



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

3rd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 147

• NUMBER 31

THE SENATE

**Motion to Encourage the Minister
of National Defence to Change
the Official Structural Name
of the Canadian Navy—Debate Adjourned**

Speech by:

The Honourable Bill Rompkey

Thursday, May 27, 2010

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MOTION TO ENCOURAGE THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE TO CHANGE THE OFFICIAL STRUCTURAL NAME OF THE CANADIAN NAVY—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Bill Rompkey, pursuant to notice of May 4, 2010, moved:

That the Senate of Canada encourage the Minister of National Defence, in view of the long service, sacrifice and courage of Canadian Naval forces and personnel, to change the official structural name of the Canadian Navy from “Maritime Command” to “Canadian Navy” effective from this year, as part of the celebration of the Canadian Navy Centennial, with that title being used in all official and operational materials, in both official languages, as soon as possible.

He said: Honourable senators, this motion is about restoring pride of place to a world-class national service with its own history and culture forged in war but operating effectively in restoring peace and dealing with disaster. This motion is about acknowledging a modern navy giving outstanding performance both at home and abroad.

Recently, HMCS *Fredericton* returned home to Halifax in time for the May 4 celebrations marking the one hundredth anniversary of the navy. The frigate had been deployed for six months to the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa, conducting counter-piracy and anti-terrorism operations alongside the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, and coalition partners. Such is the modern role of our navy: protecting our own shores but able to operate proudly and successfully in blue water anywhere in the world.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, Commodore Ken Summers led a task force to the Persian Gulf to enforce the United Nations embargo. By the mid-1990s, new Halifax-class frigates were able to act as one-for-one replacements for American warships. Canadians abroad assumed command of coalition fleets. This year, a Halifax-class frigate and an Iroquois-class destroyer provided aid to the victims of the Haiti earthquake.

The achievements and innovations of this nation’s navy have established Canada’s reputation in the naval community and in the world at large. As Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden has said, tonne for tonne, Canadian ships and personnel are equal to the best in the world.

The origins of the Navy go back 100 years. In the first decade of the 20th century, Sir Wilfrid Laurier decided to develop the Dominion’s own permanent fighting navy. The title “Royal” was approved by King George V in 1911.

Underfunded and short-handed as the navy was, leaders like Admiral Charles Kingsmill and Commodore Walter Hose built up the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, with volunteers from all walks of life, and the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve, drawn from the ranks of the merchant navy. They turned out be

the fighting navy that represented us only six years later in the Great War.

Canadians acquitted themselves well in the naval conflict of this war. The first naval flying ace in the world was a Canadian — Redford “Red” Mullock of Winnipeg. Canadian Raymond Collishaw of Nanaimo, B.C., was the leading naval ace of the First World War with 60 confirmed victories. Of 936 Canadian naval aviators of World War I, 53 gained the status of air ace in combat.

It was World War II that saw the navy come to maturity. When war with Germany broke out in 1939, the RCN, although remarkably efficient, had so long been underfunded and shorthanded that it was still little more than an offshoot of the Royal Navy. Enormous Canadian naval expansion became necessary to meet enemy threats in the Atlantic. At the beginning of World War II, the navy consisted of 13 ships and under 3,000 personnel. However, ships poured out of shipyards all across Canada, and men and women volunteered in huge numbers. Throughout the war, Canada commissioned 434 vessels of which 341 were fighting ships. Of those ships, 31 were lost. Just under 400,000 men and women passed through its ranks. Well over 2,000 paid the supreme sacrifice. Canada played a pivotal role in the Battle of the Atlantic — that long and relentless battle that, more than anything else, made possible the liberation of Europe.

The navy engaged in virtually every type of operation in every theatre of war. Canadian naval airmen flew with the Fleet Air Arm.

The RCN, no longer only an offshoot of the Royal Navy, had become a major national institution by 1945. However, it was still at risk. Cut back from nearly 100,000 to 7,500 personnel, morale suffered.

Brooke Claxton, then Minister of National Defence, ordered a commission of inquiry in 1949. The subsequent report of Rear Admiral Rollo Mainguy has been called the Canadian navy’s “Magna Carta.” Initiating major changes to “Canadianize” the navy, it came just as the Cold War gave the RCN new and meaningful roles. An apparently imminent threat of war with the Soviet Union gave Canada the NATO role of convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare. Thus, when the navy celebrated its fiftieth birthday in 1960, the RCN, with about 20,000 men and women, had grown to well over 50 vessels.

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Once more, the navy was threatened. After the election of 1963, the Minister of National Defence, Paul Hellyer, set about modernizing Canadian defence capabilities. To the navy’s chagrin, Hellyer succeeded first in integration and, finally, in the unification of the Armed Forces.

The navy battled for its survival and its identity, but lost the fight against the politicians. Admirals who opposed Hellyer’s policies were retired early, if they had not already been fired. Many other officers retired early as a form of protest, and most of

those who remained did so to preserve a navy that had been recast in the form of Maritime Command.

For a number of years confusion reigned at National Defence Headquarters and morale took a serious hit. The new green uniform disregarded naval tradition, and the new rank structure, based on army practice and culture, had little relation to naval requirements.

Other navies did not emulate Canada's example as Hellyer had predicted. Yet in spite of it all, the navy rose above the setbacks. It continued to meet all national and NATO requirements. Its contribution was noted and some of its ambitions realized when in 1985 sailors got back the blue uniform. The return of this universal symbol of identity was met with great rejoicing, ushering in a new era.

As we celebrate the centennial, there is renewed interest in naval matters. A recent editorial in *The Globe and Mail* urged the return of the Royal Canadian Navy, the title King George V approved in 1911. The response from sailors has been instructive, the vast majority of whom never served in the RCN. In general, they reject what they see as a backward step. They want to be seen as moving forward, not backward.

That view was anticipated by Lieutenant-Commander Alan Easton in his excellent account of his World War II sea service in his book *50 North*. He recalls a wartime conversation with a senior Royal Navy officer:

We went on to speak of tradition. He said that in the RN tradition was a heritage of which they were very proud, and in a sense was the moral backbone of the service. "You are not far removed from it yourselves, you know. You are part of the Empire and much of our stock is British."

That's so, sir, I acknowledged. But, although we learned your customs and in fact were patterned after the Royal Navy, I feel, and I think most of us feel, that we have no direct right to your traditions. Nor, could they apply really, because, what made them occurred mainly before we were in existence.

Our tradition, I suggested, is possibly being made now.

That point of view, I believe, would be shared by the majority of those serving in the navy today and by many who have retired. For half of the hundred years that the navy has existed, those who enlisted did not serve in the RCN. The RCN disappeared with a wave of Paul Hellyer's wand. Unification was seen as an insult to the many who had served in the RCN because it instantly and arbitrarily took away symbols and traditions that were part of their long and distinguished legacy of service. Surely, bringing back the designation RCN today would be doing the same thing to those who have served over the past 42 years. What of the innovations that are truly Canadian? Now women serve and command at sea; now we have bilingual warships; now we have a diversity of people from many ethnic and racial backgrounds reflecting the unique mix that is Canada itself. These are

traditions that are in part handed down and are in part earned by Canadian sailors who never served in the RCN but who proudly served in what is commonly known as the Canadian navy. Like those who suffered from unification they should not have their accomplishments cast aside.

The men and women of today's navy know that for some time they have been working more and more closely with the USN whose continent we share. Indeed, they interface more and more with foreign navies who identify them as the Canadian Navy. Francophones have been in what is now Canada longer than any, except for the First Nations and Inuit. Francophones do not use "Maritime Command" when identifying the navy. For them, the French word for navy is "La Marine." Navy/marine is a term that has survived 42 years of official, political and statutory deletion.

Vice-Admiral Dean McFadden has pointed out how closely the story of the navy parallels the development of Canada. Both came from humble beginnings but aspired to contribute beyond the shores of the country. Both modelled themselves on remarkable institutions of Great Britain. Both came of age in the crucible of war. He could have added that just as Canada has emerged from the shadow of Britain to tread the world stage as a respected and able nation in its own right, so did the Canadian Navy emerge from the shadow of the RN to become a world-renowned navy in its own right. It has become a navy reflecting the diversity, creativity, competence and multi-culturalism of the country itself.

This chamber is not the Royal Canadian Senate, although we owe much to British origins; we are the Senate of Canada. We are Canadians with our own constitution and identity. So it is with the Canadian Navy, with its own insignia, customs, practices and history.

The connection with the sovereign is acknowledged through the presentation of the Queen's Colours, which recently occurred for the third time in Halifax. Additionally, the use of HMCS is a practice well accepted by today's sailors.

The face of young Canada is rapidly changing. The demographic is no longer one of British, or even European, ancestry. The talent pool for the future navy has no connection with the royal designation. As the population ages, the navy is in an almost life and death competition with every other industry. If the navy does not attract more Aborigines, more francophones, more of the anglophone and francophone immigrant communities and visible minorities, it will die a slow death.

Maritime Command is a bland nonentity that has no synergy with other naval forces and has no discernible character with which the Canadian public can identify. Everyone knows the navy. The time has come to institutionalize the name "Canadian Navy/La Marine Canadienne." This motion is simple: Let us throw Maritime Canada overboard and signal that the Canadian Navy will be called officially the Canadian Navy/La Marine Canadienne.

(On motion of Senator Comeau, debate adjourned.)