

CANADIAN BASE OPERATORS

*EXCELSIOR:
BRYAN BEDARD'S JOURNEY FROM COMMANDING OFFICER TO
CANADIAN BASE OPERATOR*





Canadian Base Operators

An interview with Bryan Bedard

Operations Manager

“...we are a facility maintenance and operations company...”

After 25 years in the Canadian military, Bryan Bedard left his position as Directing Staff at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto for the unfamiliar civilian world. Prior to that posting, Bryan was the Commanding Officer of the 4th Canadian Division Training Centre in Meaford, Ontario. He and his family knew they wanted to live in Collingwood, Ontario for the foreseeable future, but finding civilian employment was another matter. Bryan recalls: “It was a little bit scary, to be honest with you. I had a couple of opportunities; I pursued them, and they just didn’t work out for a number of reasons.” Fortunately, Bryan would get an unexpected call from the Canadian Base Operators (CBO) one afternoon in 2016, and they would soon offer him a job. Consequently, Bryan’s transition from the military to civilian life was straightforward.

Founded in 1994, CBO is a facilities maintenance and operations company. Bryan explains: “On the facility maintenance side of things, we do everything that a general trades person would do, including: all preventative maintenance and corrective maintenance on buildings and associated equipment. On the operations side, we provide services for our clients so they can focus on their primary mission. For example, in Meaford, we help employees to carry out the normal duties in Supply, Vehicle and Weapons Maintenance, Kitchen, and Accommodations to name a few. We also provide airport services including Air Traffic Control (ATC), weather reporting, and simulator operations for the Canadian Military Primary Flight Training in Southport, Manitoba. As well, we run an aerodrome site for our Client, Suncor Energy, up in Firebag in northern Alberta. We have been providing Facilities Maintenance services in Suffield: a unique Site in that contract is for facilities maintenance for only the British buildings for the last six years; this was the first contract I worked on in my civilian work. Finally, we have recently started supporting the NATO Flying Training in Canada (NFTC) in 15 Wing Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan with Facilities Maintenance and Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) services.

JOINT VENTURE

"CBO is a joint venture between Black & McDonald and Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE). Black & McDonald is our parent company and our managing partner operating across Canada. They are an integrated, multi-trade service provider with more than 100 years of diverse market experience across North America."

Bryan explains CBO's growth: "Our work evolved to working out West in the oil patch; that is where our aerodrome operations at Firebag came about through some previous work. We were previously working with Shell, just south of Firebag at Albian Sands and had become a trusted contractor in aerodrome operations. So, we primarily have had a military footprint, but we're trying everyday to expand and get into new lines of business too."

Going into greater depth on CBO's unique activities, Bryan clarifies: "Aerodromes are smaller-type airports that have aircraft flight operations, regardless of whether or not they carry passengers or cargo, but they don't have full Air Traffic Control or hangars to store aircraft. WestJet is the airline of choice for Suncor and, therefore, at the Suncor aerodrome location, we provide everything from entering the Suncor employees into the WestJet booking system to getting them and their luggage on and off the planes. We fuel the planes, we do snow and ice clearance on the runways and aprons, and we conduct maintenance on the equipment."



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"CBO provides navigational aids service to airports."

For Bryan, transitioning from the military to CBO made perfect sense. During his tenure as commanding officer at the military base in Meaford, Bryan had become familiar with CBO as they “provided – and continue to provide – facility maintenance operations and services at that Base.” They approached Bryan with a job as Deputy Operations Manager. From there he “went up to Meaford to be the civilian Site Manager for Canadian Base Operators.” This means that Bryan has the unique privilege of having been the CO on one side of the base, then the senior civilian contractor on the support side of the base several years later. Afterwards, Bryan “moved back to Collingwood HQ and was appointed the Operations Manager responsible for operations on all the CBO sites across Canada.”

Bryan’s military experience made him the ideal candidate for CBO: “I compare my job to an operations officer in a military brigade or unit. But instead of units and sub-units we have contracts, and each have their unique resource and personnel requirements. I work at the headquarters level to provide Sites with the resources they need and to make sure our clients are happy with the services we are providing. In this way, CBO does everything we can to support the hardworking employees out on the ground across all our sites.”

CBO employees can move around from site to site when the situation calls for it. Sometimes, specific technicians are often asked to help at one of the other sites if there is a labour gap. As Bryan puts it: “we really pride ourselves on finding an internal solution to fix a problem. We would rather use one of our employees to try something differently.” For example, CBO provides navigational aids service to airports. Currently, CBO “has an electrician from one Site, who is learning more about how to service navigational aids on another Site. That’s just one example of collaboration between our Sites to get our employees helping each other in innovative ways.”

Though this occurred before he came to CBO, Bryan recounts one tragic, but triumphant, moment in CBO’s history: during the 2016 wildfires in northern Alberta. CBO and their then-partner, Shell Oil, used their aerodrome in the successful evacuation of approximately 8,000 people. Bryan explains: “it’s a very small airport, it has an apron for just a handful of airplanes, it’s not even really like a regional airport...you can imagine just the sheer volume of people flying out and CBO trying to manage to get aircraft in and out of the area.”





"...Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) can help with the critical labour shortage..."

Bryan continues: "we ensured the safety and security of all the evacuees. We made sure they were taken care of and were aware of what was going on, and we orchestrated things, together with a few other partners in that evacuation. We completely shifted what we were doing to get as many people out as quickly as we could. We set up a small helipad, just for helicopters to come in and out, which wasn't part of the aerodrome at the time. There were 126 flights in and out; a lot of people went out in a truly short time. I believe this was all done in a week or two. It was an incredible achievement."

Despite such exciting work, CBO, like so many companies in Canada at this moment, is suffering from a critical labour shortage. Bryan explains: "The toughest challenges these days all revolve around people: finding the right people and keeping the right people. The employment opportunities are much more extensive than they have ever been in Canada." But to find the right person for the right job is not always easy. Fortunately, Bryan notes that "CBO is proud of not having a very high turnover rate. We do a lot of work at the front end to hire the right people and make sure the people know what they are getting into when they join CBO. The number one challenge across all our sites right now is getting the right people and having them stay there for a long time to work hard for our clients."

Thankfully, organizations like Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) can help with the critical labour shortage – especially in a company like CBO. Bryan holds that the managers at CBO "see the value in having retired military personnel join our company. We have some unique military qualifications that are needed to meet contractual obligations. So, positions like weapons technicians, ammo technicians, EO technicians: these employees must have previous military experience. We are excited to work with H2H to try to get those types of employees to work for us."



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Bryan recalls his first encounter with H2H: "it was at Base Borden at the SCAN seminar when I was leaving the CAF in 2016. Then, a few years later, my president met with Helmets to Hardhats, which evolved into some further engagements. Then I was brought in, because of my role and military perspective on things. We think it's a great organization to bring on board, sponsor, and bring along to be successful. It creates another avenue for military Veterans that are transitioning into civilian life."

Furthermore, Bryan deeply appreciates H2H's initiative. While Bryan had a simple transition from the military to civilian life, he understands that many Veterans are not as fortunate. Returning to civilian life "is scary after having worn the same uniform for 25 years." As such, Bryan is pleased to see "all the services that are provided now, whether it's through H2H or other services through Veterans Affairs and Transition Centers; there are many more services than there were only six years ago...it's actually developed into a large support network for the serving members to transition out." For Bryan, "continuing to work in a military-related environment has been very helpful in that regard; I'm very fortunate for that." He hopes that other Veterans will be able to join the ranks of CBO and find meaningful employment in a positive work environment that allows them to utilize their military training while in a civilian role.

Aside from their partnership with H2H, CBO actively strives to be good corporate community citizens. "Every Site in their operational areas have local community support initiatives. Whether it's spending time or donating money or food to local food foundations – we do things like that to ensure we meet our responsibility of community stewardship. We have sponsored libraries, and even a large rodeo (the Ralston Rodeo) that happens outside of Suffield every year." Such initiatives make CBO a valuable partner in the communities in which they work.

For more information on Canadian Base Operators, visit their website: [Canadian Base Operators | Facilities Maintenance & Operations Contractor](https://canadianbaseoperators.com/)

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"...just recently,
financial assistance
has been made
available, thanks to
H2H's lobbying."

RON BALZAR

