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The Canadian Rangers
A Living History



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STUDIES IN CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY
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The Canadian War Museum, Canada's national museum of military history, has a threefold mandate: to remember, to preserve, and to educate. *Studies in Canadian Military History*, published by UBC Press in association with the Museum, extends this mandate by presenting the best of contemporary scholarship to provide new insights into all aspects of Canadian military history, from earliest times to recent events. The work of a new generation of scholars is especially encouraged, and the books employ a variety of approaches – cultural, social, intellectual, economic, political, and comparative – to investigate gaps in the existing historiography. The books in the series feed immediately into future exhibitions, programs, and outreach efforts by the Canadian War Museum. A list of the titles in the series appears at the end of the book.



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Introduction

✦ CAPE ISACHSEN, ELLEF RINGES ISLAND, Nunavut, longitude 78°8' N, latitude 103°6' W, 18 April 2002. It was a biting minus thirty-six degrees Celsius with wind chill when the Canadian Forces Northern Area commander and his entourage, including me, stepped off the yellow Canadian Forces Twin Otter plane. The serious faces of twenty-nine Canadian Rangers, lined up in rows behind their snow machines, greeted us. They had just conquered the magnetic North Pole. Ten days before, these Rangers and four soldiers from 1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (CRPG) Headquarters in Yellowknife had left the community of Resolute Bay. Operation Kigiliqavik Ranger, named after the Inuktitut word for “the place at the edge of known land,” covered more than 1,600 kilometres of rough sea ice, pressure ridges, rocky river valleys, and breathtaking expanses of tundra. Each Ranger drove a snow machine that pulled a sixteen-foot *komatik* (sled) laden with up to 675 kilograms of supplies. They endured wind chill temperatures below minus fifty degrees Celsius, near whiteout conditions, and twenty-four-hour sunlight.¹

The patrol had travelled more than 800 kilometres when it was forced to stop on the sea ice north of Ellef Ringes Island. Two kilometres ahead lay a huge, impassable lead – a crack in the sea ice over 400 kilometres long and 5 kilometres wide. By attaining 79°N latitude, the expedition technically could claim that it had reached the magnetic pole – the point where Earth’s magnetic field points vertically downwards, “wobbling” in an oval up to 200 kilometres in a single day. Ranger Sergeant Peter Moon reported that

[a] small iceberg was selected as the symbolic centre of the Pole and Rangers ran to it whooping and shouting and waving two big Maple Leaf and Canadian Ranger flags, as well as the flags of the three territories and their home communities. They hugged, shook hands and slapped high fives.

[Major Yves] Laroche [the commanding officer of 1 CRPG] sat quietly on his snowmobile amidst the jubilation and thought about the 18 months of planning that had gone into the event, the longest, furthest and largest sovereignty patrol in Canadian history. In a short speech to team members he said, “You know, guys, usually I don’t say too much, but today is outstanding. Today, you made history. You should all be very proud.”²

The Rangers on the patrol, all part-time members of the Canadian Forces Reserves based in communities across Canada’s remote regions, expressed their excitement. These men and women, many of their weathered faces burned by frost and exposure, loved and lived the land. In this group, I saw a microcosm of northern Canada. They came in all shapes and sizes. Some were Inuit, some Dene, some White. Ranger Paul Guyot from Fort Simpson emphasized one common characteristic: “they are all tough.”³ He took me back to the tent he was sharing with three Inuit Rangers. The group exuded a spirit of camaraderie. Over bannock and cups of “cowboy coffee,” visitors coming and going, the Rangers swapped stories. They told me about the trip, but the conversation soon shifted to their personal encounters with polar bears. These were stories about survival – what Margaret Atwood has identified as the dominant theme in Canadian culture and identity.⁴ Lounging comfortably on a polar bear skin, despite the frigid temperature outside, I realized that the Rangers’ stories were not about victimization, nor simply about surviving. These tales celebrated living on the land and waters, their homeland, as northerners and as Canadians.

The Rangers reflected on patriotism and service: “We don’t want other people intruding on our land without us knowing about it,” Ranger Sergeant Darrel Klemmer of Tulita explained. Operation Kigiliqavik Ranger demonstrated the Canadian Forces’ ability to patrol the outermost reaches of the country. The exercise also offered Rangers from different areas a chance to share their experiences. “You get 30 different Rangers together and they’ll have 60 different ways of doing the same thing,” he noted. “But we talk about our families and our communities and tell stories of the old ways. Everybody has hunting in common. Everybody likes to hunt.” Ranger Sergeant



The Rangers conquer the magnetic North Pole, 2002. Photo by Julian Tomlinson, courtesy of
1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group

John Mitchell of Dawson observed: “the Rangers are one of the things that link the whole North.”⁵ A quiet patriotism underlay their statements. “It’s always been a national thing, you know, to wave the Canadian flag here,” Mitchell told a reporter. “I think what everybody ... got was a sort of personal understanding of sovereignty as it pertains to them. You know, it became a personal thing.”⁶

The political profile and extensive media coverage of the operation highlighted the Rangers’ contributions to Canadian sovereignty. While we were visiting, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Art Eggleton, the defence minister, telephoned from Ottawa to congratulate the Rangers on their operation.

“This sovereignty patrol is a continuing example of the service and dedication of the Canadian Rangers over the past 60 years,” Eggleton told the press. “It illustrates their unique skills and vital contributions, not only to their own communities, but to Canada. Canadian Rangers, who are masters of operation in Canada’s harshest environment, are an invaluable component of the Canadian Forces.”⁷ The media reported that the exercise provided Canada with “crucial ammunition” for its northern sovereignty disputes. “It’s all about sovereignty here,” Captain Rick Regan, the deputy commanding officer of 1 CRPG, explained. “The Rangers are the ones letting us know what’s going on in our own backyard.”⁸

This national profile revealed one face of the Canadian Rangers. Their other face was well known by the residents of the nation’s sparsely settled northern coastal and isolated areas. “We rarely make notice of the Rangers, but they are the ones we see at the cenotaph every Remembrance Day. But more than sombre figures to remember the ones that have fallen, the Rangers are here to provide us all vital service,” an editorial in *Nunavut News/North* noted on 18 October 1999. “When search and rescue teams are required, the Rangers are trained, ready and willing to deploy on a moment’s notice. When emergency situations call for help, our Rangers are there first. We don’t often notice them and we hope we never need them, but we can all sleep a little better at night knowing they’re out there ready if the unexpected happens.”⁹

Sombre evidence of the Rangers’ contributions came on New Year’s Eve 1999 in Kangiqsualujjuaq, a small village on the George River and the easternmost settlement in Nunavik. About 300 of the 650 residents attended the New Year’s festivities at the Satuumavik school gymnasium, which doubled as the community’s meeting hall. At midnight, everyone gathered outside the building to watch ten Rangers fire their usual ceremonial salute. Minutes later, the community returned to the gym and formed their customary circle to welcome one another into 1999. Moments after the handshake ceremony ended, they watched in horror as snow from the steep hill beside the building smashed through the wall. People frantically dug with their bare hands, trying to rescue friends and family, many of whom were buried completely by the avalanche. The local Rangers’ gunshots had not caused the slide, but the Rangers were vital to the response. They helped pull dozens of injured men, women, and children from the carnage throughout the night and the following day. The deaths of four adults and five children testified to the “horrible nightmare.”¹⁰

Despite being geographically expansive, Nunavik is a close-knit community. When Rangers from northern Quebec heard about the avalanche, they responded. Sergeant Vallee Saunders of Kuujuaq recounted:

Since the weather was a whiteout, we had heard the news at around 2:30 A.M. by telephone. Then at 7:30 A.M. the chief of the fire department came to my house to notify me to get my Ranger group ready to go. I started calling my patrol and I managed to get 18 of my Rangers ready by 11 A.M. Then we took a civilian aircraft and arrived there at around noon on Jan. 1.

They were expecting us and a school bus picked us up at the terminal and drove us to the community centre. We saw what we had never expected to see. Many Ski-Doos were all over the place like dinky toys. I saw Ford pickup trucks crushed like sardine cans.

Then we were told they had recovered six bodies but were missing three more. Even though this event was a real emotional tragedy, the people who had been digging all night were very happy to see us because we were there to help them out.

We were handed shovels and we started digging. The condition of the snow was unbelievably hard because it just dropped and didn't travel a lot.

We had to break the snow first to shovel it. We dug for about six hours before recovering the first body. This woman had a baby (with) her in the traditional parka for carrying a baby. Once we found the lady's body, the Surete du Quebec came in to take care of the body.

We didn't proceed digging until the body was removed. We were also told she had a second baby with her. We started digging some more and about 30 to 45 minutes later we recovered the last body, the woman's second child.

The experience was very hard to go through. Two Rangers from that community died in the avalanche and we all knew them.¹¹

Members from eleven of the fourteen Ranger patrols in Nunavik assisted in the Kangiqsualujuaq disaster. They controlled access to the school building, provided honour guards and security when the prime minister and the premier visited the community, carried handmade plywood coffins containing the victims, and reassured the community when weather conditions delayed funeral arrangements. Rangers from as far as Coral Harbour provided



Ranger Sergeant Vallee Saunders with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien after the 1999 avalanche. Courtesy of 2 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group

the disaster site with emergency supplies and food such as freshly harvested caribou.¹² This extraordinary cooperation resulted in the chief of the defence staff awarding 2 CRPG with a Canadian Forces Unit Commendation for their efforts.¹³ More importantly, the Rangers' response to the avalanche reaffirmed their leadership role in Canada's remote communities.

SOVEREIGNTY. SECURITY. STEWARDSHIP. These terms lie at the heart of debates about Canada's contemporary Arctic policies.¹⁴ They are also essential to understanding the Canadian Rangers and their contributions to their communities, the Canadian Forces, and their country – past and present.

Canada's extensive coastlines and vast northern expanses have presented security and sovereignty problems since the Second World War. These regions have some of the lowest population densities in the world combined with some of the most difficult climatic and physical environments in which to operate. Maintaining a conventional military presence is prohibitively expensive. As a result, the Canadian Rangers have played an important but unorthodox role in domestic defence for more than six decades. Often described as the military's "eyes and ears" in remote regions, the Rangers

have come to represent an important success story for the Canadian Forces. They are a flexible, inexpensive, and culturally inclusive means of having “boots on the ground” to demonstrate sovereignty and to conduct or support domestic operations. The Rangers successfully integrate national security and sovereignty agendas with community-based activities and local stewardship. This practical partnership, rooted in traditional knowledge and skills, promotes cooperation, communal and individual empowerment, and crosscultural understanding.

This book explains how and why the Canadian Rangers took shape, how cycles of waxing and waning support influenced the form and pace of their development during the Cold War, and how the organization has grown and gained national attention over the last three decades. Defence officials defined the Canadian Ranger concept in the early postwar period and based it on the model of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers created during the Second World War. Since 1947, popular, political, and military interest in the Rangers has mirrored surges of military interest and involvement in the North.¹⁵ Oscillating cycles of disinterest and commitment reveal that the historical relationship between the Rangers and the military establishment was marked as much by uncertainty and neglect as by support and respect.¹⁶

Historian Bill Waiser reminds us that distance is both a physical reality and a state of mind. “The hard facts of distance” (both getting to and travelling in remote regions) are complemented by distance as a mental construct (the distance between the land and the observer).¹⁷ Defence officials conceived the Canadian Rangers as an inexpensive way to carve out a military space for citizens who live in isolated coastal and northern communities and who would not otherwise be suitable for or interested in military service. The army’s early expectations were low and its support limited. Over the last six decades, however, the Rangers have come to occupy a middle ground – an interactive space where residents of remote regions are actors and partners in defence rather than simple pawns of outside forces.¹⁸ The military now understands that residents of remote regions can make meaningful contributions to both national defence and their communities, without leaving their homelands. The history of the Rangers reveals how accommodation and acceptance of cultural diversity can generate and sustain a low-cost military presence that supports sovereignty, military operations, and nation building. The Rangers represent a bridge between the military and civilian realms, spanning different physical and cultural geographies.

Although I characterize the Rangers as a postmodern military unit, they were created in the midst of Cold War modernism. They may just as easily be characterized as pre-modern citizen-soldiers, more akin to the militia of New France than to the primary reservists of the early twenty-first century.¹⁹ The Canadian Rangers are not an anachronism, however. They are a unique form of military service created and adapted to Canada's remote regions. Their evolving roles and practices reflect the interplay between the military's expectations, practical skills, traditional knowledge, and the needs of local communities.

Defence officials and politicians have debated the Ranger concept since the early postwar period. Enduring questions help to frame this history. What should the Canadian Rangers be expected to do? Where should they be located? Who should participate? How should they be organized? And how does Ranger service fit within evolving military and civic identities?²⁰

Expectations

This book reveals a long-standing debate about what the military could or should expect of the Canadian Rangers. The Rangers' basic mandate – “to provide a military presence in sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas of Canada that cannot conveniently or economically be provided for by other components of the Canadian Forces” – has remained remarkably consistent since 1947. The tasks that the Rangers perform to support this mission have changed and become more complex. They focused initially on supporting national security – protecting their communities from enemy attack in the early Cold War. By the 1970s, their role dovetailed with general military responsibilities to assert Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. Since the 1990s, the Rangers have also played a more visible nation-building and stewardship role in remote regions, particularly in Aboriginal communities.

Policy makers framed the original concept around the idea that the Rangers would be the armed forces' eyes and ears in sparsely settled regions. Postwar realities dictated new responsibilities for continental defence, and politicians and defence planners had no desire to position garrison forces across Canada's northern expanse. They sought less resource-intensive solutions. Military officials had debated the usefulness of minimally trained and largely unsupported forces even before the organization formed in 1947. The Rangers' primary role was to detect and report anything unusual while they went about their daily lives. In wartime, they would serve as coast

watchers, guides, and guerrillas to prevent the enemy from securing a foothold on Canadian soil. Their tactical role was limited. Because they had no training, they would engage the enemy only until regular troops could respond. Their contribution was modest, but so was their cost. “As an exercise in risk management,” one report concluded, “the establishment of the Rangers was a sound and well thought out mitigation strategy. Although the likelihood of invasion was not high, the consequences of a successful invasion were significant.”²¹

The early debates about whether the Rangers should focus on surveillance and reconnaissance or be trained in guerrilla tactics and equipped for combat persist. Even though senior decision makers repeatedly denied that the Canadian Rangers resurrected the wartime Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, the Canadian Army’s Western Command pushed for a strong operational and tactical role throughout the 1950s. By contrast, liaison officers in Quebec and Eastern Commands worried about a combat emphasis, believing that this would set up false expectations about the organization’s purpose and capability. Instead, they emphasized grassroots surveillance and reconnaissance.

These debates were unique to the Rangers, but they paralleled the experiences of other formations within the armed forces. Military historian Bernd Horn’s analysis of Canada’s airborne forces in the early Cold War offers some striking similarities with the early history of the Rangers. To “defend against help” from its American neighbour, Canada had to show that it was capable of guarding the northern approaches to the continent against an ill-defined Soviet threat. The Mobile Striking Force offered an inexpensive solution to Canada’s sovereignty and security problem, but the paltry resources dedicated to manpower and training made it a paper tiger. In due course, the government’s inability to rationalize the role, structure, and relevance of airborne forces contributed to their decline after political and military leaders downgraded the idea of the North as a gateway to invasion in the mid-1950s.²²

The Rangers faced similar problems, and the lack of a clear, credible requirement led to the organization’s decline in the 1960s. As the nature of the nuclear threat shifted, so did perceptions about what citizens and soldiers could contribute to defence. The military value of the Rangers’ surveillance and tactical roles became less apparent, paralleling trends in Canadian militia service and civil defence planning more generally. Training regimens, which focused on national survival tasks, proved unpopular, and the bureaucratization of civil defence planning pushed out grassroots community

organizations.²³ The Rangers' practical roles as coast watchers, advisers, and guides to the military remained, particularly along the Atlantic coast. By the 1970s, however, officials gave more weight to their importance as a simple military presence in northern regions than to their potential to engage a foreign adversary with guerrilla tactics.

The Rangers, as Canadians representing the military in remote parts of the country, had always served an implicit sovereignty function. The government's growing preoccupation with the need for a symbolic military presence in support of sovereignty accentuated this role. The Rangers provided an inexpensive answer to the government's perceived lack of "boots on the ground." To claim sovereignty, popular logic suggested, a government must know what is happening in its territory and be able to respond when required. When Canadians worried about sovereignty over the Arctic, the Rangers offered a fitting example of control over isolated areas through their presence and as advisers to southern troops sent to demonstrate "effective occupation."²⁴

Critical theory that broadens and deepens the definition of security and acknowledges discursive, temporal, and cultural contexts also helps to explain the Rangers' growth and success in recent decades.²⁵ In the 1970s, Nils Ørvik drew a link between northern development issues and the military, economic, and political components of security. He outlined the need for governments to respond to northern Aboriginal peoples' desire to achieve "equality" with southern Canadians while implementing development "methods and measures that could prevent a general adoption of the southern model from disrupting or destroying the values and traditions of the native society." A decentralized approach would allow northern peoples to stay close to their lands and maintain their identity (and thus their personal security), but it would also entail additional money.²⁶ Although his work focused on resource and political development, his articulation of security concerns beyond the narrow realm of military confrontation sheds light on the sociopolitical climate of the Canadian North and provides a useful theoretical and contextual framework for assessing military activities.

Ørvik's insights have particular relevance when applied to the post-Cold War period. In the late 1990s, Arctic security issues changed significantly. The effects of military operations on northern peoples and ecology became central considerations, and Canadian defence activities in the Arctic focused on sovereignty rather than on conventional military security.²⁷ Debates about the militarization of the Arctic illuminated its damaging effects, and policy

makers could no longer ignore the human-security dimensions of their decisions. Canada's unofficial security discourse shifted from defending the integrity of the nation-state to protecting essential individual and group rights.²⁸ This shift helps explain why sociopolitical and human-security considerations validated the expansion of the Canadian Rangers in remote regions alongside commitments to traditional security and sovereignty.

While the Canadian Rangers were increasingly celebrated as sovereignty soldiers, military officials, journalists, and politicians began to acknowledge in the late 1980s that they also had a social impact that extended beyond their military presence. Many Rangers enjoyed prominent positions within their communities, which respected and valued the patrols as grassroots organizations that provided essential services in cases of emergency. Rangers regularly took leadership roles in local search-and-rescue activities and were held up as role models. Most surprisingly, given the popular assumption that military activities pose a threat to Aboriginal people and their homelands, Aboriginal leaders repeatedly acknowledged that the Rangers contributed to healthy communities.²⁹ The creation of the Junior Canadian Rangers in 1998 formalized the organization's nation-building role by using the Rangers to support a culturally appropriate youth program in remote communities.

Ongoing debates about the appropriateness of the Rangers' role and responsibilities reflect the relative weight that commentators give to the organization's operational and representational functions.³⁰ They value the Rangers for their military contributions to sovereignty, national security, and domestic operations, and some pundits believe that they should have more formal military training and responsibilities to ward off potential enemies. Other commentators believe that the Ranger's sociopolitical value is paramount and that resources should be redirected to enhance their contributions to Aboriginal communities.

Location

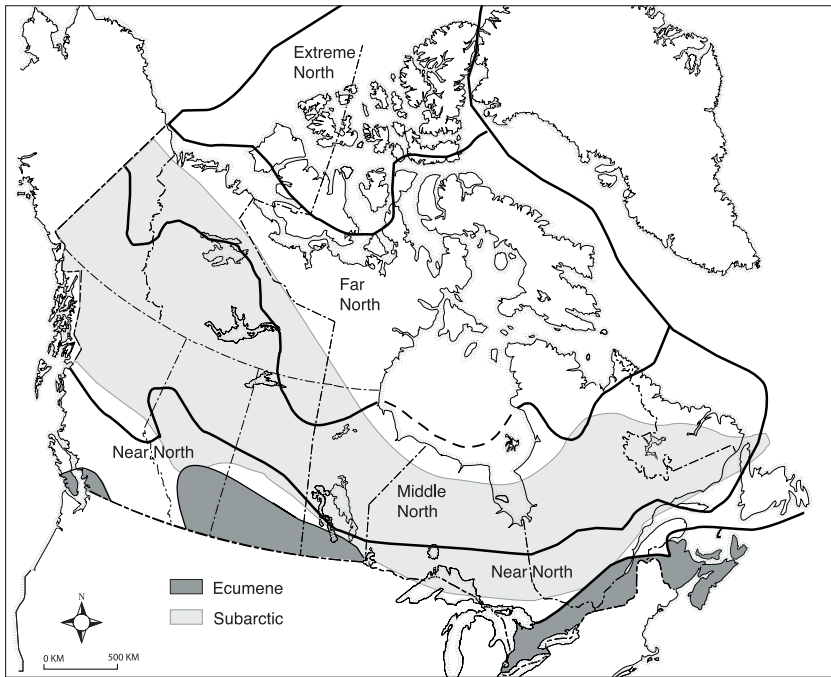
The mystique of the "Arctic Ranger" – a misnomer popularized by ill-conceived political statements in recent years – has dominated media and policy debates since the 1970s.³¹ The Canadian Rangers, however, have a presence from coast to coast to coast and throughout the provincial norths. Over the years, the Rangers' geographical parameters – "sparsely settled northern, coastal and isolated areas" – have been interpreted in different

ways by different people in different contexts. Simply looking at the Rangers as an Arctic organization obfuscates much of their history.

In an important think piece, historian Ken Coates advocates reconceptualizing the study of the Canadian North by focusing more broadly on remote regions. In sharing the fundamental characteristic of remoteness, coastal areas and communities beyond the main population belt, whether northern or non-northern, share “a particular set of structural relationships with the dominant sources of power” not defined by latitude.³² This insight is particularly appropriate to the history of the Rangers, which does not conform to a fixed, unchanging geographical conceptualization of “the North” or “remoteness.”

There is no single definition of *Arctic*, *North*, or *remote regions* (see the note on terminology at the end of this introduction). Geographer William Wonders observed that a “long-established practice by governments of arbitrarily selecting a particular degree of latitude to define the North still continues despite its artificiality.” Nationally, the southern boundaries of the northern territories were set at latitude 60° north. Provincial definitions usually begin their “norths” at latitude 55° north. Even dividing the North into Arctic and Subarctic components oversimplifies tremendous physical and cultural diversity.³³ Louis-Edmond Hamelin’s regionalization of the North and measures of nordicity create mental maps in which to situate the Rangers’ expansion throughout the Middle, Far, and Extreme Norths over the last seven decades.³⁴ Scholarship on the northern territories as Canada’s colonies and as the provinces’ forgotten norths also help to place the Rangers’ history in appropriate regional contexts.³⁵

The Canadian Rangers provide a military presence along Canada’s three coastlines. The Pacific, Arctic, and Atlantic seabords are diverse, yet coastal communities share commonalities – with one another and with isolated northern communities. The Coasts Under Stress research team recently observed that coasts represent cultural, political, and ecological edges, boundaries, or interfaces depending on the perspective of the viewer. Coastal residents, from their “peripheral” location, produce information that is distinct from perspectives emanating from the continental or political centre. They also face daunting challenges as members of distressed, staple-based communities that are highly vulnerable to external pressures.³⁶ Fortunately, important studies on Quebec’s Lower North Shore, outport Newfoundland and Labrador, and BC’s remote coastal areas help situate the Rangers’ evolution in temporal- and place-specific contexts.³⁷



Louis-Edmond Hamelin's Canadian Nordicity Index and the three northern zones

Sources: Based on Robert Bone, *The Geography of the Canadian North: Issues and Challenges* (Toronto: Oxford, 1992) and Louis-Edmond Hamelin, *Canadian Nordicity: It's Your North Too*, trans. by W. Barr (Montreal: Harvest House, 1978)

Although national in scope, the Rangers have developed distinct regional and local cultures. The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers flourished in British Columbia and Yukon during the Second World War, which explains why Western Command created the first peacetime Ranger units. Distinct approaches to organizing units and the roles assigned to them reflected the priorities of regional army commanders, demographic and socioeconomic realities, and geographical constraints. By the 1950s, the Ranger footprint extended across the territorial and provincial norths, along the Newfoundland coastline, and into the High Arctic. Limited resources exacerbated challenges related to organizing units and sustaining relationships. Regional commanders supported the Ranger units with varying degrees of commitment, and local activities and success depended upon the company or platoon commander's initiative and creativity.

The Ranger organization contracted in the 1960s and early '70s, when it was divided between a new Northern Region Headquarters in Yellowknife

and Maritime Command (the navy) in Halifax. The composition of Ranger patrols in Northern Region became increasingly Aboriginal and focused on sovereignty while the predominantly non-Aboriginal companies and platoons of Maritime Command concentrated on coast watching. When another Arctic sovereignty crisis renewed interest in the Rangers in the 1980s and prompted expansion, military officials debated whether growth should be directed North of 60 (where they believed the Rangers had a clear operational role in support of sovereignty) or South of 60 (where Rangers were making visible sociopolitical contributions). Despite the popular association of the Rangers with Inuit, the most vigorous growth in the last two decades occurred with the re-creation of the Rangers in British Columbia, northern Ontario, and in the northern prairie provinces. This expansion has enriched the demographic diversity of the organization.

Participation

Participation in the Rangers offers an alternative form of military service to those Canadians who live in remote areas, do not want to join the Regular Force, but still want to serve their country and their communities. The perceived military value of Rangers has always been linked to civilian experiences and practices. The basic premise is to recruit individuals who have lived in an area for a long time; who are intimately familiar with the local people, terrain, and weather conditions; and who possess skills and expert local knowledge.³⁸ There is no upper age limit so long as the recruits can perform their duties. The army will not deploy Rangers overseas and does not expect them to serve outside of their local areas (with some recent qualifications). This makes Ranger service distinct from Regular Force and Primary Reserve Force units.

The media overwhelmingly associates the Canadian Rangers with romantic stereotypes of Inuit hunter-trappers patriotically defending their homeland. Although true in many contexts, this book contextualizes this popular imagery by explaining how and why it became politically relevant and important. The iconic status of Inuit in the Rangers has generated a persistent misconception – perpetuated through the media and political statements – of the Rangers as an Aboriginal *program*. In reality, the Rangers are a subcomponent of the Canadian Forces Reserves with a high degree of Aboriginal participation. Most Rangers today are of Aboriginal descent, but

until the 1980s the majority were not. Misrepresenting the organization as an Aboriginal program fails to acknowledge the diversity of the Rangers and their historical experiences.

The military's evolving perceptions about the contributions that Aboriginal people in remote regions can make to national defence correspond with an expanding literature on indigenous people and military service in the twentieth century. Although the Rangers' history includes some examples of racism, marginalization, and neglect,³⁹ the dominant narrative reveals a growing military acceptance of Aboriginal people and their role in defending Canada and asserting sovereignty. In her study of military workfare in Canada, geographer Deborah Cowen observes a "shift from an explicitly colonial project of civilizing or 'integrating Indians,' to a complicated military mobilization of social justice discourse and specific celebration of Native rights and tradition in order to increase enrolment."⁴⁰ This observation applies to the Rangers, but in this case the military made no sustained attempt to acculturate Aboriginal people. Early critics, particularly Major-General Chris Vokes, questioned whether First Nations and Inuit could make a meaningful contribution to the military. Other officers supported Aboriginal involvement (generally under non-Aboriginal leadership) because they recognized the value of traditional knowledge, survival skills, and land use patterns. Close observers such as Captain Ambrose Shea in Eastern Command embraced this "otherness" and promoted Ranger service as a culturally appropriate way to sustain a military presence in remote communities.

New sovereignty and security discourses made efforts to accommodate Aboriginal peoples in the armed forces all the more significant by the late 1970s. During exercises, military officials saw the operational value of traditional skills. They began to see diversity as a force multiplier – a way to increase a combat force's operational effectiveness – rather than as a liability.⁴¹ Over the last three decades, this acceptance of diversity has allowed the Rangers to flourish in remote regions and has attracted significant positive media attention for the military. Acceptance not only fosters positive Aboriginal-military relations but also allows the Rangers to support self-governing and sustainable communities in unexpected ways.⁴²

As the Aboriginal profile of the Rangers has grown, non-Aboriginal contributions to the organization – particularly in British Columbia and Yukon, along the Lower North Shore, and in Newfoundland – have been pushed to the margins of popular awareness. This shift reflects larger

political and historiographical trends. Efforts to write Aboriginal people into regional histories have unfortunately led scholars to downplay other residents, and studies of non-Aboriginal people in remote regions have declined precipitously in recent decades.⁴³ As historical geographer Rosemary Ommer reminds us, remote coastal communities are also homelands to a diverse non-Aboriginal population with a strong sense of place.⁴⁴

Ken Coates observes that northern or remote regions are characterized by “a culture of opposition” that prevents networks of support from developing both within and outside of the region. Theoretical approaches that emphasize core-periphery relations predict that powerful agents of external control will dictate the future of remote areas.⁴⁵ Although defence officials in Ottawa and in regional headquarters factor heavily into this study, they are not the whole story. Rangers have never been coerced into service, cannot be employed against their will, and have leveraged their own social power to negotiate a distinctive place within the military system.⁴⁶ If there is little conceptual space in the existing literature for intimate cooperation between residents of remote regions and the Canadian state, as Coates suggests, the history of the Canadian Rangers reveals a more positive picture.

Organization

The unique organizational forms that the Canadian Rangers have assumed reflect dynamics at (and across) national, regional, and local levels.⁴⁷ On the national scale, political and military priorities have always shaped the Rangers. Politicians set the broad political direction for the military, determine budgets, and help to frame popular expectations for the armed forces. In this particular case, general threat assessments and high-level political and military decisions about how much interest and effort the military should devote to the defence of remote regions had a direct bearing on expansion and enhancement plans. Since 1994, political and national media interest in the Rangers has ensured sustained growth, with emphasis on Aboriginal service. Broader efforts to restructure the military in light of shifting geopolitical, economic, technological, and sociocultural environments also influenced the form and pace of Ranger development.

At National Defence Headquarters, senior officials have long deliberated over where the Rangers fit into the broader direction of national defence and

how the organization can meet operational and political objectives without draining budgets or losing overall coherence. Various organizations have executed command and control of the Canadian Rangers since 1947: the army; Maritime Command (the navy) and Northern Region Headquarters/Canadian Forces Northern Area; the vice chief of the defence staff through the Land Force Areas; and, recently, the chief of the land staff. In practice, central authorities devolved responsibilities for the Rangers to the regional level, where area commanders charted the course for their companies, platoons, and patrols with shoestring budgets and little national direction.

This book devotes significant attention to regional developments in order to reflect the Rangers' decentralized nature. National authorities intervened in debates about the Rangers' role and policy, but they recognized that a one-size-fits-all mentality would suffocate the regional commanders' ability to generate and sustain the Rangers' interest in their area. Officers outside of the national capital therefore had ample creative leeway to interpret national directives. This flexibility accommodated diverse human and physical geographies, and over time it allowed training and operations to adapt to local conditions and priorities. Contrary to the common notion that decentralized, community-based partnerships in remote regions are prohibitively costly, the Rangers were inexpensive compared to other military options. The formal reorganization of regional elements into Canadian Ranger Patrol Groups in 1998 marked a continuation of this long-standing regional evolution, and the groups remain in place today.

This decentralized approach has, however, generated concerns that the Rangers lack coherence as a national organization. Rigid management and the misalignment of structure and socio-environmental realities can lead to an organization's decline or collapse. Unfettered growth and liberal interpretation and implementation of mandates when there is no central coordination and stability can be equally damaging. A military review noted in 2003 that, over the preceding six decades, the Rangers had spent more time "as a number of regional entities than as a national program. Patrol Groups were simply set up to suit their own natural environment, cultural makeup, operational needs and political situation at the time." Although many of these differences were, according to the review, perfectly valid (particularly the accommodation of cultural differences), in other cases regional commanders had simply taken "different paths to achieve an end or have interpreted guidelines or even directives differently."⁴⁸ The challenge has been in

balancing flexibility and diversity with coherent direction and constraints to preserve the credibility and sustainability of the overall organization.

At its core, the Canadian Ranger organization is rooted in human relationships. Ranger instructors and Ranger liaison officers have provided the critical link between the military hierarchy and the Rangers since the 1950s. They have translated vague directions into practical training programs adapted to local conditions, responded to evolving sociocultural and operational needs, and ensured that the military has credibility at the grassroots level. With few military resources dedicated to the organization, their bottom-up approach to building and sustaining relationships with local communities has been essential to its success.

The Rangers must be understood as both a local, grassroots force and as a nationally or regionally directed military formation. The organization has changed over time, yet the basic principle of rooting it in local populations has remained constant. The original company-platoon structure, overseen by officers from the local area, reflected a traditional military structure – on paper. In practice, however, the characteristics of local leadership, widely dispersed units, and loose relationships with the military hierarchy proved highly unorthodox. As northern and coastal residents concentrated into settlements, the Rangers developed a simplified patrol structure. This structure encouraged community-based stewardship, ensuring that military practices reflected the needs, aspirations, and values of local people.

The Canadian Rangers have no parallel in the military world. Other countries have created unconventional military units to defend remote regions, but most are formally trained and serve requirements more comparable to Canada's Regular or Primary Reserve Forces than the Rangers.⁴⁹ This uniqueness means that the Rangers remain an enigma to defence planners who do not comprehend why or how they have taken their particular form. Repeated attempts to reconstitute the organization into a typical or formal military structure have been stymied by fiscal constraints, high-level military restructuring, and debates about feasibility and desirability. Consequently, most organizational change has been incremental and slow. Although unintentional, this pace allowed the Rangers to develop an inclusive governance structure that balances national and regional direction from headquarters staff with elected leadership at the patrol level. The ongoing search for balance between local, regional, and national priorities allows the Canadian Rangers to operate simultaneously on multiple scales, in ways that most casual commentators pushing for "modernization" fail to appreciate.

Ranger Service and Evolving Military and Civic Identities

Hedda Schuurman defines community as a conscious bond that unites people with shared traditions such as experience or language. Community is also “a consciousness that motivates people to work for a common good.”⁵⁰ Over time, the Rangers have formed a unique community. How and why did this occur, and what are the ties that bind them to the Canadian Forces and the Canadian state, given the culture of opposition prevalent in remote regions? How do the Rangers fit within the broader military community and, in turn, how does the military fit within the broader network of societal relations in remote regions?

The relationship between civilians (people without arms who constitute a society at large) and the military (people with arms established as a separate body to protect that society) in Western democracies has been influenced by national history, sentiment, and tradition. Sociologist Giuseppe Caforio notes that, for centuries, “the military world and the military mind-set have constituted a quite different, quite separate environment from other institutions, groups, and aggregates of civil society, and in part they still do.”⁵¹ Proponents of a divergence model insist on the need for a sharp distinction between civilian (political) and military (apolitical) spheres: military power must be contained so that instruments of state-sanctioned violence remain in the hands of legitimate civilian authorities who govern according to democratic principles.⁵² Other scholars promote a convergence model that draws the military closer to mainstream society as it incorporates broadly accepted social values. Through this process, military organizations become more decentralized and have more autonomous commands at lower levels.⁵³ Proponents of a segmented model try to bridge the divide between the divergence and convergence models by characterizing modern militaries as pluralistic organisms in which sectors bearing characteristics of civil society coexist with sectors that preserve a more traditional military *habitus*.⁵⁴ This long-standing debate raises questions about how cultural values, attitudes and symbols inform not only the nation’s view of military roles but also the military’s own view of that role. How do citizens interact with the military? Is there agreement over the role of the military in society?⁵⁵

This book carries the study of civil-military relations beyond the national centre by exploring military engagements with civil society in remote regions. The Rangers’ place in broader defence planning and practices partly reflects broader perceptions about professional soldiers and amateur *citizen-soldiers*

in modern Canada.⁵⁶ The emergence of a profession of arms in the nineteenth century, in which the state trained full-time soldiers to provide it with specialized services, explains why scholarly debates on civil-military relations deal primarily with political power and the relationship between the state and the professional officer corps.⁵⁷ Less work has been dedicated to amateur forces – the militia and other reservists.

Historian James Wood argues that Canada's militia myth, created in the aftermath of the War of 1812, "fostered a sense of complacency on the part of the Canadian people" that lasted more than a century. According to this logic, ordinary Canadians would simply volunteer, take up arms as citizen-soldiers, and meet any military crisis. This mentality survived the Great War and the interwar period but died during the Second World War and Cold War. "In an era when 'the next war' was likely to be won or lost in a matter of weeks rather than years," Wood explains, historians (and professional soldiers) found the militia myth dangerous. Consequently, they tended to depict "amateur soldiers as slightly comical anachronisms, holdovers from an earlier, pre-industrial era when war could be approached as a hobby or seasonal occupation."⁵⁸ Scholars, preoccupied with military professionalism, overlooked reservists – particularly peculiar subcomponents such as the Canadian Rangers.

In the late 1980s, sociologist Terrence Willett examined this bias towards professionalism, which downplayed the connection between reservists and their local cultures and communities. In his assessment, the Canadian Forces Reserves are a social and civic institution on par with full-time professional soldiers. In some situations, reservists could contribute more than Regular Forces because of their knowledge of and links to their host community. Although professional soldiers often dismiss social defence roles such as responding to natural disasters and other crises as if they are not "proper soldiering," these responsibilities expose soldiers to the same risks and stresses they would encounter in wartime and reinforce the public's perceptions that "a useful body of disciplined men [and women]" has civic relevance at home.⁵⁹

If reservists are citizen-soldiers who embody the link or bridge between the military and civil society,⁶⁰ then their perception of where they fit within Canada is integral to understanding their sense of patriotism and civic responsibility. Political scientist Alan Cairns emphasizes the centrality of citizenship to the modern democratic state. He describes citizenship as an instrument that socializes individuals to take ownership of the state, support it, and grant it legitimacy.⁶¹ Other scholars have observed how conceptions

of citizenship have broadened from the political to include economic and social dimensions (emphasizing rights rather than obligations), and they have noted the effects of diversity and pluralism on feelings of solidarity, social harmony, and civility.⁶² These broader societal trends have shaped how politicians, defence officials, community members, and the Rangers themselves understand the Canadian Rangers' role.

Modern military institutions are quintessentially assimilationist. Uniforms, systems of rank and promotion, and standardized training-and-operating procedures reinforce hierarchy and collective identity. Traditional military socialization seeks to supplant individual difference with a sense of shared loyalty and commitment to the traditions of the unit and the nation.⁶³ The Canadian Rangers do not fit this description and require a different analytical framework. Military sociologists Charles Moskos, J.A. Williams, and David Segal ascribe five fundamental characteristics to post-modern militaries. First, the civilian and military spheres interact on the structural and cultural levels. Second, postmodern militaries place less emphasis or differentiation on service, rank, and specialization. Third, missions focus less on combat and more on low-intensity humanitarian and constabulary missions. Fourth, postmodern forces carry out missions with multilateral rather than unilateral authorization. This idea extends to the fifth characteristic: the internationalization of military forces.⁶⁴

Applying these theoretical traits to a domestic-oriented force such as the Canadian Rangers requires creative interpretation, but these traits do help to explain the organization's vitality and success in recent decades. The Rangers' history certainly reveals the permeability of the civil and military structures, the erosion of martial values, and the degree to which democratization has been driven by internal rather than external considerations.⁶⁵ The organization does not divorce defence and security activities from cultural survival, sustainable community development, and civic or indigenous rights. If traditional theory typically casts military service as "selective, exclusive, and high normalizing in its sweep,"⁶⁶ the Rangers stand as an important exception, blurring the line between the citizen-soldier and the citizen-server.⁶⁷

As Canada's political self-image has shifted to a multicultural mosaic, military personnel policies have changed accordingly.⁶⁸ Cowen observes that "efforts to moderate the demands of discipline, conformity, and even nationalism have been under way, and new images of military service have been constructed on the grounds of global justice, multicultural leadership, and

service to self through education and improvement.”⁶⁹ Strategic documents emphasize that the Canadian Forces must be a visible national institution, one that reflects the country’s geographic and cultural diversity.⁷⁰ If cultural pluralism is now the main criterion by which to judge the acceptability of the armed forces’ social composition,⁷¹ the Canadian Rangers fare very well.

Accommodating and accepting pluralism also implies official recognition that “identities are not like hats” – people wear multiple identities at the same time. In addition to national identities, people often have limited ones that are local or regional or that reflect ethnic, gender, occupation or class, and familial or clan affiliations.⁷² By encouraging Canadian Rangers to function in a manner appropriate to diverse cultural and environmental conditions, the military has accommodated local and individual identities. The organization also reflects regional identities in its training, operations, command structure, liaison efforts, and representational activities. The overarching national identity of the Canadian Rangers is more elusive: a cliché such as “Unity in Diversity” may apply best.⁷³

Multiple imagined communities can, fortunately, occupy the same space simultaneously. In *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Jens Bartelson explains that sovereignty has both external and internal dimensions – it can signify something over a territory and within a given territory. As the parergonal divide between the international and the domestic spheres becomes increasingly blurred, it is difficult to classify phenomena as either inside or outside of the state.⁷⁴ Aboriginal self-government, for example, blurs the lines between governmental and “national” jurisdictions within the country. Although the Rangers do not constitute an Aboriginal program, they represent an important example of intertwined categories and contexts of citizenship, belonging, and identity. Mary Simon, speaking as a representative of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada in 1994, stressed that “the Inuit agenda for the exercise of our right to self-determination is not to secede or separate from Canada but rather that we wish to share a common citizenship with other Canadians while maintaining our identity as a people, which means maintaining our identity as Inuit.”⁷⁵ When Rangers set out on exercises, they represent both their local and regional communities and the Canadian Forces.

Although the high rate of Aboriginal membership in the Canadian Rangers is well known, scholars have not explored its broader significance. They typically depict Aboriginal peoples’ relations with the state as power contests. Anthropologist Paul Nadasdy warns that even current efforts to restructure Aboriginal-state relations, which appear empowering, may have

the opposite effect, “replacing local Aboriginal ways of talking, thinking, and acting with those specifically sanctioned by the state.”⁷⁶ Echoing the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, many commentators insist that the federal government should adopt a “two row wampum” model in which Aboriginal nations are treated as distinct from the Canadian citizenry.⁷⁷ With little common ground connecting Aboriginal peoples to Canadians, anthropologist Colin Scott insists that “the goal must be the creation of autonomous spaces within which Aboriginal peoples can give full play to their own cultural dynamics, reproduce their own social orders, and engage in innovations according to their own cultural genius.” This framework emphasizes the capacity of Aboriginal communities “for solid resistance and sustained action.”⁷⁸ Scholars such as Taiaiake Alfred, who hold up warriors resisting the Canadian state as authentic, organic expressions of timeless indigenous values,⁷⁹ simply deny legitimacy to Aboriginal people who participate with the state.⁸⁰

A framework that privileges autonomy and denies the possibility of complex Aboriginal identities that include Canadian citizenship cannot explain the Canadian Rangers’ success or even its very existence. The “citizens plus” school, first articulated by the Hawthorn-Tremblay Report in the mid-1960s, offers a more useful framework to explain the organization’s success.⁸¹ Rejecting assimilation as a policy goal, the report proposed that Indians should instead be regarded as citizens plus, as “charter members of the Canadian community” who could benefit from Canadian citizenship while also maintaining rights guaranteed through Indian status and treaty arrangements.⁸² Proponents of a citizens plus approach recognize the need for Aboriginal nations to govern themselves within Canada rather than to see themselves as international actors interacting with a foreign state.⁸³

In essence, the Canadian Rangers have become *citizen-soldiers plus* – members of the Canadian Forces who serve in their home areas with no expectation that they sacrifice their cultural and political identities. This book traces how the Rangers evolved to serve a vital function in remote communities, a function that transcends military, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural realms. Their history reveals that military activities designed to assert sovereignty need not cause insecurity for Aboriginal peoples. Managed on a community scale, a Ranger patrol draws on the indigenous knowledge of its members rather than “militarizing” and conditioning them through conventional training regimes. Flexible, cost-effective, and culturally inclusive, the Canadian Rangers support sustainable Aboriginal communities.

Discussions of Aboriginal-state friction, which dominate most theoretically oriented scholarship, are strikingly absent in documents and oral testimonies pertaining to the Rangers. Rangers are not simply a counterhegemonic response to hegemonic forms; instead, the organization accommodates diverse social and political orders and encourages its members to exercise their culture-based rights in a modern context.⁸⁴

In her landmark book *Ethnic Soldiers*, Cynthia Enloe explores how states use ethnicity to maintain political order and authority by manipulating the form and conditions of military service. Even though authorities publicly deplore ethnic divisions, she argues, they exploit them militarily.⁸⁵ By contrast, the history of the Rangers suggests an acceptance (rather than a conspiratorial exploitation) of diversity. When, why, and how did the Canadian Ranger organization develop into a middle ground – a civil-military community – embraced by residents of remote regions as a source of connectedness to one another, to the Canadian Forces, and to the Canadian state? Their unique form of military service, which has evolved since the origins of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers during the dark days of the Second World War, extends across Canada from coast to coast to coast. At the magnetic North Pole in 2002, Ranger Sergeant Darrel Klemmer emphasized that the Rangers had much in common, regardless of whether they called the forest or the bush, the Subarctic or the treeless tundra home. Ranger Sergeant John Mitchell agreed that the Rangers linked not only the whole North but also northerners with the south. “People don’t realize how far we are from the nation’s capital,” he explained, standing at one of the remotest reaches of Canada’s High Arctic. “The Rangers make you feel more like you’re a Canadian.”⁸⁶

A Note on Terminology

For the purposes of this book, *Arctic* has two meanings. Geographically, the region encompasses the territory and permanent ice north of the treeline, which roughly corresponds to Inuit Nunangat – the homeland of Canada’s Inuit, comprising the land and marine areas of the Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut, and Inuvialuit land claims settlement areas.⁸⁷ This area includes the Arctic Archipelago, the islands and waters that lie to the north of the Canadian mainland. Politically and militarily, the term *Arctic* refers to either this topographical or cultural area or to Canada’s Territorial North (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut – also referred to as “North of 60”).⁸⁸

The phrase *the North* is more inclusive than *the Arctic* and is used in various senses. The Canadian North includes the territories and the northern regions of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Labrador. In this book, the term *northerners* includes the people of Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and (where stated) Nunavik and Labrador.

I adopt the generic term *Aboriginal peoples* to refer collectively to the three groups recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982: Indians (Status, Non-status, and treaty), Inuit, and Metis. I use the term *Aboriginal peoples* synonymously with *Native peoples* and *indigenous peoples*. Military and civilian officials used the term *Indian* in accordance with the Indian Act and the Constitution. Given the stereotypes and ideological baggage associated with the term, people replaced *Indian* with *Native* and then *First Nation(s)* to refer to both individuals and groups (previously bands or tribes). *Eskimo* is now considered pejorative in many circles (being associated with the discredited etymology “one who eats raw flesh”) and has been replaced by *Inuit* (the people) in Canada and Greenland. *Eskimo* is still used in parts of Alaska and in anthropological and archaeological contexts.⁸⁹ I adopt language consistent with the documentary record, particularly in direct quotes, as well as current and preferred terms. Geographical names reflect those used during the periods under study, supplemented in parenthesis (where appropriate) with current names. Although changing nomenclature may confuse the reader, the process of renaming communities reflects evolving political and social identities.⁹⁰

I also use military terminology appropriate to its historical context. The generic term *Regular Forces* refers to Canada’s full-time professional military forces. The land force components have been called the Canadian Army Active Force (Active Army), Canadian Army (Regular), Forces Mobile Command, Land Force Command, and the Canadian Army. *Reserves* or *reservists* refers to part-time components of the Canadian Forces. The term *Primary Reserve* refers to soldiers, sailors, and air personnel who are trained to the level of their Regular Force counterparts. The term *militia* refers to the land forces (army) reserves. Area or regional commands also changed over time. For example, the Canadian Army regional command structure changed after the creation of Mobile Command in 1964. Land force area commands, comprising all regular and reserve army units, were created in 1991 in anticipation of the reorganization of the Canadian Forces in 1997 and the creation of Land Force Command. Since the creation of Canada Command

in 2006, land force areas are co-located with regional Joint Task Force Headquarters, responsible for coordinating all army, air force, and navy components in domestic and continental operations. In another example, Northern Region Headquarters in Yellowknife became Canadian Forces Northern Area in 1992 and Joint Task Force (North) in 2006.

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