

Canadian Army Tactical Nuclear Warfare Doctrine in the fifties: Force Development in the Pre-Professional Era

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Abstract :

The development of combat doctrine represents the highest level of corporate intellectual skills needed to manage an armed service. It requires the assessment of national goals and the derivation of required military capability. That capability must be shaped by intelligence of enemy means and intentions, knowledge of present and future technology and an appreciation of national priorities and resources to fund the force. A force must then be designed and trained to implement the doctrinal choices made by the high command. The Canadian Army that emerged from the Second World War had been reduced from 478,090 men and women to only 15,852 personnel. It had existed up to that point as a sort of branch operation of the British Army, dependent upon the head office at Horse Guards for intelligence and doctrine. By the early 1950s, it was faced with raising, deploying, and sustaining a brigade to fight in Korea, and then a second brigade to meet NATO commitments in Europe. The need to increase its size and to conduct combat operations created major management challenges, but did not require rethinking the fundamentals of combat. The advent of nuclear weapons and their adoption by the Soviet Union, however, posed just such a challenge.

While sometimes regarded as the golden age of Canadian military professionalism,¹ the 1950s are more accurately seen as the beginning of a lengthy developmental phase for the army. A colonial fragment, the army struggled to stand on its own two feet. Not only was it incomplete, but it had inherited the culture of the British Army, whose concepts of leadership, staff doctrine, and organization were to contribute to its difficulty in resolving military policy challenges. The Canadian Army exited the decade much larger than when it had entered. Size, however, should not be confused with professional attainment. While the effort to develop nuclear warfare doctrine resulted in the creation of new – and hitherto missing – staff capabilities, the product itself was not a success, offering little hope of battlefield victory over Soviet opponents.

Key Word :

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