



MY DOUBLE LIFE IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

by peter c. newman

THE French novelist Victor Hugo described the nets strung across the River Seine at Saint--Cloud, designed to catch the bodies of Parisians who drowned themselves, as a missing link with posterity. Even on the best of golden summer days, that same melancholy mood permeates Pearl Harbor. The Day of Infamy, when the bombs and torpedoes of Japanese Zeros shattered the sitting--duck American fleet, lives on in this place.

Clearly visible just below the waves are the battleships *uss Utah* and *uss Arizona*. Their American ensigns float at full mast since they remain in commission as tombs for the thousands of sailors killed on December 7, 1941. At 7:55 a.m. on that fateful day, nearly two hundred torpedo planes, bombers, and fighters from six Japanese aircraft carriers descended on the U.S. Pacific fleet, engulfing it in flames within fifteen minutes. In the midst of the turquoise ocean in which the battleships were sunk, the ships' hulls have coloured the water above them battleship--grey, an appropriate hue for a mausoleum. Their hulls are mute testament to a history that can be neither altered nor enhanced.

Now, I have come to this historic venue on a mission. It is August 15, 1988, and I am dressed in my summer whites as a commander in Canada's naval reserves (the same rank as James Bond, and of Prince Charles when he married Lady Diana, I comfort myself). My assignment is to deliver a message to Admiral Ronald Hays, commander--in--chief of the U.S. Pacific Command (cincpac) who hails from Urania, deep in the heart of Louisiana, and still speaks with a soft southern twang. He is a forty--year naval veteran who holds military sway over half of the earth's surface, from the East African coast to the Pacific shore of the Americas. His is the world's most powerful naval command, with more than a quarter of a million sailors quartered in 220 fighting ships.

On the other hand, I represent the western alliance's puniest navy -- Canada's Maritime Command, a tin pot fleet supported by a nation that, in per--capita military expenditures, lags behind such awesome players on the world stage as Madagascar, Togo, and the Seychelles. Canada spends \$12 billion a year on defence, which sounds like a lot until it is expressed as a fraction of gdp -- about 1 per cent. In nato, that puts us just ahead of Luxembourg, whose armed forces consist of seven hundred plumed and puffed--out toy soldiers who pretend to be guarding the royal palace.

No wonder that my business -- to persuade this grand admiral that in the future his fleet ought to manoeuvre more frequently with ours -- is quickly concluded. He allows that this is a fine idea, sounding like a champion heavyweight boxer who has just swatted a pesky mosquito, and sends me off to see Vice--Admiral Duke Hernandez, commander of the Third Fleet, which would be more directly involved in any such Canadian caper. Keeping watch over fifty million square miles of ocean in the eastern Pacific, the Third Fleet consists of 80 ships, 1,200 aircraft, and more than 200,000 sailors and marines.

A former naval aviator who rose to command aircraft carriers, Hernandez is quartered aboard the battle cruiser *uss Coronado*. The flagship bristles with so many missiles she looks like a floating pin cushion. The admiral boasts three post--graduate degrees in international affairs and proves to be a lively debater, who, unfortunately, is well--enough briefed to dismiss anyone representing Canada's naval service as not being on a serious wavelength. After a polite interval of about ten minutes, he gets up and, trying to keep the condescension out of his voice, asks, "Can I do anything else for you?"

I suspect this is more a dismissal than a kindness, but decide to take advantage of the offer. "Yes, sir," I say as I jump to my feet. "As a matter of fact, you can. I've seen every movie and read every book about Pearl Harbor, but I've never been here before. Could I have a tour?"

"No problem," he replies, as he rings for his flag lieutenant to relay my request.

"Can't be done, sir," replies his smooth--bore assistant. "Our visitors' boat is being repaired and -won't be ready for a week."

"No problem," repeats the admiral. (When you have military control over half of the earth's surface, nothing is a problem.) "Take my barge."

Now, this is a serious proposition. Admirals' barges are elegant vessels, used by them to inspect their fleets. They are luxurious vintage motorboats, easily identified by the flag of horizontal red and white stripes displayed on the bow, indicating that they take precedence over all other naval vessels within their jurisdictions. The following morning, wearing my yellowing summer whites, I climb aboard this admiral's barge, a spiffy, fifty--five--foot, broad--beamed example of wooden--boat workmanship at its finest. It is manned by two seamen standing on the stern in gleaming whites, who execute an elaborate ballet with their boat hooks after I return their salutes.

In charge is a seasoned coxswain, his chest expanded by a rainbow of ribbons, who, in an alcohol-cured voice, leaves little doubt that he feels humiliated by the lowly status of his cargo. Why has his admiral inflicted this visiting fireman on him? Has he not devoted his life to the double eagle? Has he not served long enough to avoid such a routine chore? I notice that the coxswain walks with a pronounced starboard list, as though permanently leaning into a western squall. His mood does not improve when I congratulate him on his nautical tilt. "Makes you look like a real sea dog," I josh. He glares at me but says nothing.

After we pay appropriate homage to the *USS Arizona's* drowned crew, the coxswain pointedly suggests, "How about going back now, sir."

"Oh, no," I counter. "Let's go for a spin to the outer harbour." So we drift due east through the lazy afternoon while I savour the sun and a Diet Pepsi. Suddenly, I notice the coxswain freeze in his position at the wheel. He asks me to hide in the cabin, a request I ignore. Then I recognize the problem. Heading straight toward us is a long, grey line of the most impressive battle wagons I have ever seen. The Third Fleet of the United States Navy is coming home from the sea and is about to enter its home port. I feel as if a street of skyscrapers is coming right at me and sense dozens of high-powered binoculars being aimed at the admiral's barge by people trying to read my rank and my business.

At this point, the coxswain is madly waving his arms across his face to indicate that the admiral is not aboard and everybody should relax. But Hernandez is not a relaxed admiral and he often stages surprise inspections. So the incoming captains are not about to take a chance. As the flotilla approaches us, I can hear ships' whistles blowing, see salute flags being raised, and spot officers and crew racing to line up impressively on the port side of their ships' superstructures, ready to salute their admiral. The coxswain and I look at one another. We shrug. There is only one thing to do. Naval decorum demands that a salute be held until it is returned. So I climb aboard the barge's saluting platform and, like a pope presuming worship, execute a smart salute as each man-o'-war steams by, flags aflutter, whistles blaring.

As they pass the barge, the captains' reactions are mostly puzzled looks and shaking heads, with the exception of one grizzled skipper who slaps his forehead and stomps off his bridge.

And that was how I brought the United States Navy's Third Fleet into Pearl Harbor.

That was one small incident in the double life I led during more than four decades: as a pushy journalist and an undercover naval officer, in love with both professions and determined not to betray the integrity of either. It was a tough gig. At least once a week, after my work day, I would disappear into a nearby closet and, like Superman, change into my uniform and peaked officer's cap to attend to naval matters. No one ever saw me, except driving around Toronto, alone in my car; more than once at intersections pedestrians would spot my cap (similar to those worn by cabbies in those days), climb into my back seat, and order me to take them to the races, or some such. I was occasionally tempted to deliver them to their destinations and mint a little extra cash but never did.

I enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy as an ordinary seaman on October 21, 1947, three months after graduating from Upper Canada College. In a sense, it was inevitable that I join the navy. Ever since my earliest breath, I had been fascinated by the sea, by tales of seafaring, and by the great fleets and warships of the world. Perhaps it was the result of a sheltered upbringing, which naturally caused my mind to seek farther horizons – and in my youth, wandering led to the sea, not to the air lanes of the sky.

The first book I read in English was C.S. Forester's swashbuckling tale of Napoleonic adventure *Beat to Quarters*, featuring Captain Horatio Hornblower of the Royal Navy. (In Forester's later "prequels," he was demoted to Mr. Midshipman Hornblower.) I devoured it, plunging into the scents and colours of the faraway Nicaraguan coast, feeling betrayed by the mad captain El Supremo and enchanted by Lady Barbara. The other novels followed, and I was soon captured off the Spanish coast in *A Ship of the Line* only to escape home to England in *Flying Colours*. I resolved to be just like Hornblower: passionate, courageous, quick-witted – and, above all, a consummate Royal Navy man. Growing up in landlocked Ontario, I relished tales of square-rigged adventures, and in later years, I joined the Royal Navy for the cinematic exploits of Lieut. Daring, R.N., or enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy to hunt U-boats with Randolph Scott aboard *Corvette K-225*.

This love of naval literature has never left me. When it was published in 1951, I was profoundly influenced by Nicholas Monsarrat's *The Cruel Sea*, the classic tale of war in the North Atlantic. As a navy man, how could I not be transfixed by its opening lines: "This is the story – the long and true story – of one ocean, two ships, and about one hundred and fifty men"? I read the tale of the corvettes *HMS Compass Rose* and *Saltash*, and their cat-and-mouse games with wolf packs of U-boats, while I was myself on the North Atlantic in a warship.

There were two other reasons for joining the navy besides my love of the sea. I doubted that I could ever afford a boat of my own, so my chances of feeling the ocean swell under my feet would have to be at government expense. On top of which, I somehow felt that I would be a certified Canadian only when I walked down the street in naval uniform with the "canada" badges on my shoulders. Not surprisingly, then, I found myself at the navy recruiting table for undergraduates at the University of Toronto signing the requisite forms, and a short while later I was sworn in as one of nine thousand volunteer members of the University Naval Training Division (untnd), which flourished for a quarter of a century during the height of the Cold War.

My proudest moment was the day I first put on my sailor suit. It was the standard sailor's square rig, dating back to the time of Nelson. To my delight, there on both shoulder flashes was the word "canada," as I had expected. Only seven years before, I had stumbled ashore in Halifax, and now I was returning to the same port, a certified Canadian, officially stamped as such, ready to help defend my new homeland.

I found that when I went on my first training course in Halifax it was easy to fit in with my fellow recruits. We were bonded by a mutual ignorance of all things nautical – many of my comrades in arms had come to the sea from the Prairies, and none of my battalion experience from school turned out to be transferable. What we learned had little to do with war. We were taught the naval code of conduct, knot-tying, Morse code, weather forecasting, navigation, sailing, semaphore, how to march to exhaustion, how to survive early-morning calisthenics, and how to salute as if we meant it. In the evenings we became adept at wooing the lively girls of Halifax. It really is true that girls love a man in uniform. Besides, it didn't hurt that they believed us all to be gentlemen from good homes. I conducted my amorous pursuits at private sailing clubs on the northwest arm of Halifax Harbour, although many cadets braved the rougher seaman's bars along Upper Water Street. Our efforts were for naught, since nearly all the girls were good Catholics, and in those days good Catholic girls -didn't.

Along the way, we grew up. We became a band of brothers, proud of our service, which voiced and practised a very un-Canadian love of country that stayed with us the rest of our lives. At a time when domestic travel was still a luxury, we met and bonded with young Canadians of our own age and education from every province, including Quebec, awakening to the fact that there was a land out there – and a people – worth knowing.

When the untnd was breech-birthed during the final phase of the Second World War, it was a late addition to such similar training schemes as the Reserve Officers Training Corps (rotc), founded by the Canadian army in 1921, and the University Air Training Plan (uatp), established by the air force in 1939. Incredibly, our service's official name was originally the Canadian University Naval Training Service. For most of its founding year no one seemed to realize the embarrassment that lay in its initials.

As members of the untnd, we got off lightly, inevitably known as the "Untidies." But even if the regulars, whom we derisively called "Pusser types," made fun of us, being a untnd in the 1950s and 1960s was a rare and valuable experience. Most days of the year we were campus cats, trying our best to baffle the professors who marked our tests and essays. But one night a week, we changed into uniform to drill at the nearest of forty naval reserve divisions, buildings far from the oceans known as "stone frigates." In those days, the Royal Canadian Navy, which during the Second World War had grown into the free world's fourth-largest fleet, was still a fifty-two-ship armada that made a difference. Every summer, we boarded trains to either Halifax or Victoria to earn our sea time, which often meant trips to Bermuda or Hawaii.

My first venture was aboard the minesweeper hmcs Portage, at nine hundred tons one of the smallest of the rcn's training ships, bound for St. George's in Bermuda – or, more accurately, for The Pirates' Den, then the island's most notorious hangout. As ordinary seamen we slept in hammocks, and my most vivid memory was the early-morning wake-up call, with an iron-lunged petty officer blowing his bosun's pipe and bellowing: "Wakey, Wakey! RISE AND SHINE! Drop your cocks and grab your socks!" (I sometimes got it the wrong way around.) There was no respite for us greenhorns. The training was relentless and the sea was cruel. On the return journey, I was assigned as port lookout on the open side of the bridge just as we were edging into a minor hurricane. As the little ship ploughed into waves many times its height, they upended her into nearly vertical positions; the bow then slammed down like a machete. I prayed that the hull's steel plates had not been riveted into place by the lowest bidder. On calmer days, I cleaned heads (toilets) and flats (passageways), never comprehending how a ship could get so dirty in the middle of a heaving ocean.

When I took over as helmsman, the officer of the watch glanced back at the ship's wake and remarked that it reminded him of a "snake with hiccups." (Why -didn't he become a writer?) I learned that the wisest regular aboard any navy ship is the three-badge able-bodied seaman, his badges indicating lengthy service without promotion: "Thirteen years of undetected crime," as one of them described it to me.

Two years later, I shipped out aboard hmcs Iroquois, a Tribal--class destroyer, on her way to Charlottetown. The training, conducted by Executive Officer Peter Godwin Chance, Pierre Simard, and his assistant Jake Howard (who later became a distinguished Bay Street lawyer), was the toughest and the most useful we experienced. I was not a star pupil. One night off the coast of Prince Edward Island I was on anchor watch, which meant spending most of the night on the bridge making sure that we -didn't drift ashore. One of the bearings I had to check was a lighthouse emitting flashing red signals. Unfortunately, I mistook the tail light of a car going through a grove of trees along the coastal highway for the flashing red light of the lighthouse. I transposed the speed of that moving object to the ship and rushed down to inform our navigator that we were drifting at twenty knots. I hid in the chain locker for the next two days.

By the spring of 1949, I had become a cadet, the Canadian equivalent of a Royal Navy midshipman. This pleased me, as in my imagination Mr. Midshipman Hornblower had at last become Mr. Midshipman Newman. The only difference between our uniforms was that our gunnery kit didn't have the midshipman's three buttons on the cuff, which were put there to prevent snotty-nosed young officers from wiping their noses on their sleeves. My \$30 monthly allowance was increased to \$170. The following summer, in July 1950, I volunteered for the Korean War. The previous month, North Korea, backed by Chinese Communists, had invaded South Korea in force, triggering a conflict that would last three years and cost more than a million lives. Canada's initial response was to lend naval support to the United Nations coalition defending South Korea. Three destroyers, the Cayuga, Athabaskan, and Sioux, were sent to Korean waters under un command, but there were no takers for reserve cadet volunteers. I decided to leave the executive branch for something more interesting.

I knew that I wanted to write, so I requested a transfer to the only two branches that had anything to do with the written word: Naval Intelligence and Naval Information. There, I came under the influence of my first important mentor, Captain William Strange. A native of British Honduras, Captain Strange had written novels, drilled for oil in Trinidad, taught at a British private school, and acted as a tutor to the children of the pasha of Egypt. After emigrating to Canada in 1929, he became a popular literary critic and a prize--winning cbc radio play producer. He spent most of the Second World War in charge of Naval Information, and when I arrived on his doorstep in 1950, he became the first adult to take me seriously. By giving me responsible writing assignments and allowing me to interact with naval officers at every level, including Rear--Admiral Rollo Mainguy (then in charge of the Atlantic fleet), he instilled in me my first dollop of self--confidence. I grew to greatly admire both him and his wonderful architect wife, Jean, who survives him in their post--retirement home at Lake Chapala, near Guadalajara in central Mexico.

All this effort came under the heading of trying to make the grade, so that at the end of four years, along with my degree, I would be promoted to sub--lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Navy (Reserve). To earn my commission, I first had to pass muster at a sombre selection board. Only 22 per cent of the candidates made the final cut. For some reason that annoyed me then and disturbed me a lot more afterward, the standard method for determining whether aspiring cadets were keeping up with current events was for selection board chairmen to inquire whether they regularly read the Canadian edition of Time. It was hardly an ideal test for those about to offer their lives in the cause of Canadian nationhood, I figured, and adamantly denied ever having opened Time, or even knowing what it was.

After receiving my commission in 1951, I returned to Captain Strange's directorate in Ottawa and slowly began to dovetail my naval and civilian careers. As I moved up in journalism and the navy (I was promoted to commander in 1980), there emerged a unique confluence of interests. The navy wanted someone with journalistic credentials and a basic knowledge of naval matters to document its fatal failings, hoping to provoke some national pride -- and naval spending -- among politicians. At the same time, editors loved such scandalous revelations. To avoid any conflict of interest, I requested that my naval pay be stopped, and spent most of four decades merrily attacking the navy with its blessing. My dispatches revealed, among other flaws, such bizarre situations as:

- At one point, three of the destroyers that were counted as part of our nato contribution were laid up permanently at dockside so they could be cannibalized for spare parts to keep their sister ships afloat.
- Another member of our official nato fleet, the grandly named hmcs Crusader -- which had seen action in Korea -- was in such dire straits that whole areas of its plating had rusted out and you could walk through its watertight bulkheads. It found its final resting place at a Cape Breton junkyard.
- The supply replenishment vessel hmcs Protecteur, part of our contribution to the first Gulf War against Iraq, was not fitted out for combat at all, except for being painted battleship grey. The only reason an antiquated three--inch

gun was mounted on its bow was not to shoot at anyone, but so that as a warship the Protecteur would enjoy priority at diesel re-fuelling pumps.

- The naval training vessel hmcs Porte St. Jean, which had the distinction of being condemned as unseaworthy on its maiden voyage, similarly armed itself when its skipper went into a Canadian Tire store and bought enough material to build a wooden “gun-like” structure around a narrow-gauge open sewer pipe, painted grey. He then ran up two empty bleach bottles on his mast to simulate the style of fire-direction electronics to make his tub look more like a warship.
- The ultimate insult to Canada’s navy was the private-sector purchase of four \$800,000 submarines (complete with ballast tanks and battery-driven motors) to take shoppers, twenty-four at a time, on underwater tours of an artificial pond created at the West Edmonton Mall. This meant that the shopping centre had a larger and more modern fleet of subs than the navy, which at that time had only three, 1960s-era boats that were eventually replaced by obsolete British submarines, all of which leaked.
- The stories about Sea King helicopters, which are between thirty-four and forty years old and require thirty hours of maintenance for each hour in the air, are legion. But one Sea King set a record for slow flight in the spring of 2002, when it took three weeks to reach Halifax from Vancouver because of the number of landings for emergency repairs.
- As late as 1985, most of our destroyers were using navigation and communications equipment operated by vacuum tubes instead of microchips. When I asked one commanding officer where he was able to find replacements, he told me they were still being made by a factory in Poland but were now difficult to obtain (this was during the Cold War).
- When the twenty-year-old destroyer hmcs Athabaskan was being armed to participate in the 1990 Gulf War, its only anti-aircraft weapon was a pair of Second World War-vintage Bofors guns that had to be borrowed from the Maritime Museum in Halifax.

A story, told in Halifax wardrooms in the 1990s, had an eager officer exclaim, “We attack at dawn!” To which his straight man asked, “Why at dawn?” The reply was: “That way, if we -don’t succeed, we -won’t have wasted the whole day.”

The horror stories were not confined to the navy. I wrote about army cadets training in New Brunswick during the 1960s without enough rifles to go around, so that many had to carry broomsticks pretending they were weapons. My favourite moment of the day was when one cadet pointed his broom at another and triumphantly announced: “Bang, bang, you’re dead.” To which his intended victim replied: “No, I’m not. I’m a tank!”⁴

Such stories were fun to write, and I like to think that a few political consciences were pricked, but I’m not sure. Our insulting approach to national defence, after all, has a long tradition. In the 1930s, when one of the Calgary cavalry regiments switched from horses to tanks, it had to simulate the newfangled vehicles by using burlap-covered frames mounted on motorcycles – until they were replaced by Chevrolets clad in sheet metal.

My double life as a navy shill and independent journalist would have been more difficult to reconcile were it not for these horror stories. To my mind, it was easier to justify using my naval contacts as a journalistic source when the end result was not a glorious puff-piece about the all-seeing wisdom of the naval brass, but yet another embarrassing revelation about their equipment inadequacies.

Still, I freely admit that by pointing out these deficiencies I was playing into the navy’s agenda of goading its political masters into spending more on appropriations.

The case has never been convincingly made that Canada’s military spending should reflect its role; rather, its role depends on the amount of military spending available. Military requirements are unpredictable by their very nature, the only certainty being that there will, come any crisis, be demands that exceed the amount set aside for it. Peacetime governments can either spend as little as possible, risking the possibility of being unable to respond to crises as they arise; or spend more than necessary, to be in a state of readiness for any unexpected emergency. In the past thirty years or so, Canadian politicians have consistently chosen the former course, with the result that we have been pathetically unable to meet our obligations to the world community. To mention just one example, the anticipated “peace dividend” at the end of the Cold War has disappeared in a miasma of Gulf conflicts, Balkan strife, ethnic cleansing, and terrorist activity. I enthusiastically agreed with Jean Chrétien when he declined Canadian military involvement in the second war against Iraq on the grounds that the case for war had never been convincingly made. But I do think Canada has a necessary role to play in peacekeeping duties and the enforcement of un-sanctions. It was a source of personal embarrassment to me as a journalist, and professional

embarrassment as a naval officer, when Canada was forced to scrounge through naval museums to arm its warships for duty in the Persian Gulf.

In any case, I made no effort to hide my conflict of interest, if any such conflict could be said to exist when I believed in both my causes so fervently and felt that I served them well. On the contrary, I proudly wore my naval uniform, realizing that I was the butt of jokes, both privately and in print, for being some kind of bathtub admiral. I likely received as many jabs for my dress blues as I did for my ever-present Greek fisherman's cap, another fashion icon that I wear out of my affection for the sea. Those who criticized me for not excusing myself from commenting on military affairs misunderstood my relationship to Canada and journalism. Most of my peers were raised during a period of anti-militarism. The influence of the Vietnam protests was felt north of the border, and for many of my colleagues, all military matters were framed by the image of Kent State students placing flowers in the barrels of National Guardsmen's rifles.

I had joined the Canadian navy with much less ambivalence about the military than either my journalistic colleagues or the country at large. For me, the role of the armed forces was simple – to protect the Canadian people and their sovereignty, however those interests were defined by the politicians in Ottawa. I had experienced first-hand what aid and comfort can be found from a military intent on offering assistance, rather than destruction.

Was this attitude in conflict with my role as a journalist? To suggest this is to pretend that journalists must exist in a state of detachment from their society, like monks sealed in a cloister. That was never my style of journalism, and there are many historical precedents that support my approach. The pantheon of journalists is filled with those who were committed to causes or served under arms, which experience enlightened rather than corrupted their writing. George Orwell was a declared democratic socialist who volunteered with the Republican Army during the Spanish Civil War; the resulting book, *Homage to Catalonia*, is considered the finest example of reporting on that conflict. No one has suggested that his portrayal of that war was any less vivid or accurate because of his beliefs or service as a soldier – instead, the opposite is true. Ernest Hemingway was a war reporter in Spain and in the Second World War, yet no one suggested that his declared sympathies, expressed in works like *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, conflicted with his role as a journalist. On the contrary, his fame as a politically committed novelist underscored his understanding of the human dimension of war and added to the quality of his reporting. There is perhaps no more illustrious precedent to my double life, however, than that of the young Winston Churchill. After leaving the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, Churchill entered the 4 Queen's Own Hussars and was sent first to action in Cuba, where he reported as an officer on the Cuban War of Independence for the *Daily Graphic* in London. In 1896, he saw service both as soldier and reporter with the Malakand field force in India; his resulting book launched both careers, as journalist and celebrated warrior. He later volunteered for Kitchener's expeditionary force to the Nile, where he once again performed the dual role of soldier and correspondent. His book *The River War* is still considered one of the best accounts of life under fire. Reporting as a civilian on the Boer War for the *Morning Post* of London, he could not resist entering the fighting and won fame for his part in rescuing an ambushed armoured train and escaping from a Boer prison camp.

I never felt it was the duty of journalists either to promote or to oppose; they must simply tell the truth as they find it. If my experience of the navy helped me to uncover more truths than others, then that was my good fortune. Did my loyalty to flag, naval colours, or brothers- and sisters--in--arms influence my writing? Undoubtedly. It informed my writing, made me more aware of the issues, and more determined to write about them. Did it cause me to bend the truth in any way? Not to my knowledge. That -wasn't necessary, since my beliefs as a journalist and my obligations as a navy man enjoyed a happy coincidence. I wanted, and still want, the best for the Canadian navy. I will never apologize for that.

The future of the Canadian navy depends on rediscovering its pride and purpose. The navy also faces problems formulating a defensive role that will allow it to remain independent of American initiatives.

Historically, one dilemma has been our past dependence on Britain's Royal Navy. The Royal Canadian Navy I joined was populated largely by graduates of the Royal Navy's training college on Whale Island, at Portsmouth. At the start of the Second World War, Chief of Naval Staff Percy Nelles actually recommended that the rcn be placed under British control, and one of his post-war successors, Vice-Admiral Harold Grant, refused to allow anyone to wear a "canada" shoulder flash because "it looks like hell on a uniform." (In fact, apart from the "C" on a sailor's cap tally and the shoulder flashes, there was absolutely no difference between the Royal Canadian Navy uniforms and those of the Royal Navy until 1950.) I recall young Canadian subalterns joining the Royal Navy for six-week training seminars and returning home with plummy English accents (calling their native land "Canadahr"), wearing silk handkerchiefs up their left sleeves, and looking down on us colonials.

In the winter of 1982, I was invited to visit the Royal Navy's hallowed base at Portsmouth and had a chance to see for myself what the RN mystique was all about. I arrived early for my appointment with Admiral Sir James Henry Fuller Eberle, commander-in-chief of the Home Fleet, so I toured Horatio Nelson's hms Victory, permanently on view in Portsmouth Harbour. She is an impressive sight, a 104-gun, first-rate ship of the line, built in 1765 and still the oldest commissioned warship in the world, being the flagship of the Second Sea Lord and the commander-in-chief, Naval Home Command. Afterwards, I was invited for "a quick bite" at the Old Naval Academy. In the wardroom, I found myself surrounded by real naval officers, and it hit me that our green-garbage-bag uniforms (the legacy of the misconceived unification policy of Pearson's defence minister, Paul Hellyer) had robbed us of our professional identities. (I had myself been mistaken for the co-pilot of an obscure Venezuelan airline during my departure from Toronto airport.) As for the "quick bite," I will say only that it lived up to the English reputation for serving the world's worst food on the world's finest china. After our meal, we were served pudding, and I was horrified to see staring up at me from my bowl a dish all too familiar from ucc, the ubiquitous "fish-eyes-in-glue." The whole meal was bearable only when washed down with liberal glasses of sherry – the primary reason, I surmised, why the English eat at all.

Leaving the portals of the Old Naval Academy, I noticed a small sign: "Established 1729." That, I realized, was four generations before Nelson's 1805 victory over Napoleon's fleet at Trafalgar, when his famous flag signal from the poop deck of the Victory, "England expects that every man will do his duty," would resound through naval tradition – and I suddenly felt the full weight of the RN's heritage. I realized what Jan Morris, the British essayist, had meant when she wrote: "It was the Navy which had made Britain great, guaranteeing the island immunity and giving its people the freedom of imperial action; in return the Navy received a loyalty given no other department of State. A generation of British children grew up with the names of British battleships on the ribbons of their sailor hats, and a whole culture was created around the images of the Royal Navy. The service itself assumed an anthropomorphic character – hard-drinking but always alert, eccentric but superbly professional, breezy, naughty, posh, kindly, Nelsoni-cally ready to disobey an order in a good cause, or blow any number of deserving foreigners out of the water."5

I was finally ushered in to meet Sir James Eberle, who looked exactly like a storybook admiral. His office was complete with a fireplace that didn't work, a threadbare carpet, and untidy memorabilia commemorating a career that had most recently included a term as nato's commander-in-chief, East Atlantic. It seemed entirely appropriate that he should be a master of the Britannia Beagles Club and president of the Royal Navy's Lawn Tennis Association. His cabin felt as if Nelson's mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton, might walk in any minute. As a lowly commander, I was at once mesmerized by the gold on his sleeve rank – one broad stripe and four thin ones. "My God, I thought to myself, one more stripe and he'll be king!"

The admiral was due to see me for an hour. Ninety minutes later we parted, after I had been a privileged audience of one for his overview of world affairs. He then dispatched me for a more political briefing to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on King Charles Street in London's SW1, a nineteenth-century Italianate sprawl that resembled a Graham Greene version of a rundown Caribbean island's seat of government, with its whitewashed corridors, sleepy guards, ceiling fans, and half-empty offices serving as a reminder of the British Empire's vanished colonies. From there, I went to the Admiralty Office in Whitehall for a quick call on the First Sea Lord of the admiralty. A sign near the entrance informed me that the building was on "Black Alert," which meant there were no terrorists expected that day – just a mendicant Canadian journalist in naval disguise, trying not to confuse the truth with the facts.

Sir Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord, entertained me like an Oxford don as he sipped a cup of tea and munched on water biscuits. He had a bulldog chin, kept a terrier, and looked every inch the British admiral, but I found Sir Henry surprisingly business-like. He confided that the problems of an all-volunteer force were catching up with the U.S. Navy; its training manuals had recently been rewritten for comprehension at a grade-five level. As I was about to leave, the admiral leaned back into his red leather chair and asked me to guess the level of damage U.S. nuclear submarines could inflict in the event that a Soviet first strike managed to wipe out the West's land-based retaliatory capacity. When I confessed my ignorance, he replied: "They could launch a nuclear weapon, each one three times the strength of the Hiroshima bomb, at the Russian mainland – every thirty seconds for twenty-four hours." The admiral's terrier shook his head in disbelief. So did I. It was a chilling interview.

My experience made me appreciate Royal Navy tradition, but did nothing to dilute my Canadian sentiment. By the mid 1980s I started to give pro-naval speeches and was elected for two terms as head of the Maritime Defence Association of Canada, a publicly funded lobby group. I was appointed senior staff officer to three chiefs of

reserves, including Rear-Admiral Wally Fox-Decent, a witty professor of political studies at the University of Manitoba, who became my champion. It was he who recommended me for promotion to captain, probably the only Jew to attain that rank in a navy still dominated by sea-going wasps.

I ran afoul of Canadian military thinking only once. In 1983, I took on the freelance assignment of writing a position paper for the Business Council on National Issues, the big-business lobby group run by Ottawa's self-appointed prime-minister-in-waiting, Tom d'Aquino. The bcni had rightly surmised that my report would recommend higher defence spending. But just then Canada was being pressured by the Pentagon to test the guidance systems of their terrain-guided cruise missiles, and that far I would not go. "Few of the technicalities about the cruise are understood by the general public," I wrote, "but Canadians have a way of smelling a rat." It seemed to me that the Canadian government was being set up by the Pentagon to test not, as was claimed, weapons for the defence of Europe, but offensive, first-strike nuclear missiles aimed at the destruction of Russian cities.

This was no petty issue. The American military had ordered twelve thousand of the missiles, each armed with a two-hundred-kiloton nuclear warhead, at a cost of \$29 billion. We were supposed to test their launching capabilities from American bombers flying over the Mackenzie Basin of northern Alberta. By agreeing to these tests, the Trudeau government maintained, we would be meeting our commitments to nato and might prompt the Soviets to take disarmament more seriously. Trudeau permitted the tests amidst overwhelming public opposition, yet his arguments for testing the cruise were fatally flawed. These were strategic, not tactical, weapons that threatened to unbalance the already precarious arms limitation talks.

As soon as d'Aquino read my report, he asked me to omit my criticism of the cruise testing. When I refused, he arranged a dinner meeting with former Tory leader Robert Stanfield, who was supposed to change my mind. We spent a pleasant evening discussing Duke Ellington's music, but I held my ground. The bcni refused to publish my study, switching the assignment to George Bell, a retired general. I later used the report as a skeleton outline for *True North, Not Strong and Free: Defending the Peaceable Kingdom in the Nuclear Age*, which Bruce Hutchison called my "most important book." Everywhere I went during my promotional tour, serving members of the forces in ill-fitting civvieC approached and whispered: "Keep it up. You're writing what we're not allowed to say."

Spending more than four decades in the navy had a profound effect on my life. There was certainly nothing heroic or even particularly patriotic about it. I became an ardent advocate for a cause that I believed in, and I have no regrets. The Canadian navy prided itself on being "the silent service," yet it deserved to be heard. Most Canadians live out of sight and sound of the ocean and -can't begin to comprehend why we need a peacetime naval service. "Allow us to fulfil our burning desire to be significant in what we do," pleaded Vice-Admiral Chuck Thomas, the best of the post-war naval chiefs, when he resigned on an issue of principle. No one paid any attention. Ever since Trudeau's stretch in office, Ottawa has regarded national defence as a bothersome afterthought. Trudeau himself once told me that it was his fourteenth priority, just after convicts and hog subsidies.

The Senior Service did so much with so little for so long that the politicians eventually believed it could do anything with nothing forever. That hopeful proposition broke down at the end of the second war against Iraq, when the navy admitted that it -didn't have the funds remaining for fuel to keep its ships at sea, had exhausted its sea-going personnel to the point that they -couldn't take on new assignments, was withdrawing from its permanent berth as part of the nato standing naval force, and basically was going on a year's holiday, probably the first navy in history to do so.

Navies, like armies and air forces, mirror the character of the societies they are sworn to defend. In the final analysis, our survival depends on the will we can muster to protect our institutions, and that in turn depends on how much we learn to value them.

If I managed to stir up a little dirt in the defence of one of the more valuable of those institutions and woke up a few politicians to the disgrace that has become our navy, my mission was accomplished. I enjoyed the Beau Geste civility and touch of romance involved in being a naval officer. I became part of a lost generation that lived for their ships and their shipmates. Leafing through the photograph albums of my time in the service, I see the familiar faces of the crewcut lifers, caught up in the formalities of their careers. In their faces there is not a glimmer of duplicity, only the glint of accusation. Why, they are demanding, has the idea that Canada "expects every man to do his duty" become part of a vanished culture? Why could they not have been properly equipped for the tasks they were asked to perform? Like the statues of bypassed saints in the cathedrals of post-revolutionary France, they represent a banished heritage, a way of life outside the Canadian mainstream. And nothing will bring it back. PCN