

Canada's Elite Secret Army

Peter Worthington, The Sunday Star

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Chances are you've never heard of these guys - and that's just the way they want it.

The most secret, unpublicized and least known branch of the Canadian military is also its most controversial and, arguably at the root of many of the problems that have beset our Armed Forces in the past decade.

It's something called JTF2 (Joint Task Force II).

The Department of National Defence (DND) won't talk about JTF2, other than to admit it exists and is headquartered at Dwyer Hill, outside Ottawa.

JTF2 is a hyper-secret, elite counter-terrorist and VIP security force of some 250 hand-picked volunteers who are super-fit and super-trained, whose identities are secret, whose budget is classified and who are our version of Britain's SAS and U.S. Special Forces.

But JTF2 doesn't seem to have achieved much since its creation in 1992, except to flirt with disaster - to itself, the military, the country.

Originally the brainchild of Robert Fowler when he was deputy defence minister (before his UN ambassadorship) and then-chief of defence staff (CDS) General John de Chastelain, JTF2 quickly evolved into something of a secret army outside the military chain of command, reporting directly to the CDS.

Members operate in small units (called "bricks") and act as bodyguards to the PM and Defence minister when they travel to dangerous places. Regular soldiers aren't sufficient protection.

JTF2 replaced the RCMP's anti-terrorist Special Emergency Response Team (SERT), which was deemed unsuitable for quasi-military operations. In fact, JTF2 has replaced the disbanded Airborne Regiment as our "elite" military unit. To some, it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Miraculously, JTF2 (there is no JTF1) has escaped critical assessment. Mostly, it's been Scott Taylor of the military magazine "Esprit de Corps" (see his book, Tested Mettle) and Dave Pugliese of the "Ottawa Citizen" who have documented its deeds.

Back in 1993, a JTF2 platoon was sent to Bosnia to "rescue" 55 Canadian peacekeepers held hostage by the Serbs. Fortunately for all concerned, the Serbs let the Canadians go who, it turned out, were being treated lavishly as "guests" by their captors.

In 1996, with tacit co-operation of Foreign Affairs and DND, a JTF2 commando team went to Peru, ostensibly to offer safe passage to terrorists who held 500 guests hostage

at the Japanese ambassador's residence.

The idea was that a Canadian Airbus, with a platoon of JTF2 commandos hidden inside, would ambush the terrorists as they boarded for the free flight to Cuba.

Mercifully, the Peruvian military vetoed the plan and raided the embassy, freeing all hostages and killing all the terrorists.

So hush-hust is JTF2, that when would-be and wannabe JTF2 members became involved in a bank-robbing ring, the matter was hushed up. (Two soldiers not in the JTF2, although one had tried out for it, got 12 and seven years respectively for a 1998 CIBC heist in Calgary, where 80 shots were fired. Several JTF2 members associated with the ring, according to testimony, were dealt with in secret, with no publicity, despite confessions)

Former Airborne Capt. Michel Rainville, recently convicted in Quebec of torture, after initially being charged with torture, kidnapping, illegal confinement, extortion with a firearm, assault and death threats relating to an incident in 1992, served as a JTF2 officer.

Rainville led a JTF2 "exercise" against Van Doos in Quebec City, ostensibly testing security of the Citadel's weapons locker. Wearing ski masks and carrying shotguns and UZI machine pistols, the pretend terrorists overpowered two soldiers on guard duty, stripped, beat, tortured, bound them with duct tape and threatened to kill them unless they co-operated. One soldier was sodomized with a baton and then a shotgun.

One terrified soldier escaped, climbed down the wall and called the police who arrived in full riot gear. The army tried to hush the matter up, and for years ignored the grievances of one of the victims (Frank Savage) until he brought it to the attention of civilian authorities, who laid the charges of which Rainville was eventually found guilty.

It also turns out the infamous 1993 "turkey shoot" of two "infiltrators" in Somalia (and the close-range execution-style killing of one of them) was a JTF2 "demonstration," led by the same Rainville, to show visiting Canadian and U.S. Special Forces brass their worth.

Trooper Kyle Brown, convicted in the beating death of a Somali prisoner, was always puzzled why American Special Forces were in Canadian uniforms in Somalia. It seems they were secretly training and working with JTF2.

Taylor speculates the reason the Somalia inquiry was suddenly aborted was because the question of American Special Forces wearing Canadian uniforms was about to come out, revealing the involvement of JTF2 commandos.

When the Airborne Regiment was first sent to Somalia, Brig.-Gen Ernie Beno, commander of the Special Service Force at Petawawa, urged that Rainville be sent home immediately as unfit, when his photo ran in a Montreal newspaper showing three commando knives strapped to him. Rainville boasted that he and his men were trained in assassination and he could "kill a man in two seconds".

Beno's advice was ignored at the military's top levels.

JTF2 was involved in various confrontations with Indians - and looked inept when the Mohawk Warrior Society, smuggling cigarettes and firing weapons at Cornwall, somehow tapped into and compromised JTF2's classified phone system.

As well as guarding VIPs and attending summit meetings and gatherings like th Pan-Am Games in winnipeg, JTF2 commandos have gone to Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti and Rwanda, where "black operations" were planned, bur rarely materialized, or had much effect.

Disastrous

While there's a need for elite troops in certain situations - which is what our disbanded Airborne Regiment was - secret armies are usually disastrous.

,br> I'd argue that JTF2 should be disbanded - or made public and accountable. SAS and U.S. Special Forces operations have MI6 and the CIA as intelligence sources, but JTF2 is without a similar resource, and must depend on allies.

Hence, it has a certain vulnerability. Traditionally, Canada doesn't dabble in international clandestine operations.

We don't need a secret army unit that has been associated with bank robbers and disgraced individuals like Rainville serving Canada's interests.

More Info:

Joint Task Force Two (JTF2) is the Canadian Armed Forces elite counter-terrorist/special operations unit. Although the Joint Task Force is trained in counter-terrorism, it is believed that the unit operates more like an SAS-type special operations force. JTF2's exact roles and missions, however, are not made public.

JTF2 is so secretive that it's size, weapons, training and force commander are not made public. In fact, members of the Canadian Forces know very little information about the Joint Task Force themselves.

- **Activated:** April, 1993 following the hand-over of counter-terrorist duties from RCMP to the Canadian Armed Forces.
- **Headquarters:** Dwyer Hill Training Center, Ontario believed to include a CQB (close-quarter battle)facility, an 8-story building for hostage-rescure, a DC-10, a bus, a multi-million dollar shooting range, gymnasium, and olympic-sized swimming pool.
- **Start-up costs:** believed to be around \$20 million Cdn. Reports recently indicate that JTF2's budget is closet to \$40 million Cdn. However, actual figures remain classified.
- **Team Composition:** the actual size of JTF2 remains classified. However, it is

believed the unit is 250 operators strong. JTF2 is commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel and members are selected from volunteers in the army, navy, and air force. Only the fittest and most capable armed soldiers were approached by unit CO's for tryout into JTF2. They are organized into 2 or 4-man teams known as "bricks". Each "brick" has a specialty (communications, sniping, etc.) A 20-30 man troop is commanded by a Captain.

- **Miscellaneous:** JTF2 is deployed on each and every single large scale peackeeping mission, although it is not clear as to their roles classified. Reports indicate that the Canadian has secretly expanded JTF2's counter-terrorist role to include roles similiar to those conducted by other special operations units. It has been discovered that JTF members reportedly train Canadian military snipers for overseas missions.

- **Equivalent Organizations**
 - British SAS
 - American Special Forces
 - Germany's Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG-9)
 - Australian Special Air Service Regiment
 - French GIGN