National Defence

Joint Personnel Support Unit
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15 February, 2013

Distribution List

RESIGNATION FROM CANADIAN ARMED FORCES:
MASTER WARRANT OFFICER BARRY L. WESTHOLM, CD

References: A. Email, Westholm > CO, June 13, 2011
B. Email, Westholm > CO, June 17, 2011
C. Email, Westholm > OC, December 8, 2009
D. Email, Westholm > OC, RSM, January 9, 2013

It is with regret that I submit my resignation from the Canadian Armed Forces as the Regional Master Warrant Officer and Sergeant Major of the Joint Personnel Support Unit, Eastern Ontario Region. This act should be not taken as routine as I have taken this step solely to express my ethical opposition over the management of the JPSU. I submit it with the hope that it will influence senior leaders towards providing a more logical, sustainable and honourable path for this very important Unit.

The JPSU made a contract with CF Units that it would supply an environment of support, rehabilitation and leadership for their injured and ill troops through the Support Platoon (Sp Pl). The Sp Pl was a critical component that was lacking with the former SPHL system. This absence made Commanders and Privates alike very sceptical of the SPHL, so the inclusion of a Sp Pl in the IPSC was well received. The units in our Region have been very receptive to the JPSU Mission and have entrusted us with their injured and ill members. In normal circumstances this would be cause for some satisfaction but instead, given the direction the JPSU has taken to meet this achievement, it is more a cause for alarm.

Our HHQ's long-standing opposition to staffing this Region appropriately, even while the supported personnel continue to increase past 100%, defies all logic and is by any measure a formula for tragedy. This policy makes our solicitations to Units and our claim to assist the ill and injured a fraudulent one. Command Teams, most notably at CFB Petawawa, are aware that a ratio of 45-60 posted-in personnel to one Section Commander is un-workable. Indeed, this situation in many ways reflects an organizational shortfall that made the SPHL an unmitigated disaster.

While this is not the only flaw with the JPSU's management it is a fatal one, and remains something that can be easily corrected simply by increasing the strength of military staff and applying some common-sense structure to the IPSC's. The Command Teams of 2 CMBG and CFB Petawawa know this and have offered us support from their units on several occasions. However, the JPSU HHQ consistently prevents us from accepting, or even requesting, this much needed relief. The reasoning I've been told is that JPSU/CMP brass believed this could be perceived as "Mission Failure" and therefore was unacceptable. Ironically, this face-saving attitude is pushing the JPSU towards actual Mission Failure.

Defining Mission Failure of the JPSU was a rather bizarre topic broached at the last OC's conference in Ottawa (minutes not yet circulated). After discussion of the staff shortfalls, and the pressures being placed on the Regions, the conversation turned to how best to define "Mission Failure". Two of the more memorable responses were that Mission Failure would not be declared as long as a solitary civilian employee remained within the Unit. The second was a suggestion from JPSU Ops to curtail our Out Reach initiatives which in-turn would reduce the intake of the ill and injured thus providing some relief. At that point I declared to the room that Eastern Ontario Region was at Mission Failure. I further stated that Mission Failure (to me) was the inability to effectively carry out the JPSU Mission. I underscored that the ratio of Posted-In to Section Commander allowed for very poor Situational Awareness (SA), and without SA we could lose track of our members – perhaps with mortal results.

While the staffing philosophy for the JPSU is cause for significant concern, it is not a solitary one. Another related issue is how JPSU senior leadership views the military staff at the Regional Level. During a recent discussion in Parliament, JPSU leadership stated that the role of the uniformed component in the JPSU "was strictly responsible for the personal administration" It was further stated that given this, the high ratio of personnel to staff was "workable". Regrettably, this is not the case as our front-line military staff requires an enormous amount of leadership interaction *and* administrative skills *and* communication skills *and* compassion *and* commitment *and* resiliency. In short, they must employ the attributes of Section Commanders in the classical sense of the term, and then some.

As the Regional Master Warrant Officer and Sergeant Major I hold the most senior Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) position in the Region, and with this position comes a responsibility to my subordinate NCM's (Posted-In and Staff). However, despite my best efforts to support them by sustained appeals to my superiors (as did my former OC who was "re-assigned") they were to no avail (References A thru C cited as examples). My inability to persuade my superiors in accepting my recommendations directly impact my NCM's who must bear the consequences. At this juncture, many of the Sp Pl staff have regressed to the point of losing SA on their troops and are incurring considerable stress at duty and at home – many are approaching, or are at, burn-out levels.

Given my inability to influence my superiors to correct these critical issues, I am no longer comfortable holding the position of Regional Sergeant Major as it conflicts with the ethical values instilled in me by my Branch, my Regiment and the Canadian Armed Forces. I informed my immediate superiors on of my potential departure some time ago (Reference D.) and have since discussed the reasons why. Given this, I request an expedited release date of February 28, 2013. As the contents of my letter may be of interest to those who have personnel posted to Eastern Ontario Region, or in the success of the JPSU itself, I have included them on the distribution list for information.

Respectfully

B.L. Westholm
Master Warrant Officer
Regional Sergeant Major
Joint Personnel Support Unit
Eastern Ontario Region

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