⁷ This section will focus on aspects of the role that extended beyond typical attaché duties; because they were unique to the subjects’ post, they are not talked about in existing literature about attachés, because they resulted from unique political crises.

⁵⁴ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

⁵⁵ Currie, "Christopher Kilford Interview".

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

Orr began his position on the brink of the Gulf War (1990-1991). He recalled his first week in August 1990 when as a result of the Gulf War crisis his job immediately changed. He recounted a story of being at the farewell reception for the outgoing attaché and being summoned to the phone. At the behest of the Privy Council Office he was tasked with assessing the room in which Egyptian military, intelligence and government representatives and other foreign officials were gathered. He was asked to seek the opinions about Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Not yet familiar with the position or the attendees, he was hesitant to broach the sensitive question and was surprised at the candidness of people's answers. Some were open about how their country was planning to respond to Hussein's belligerent act.⁵⁸

As a result of the Gulf War, the first two years of his position were consumed by "nit-noid", administrative work that included getting kit into the Gulf for Canadian Forces. A large amount of their time was consumed with "steam driven" technology; Orr and his Sergeant received information via "five--foot" teletype messages. They had to rely on encrypted teletype messages in order to coordinate diplomatic notes permitting flights to travel through Egyptian airspace, and ships to pass through the Suez Canal. When the Gulf War ended, the next year was filled with "picking up the pieces", arranging visits from Canadian officials who had provided supplies and resources towards the Gulf War effort.⁵⁹

Kilford's responsibilities also included crisis response. On his first night in Kabul, he recalled hearing two rockets overhead, next a firefright broke out a short distance from where he was staying. He later found out that the event was connected to a kidnapping attempt on a local house. Similarly, he was required to escort the family members of a driver who was severely burned from a drive-by bombing at the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters. These stories demonstrate the climate in which he was required to conduct his attaché duties.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Currie, "John Orr Interview".

In the beginning of Kilford's tenure in Afghanistan, a large portion of his role was devoted to observing training and the development of military academies. He was also tasked to evaluate the quality of officers and gauge the overall progress of the training program. Since 2003, the ISAF had been working with participating countries to overhaul the Afghan National Army (ANA). Previously the ANA had an inequitable ethnic majority of Tajiks who were partisan to the Shura- i-Nezar faction of the political party, Jamiat-i-Islami. The ISAF was responsible for rebuilding the army to ensure that the core was "ethnically balanced" and nonpartisan.⁶⁰ Kilford aided with coordination efforts to send Afghans to Canada for language and military training. This activity involved identifying senior leaders of a "high calibre." Unfortunately, the majority of participants selected claimed asylum once they entered Canada, this effectively shut down the program. As a result, his work was reduced. Another component of coordination activities included facilitating delivery of supplies sent by Canadians into Kabul and arranging the movement of UN vehicles with Canadian military transports.⁶¹

Kilford's next attaché post in Ankara, Turkey was also complicated by political conflict. He had assumed his position in 2011, in the midst of the Arab Uprising and the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. As a result, he spent a considerable amount of time assessing the stability of Turkey and its neighbouring state, Syria. This entailed meeting with Syrian opposition factions.

Town was not in a conflict zone, but still had an indirect role in facilitating counterinsurgency operations during the Afghanistan War. This included ensuring Canadian military representatives (i.e. special forces) could connect with their counterparts in Australia and New Zealand.⁶²

During Town's tenure in Australia, a large component of his duties involved military intelligence, because Canada did not have anyone filling the role due to a lack of resources. An aspect of Town's duties involved attending intelligence briefings and keeping Canada apprised

⁶⁰ Gale A. Mattox and Stephen M. Grenier, *Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan: The Politics of Alliance* (Stanford, California: Stanford Security Studies, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2015), 20-21

⁶¹ Currie.

⁶² Currie, "Rick Town Interview".

of critical information relevant to military intelligence. In the Twentieth-First Century, defence policy shifted for many countries including Australia and Canada, to focus on global counterterrorism operations in which military strategy hinged on multinational cooperation. Both Canada and Australia are members of the Five Eyes community established under the *United Kingdom -United States of America Agreement (UKUSA)*, a multi-cooperative intelligence treaty.⁶³ These stories demonstrate the fluidity of the attaché role, how it must be adapted according to the changing circumstances in which they assume their duties in their host country.

In conclusion, the subjects often shared experiences that were similar to the writings of previous attachés and academic articles, their interviews contribute to existing knowledge by providing in-depth scenarios. These narratives encompass the journey of an attaché from the beginning with selection and training to their performance in a host country and working under surveillance. The interviews demonstrate how the role shifts at critical junctures in history; responding to political crises such as the Syrian Civil War and the Gulf War. From the stories told, the oral histories also shed light on how critical relationships are to achieving success in their role. Without these connections on the ground, the attaché could not acquire a wide perspective of issues in the region in which they are posted. It is also clear from the interviews that there is still a knowledge gap as to how this information is considered in the drafting process of Canadian foreign and military policies and strategies. What is still unknown is what happened to the information supplied to Canadian authorities? Was there a debate over the information collected in places such as Sudan and Syria, or did it get pushed aside because it did not serve the Canadian government's policies of the day? Perhaps these histories will encourage future academics to seek out former attachés, learn about their contributions and explore how this role has shaped the history of the Canadian military.

⁶³ John Charles Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006) ,208, 261-263

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