

Support from Outside the Tent

With the shake up in leadership by Defence Minister, Bill Graham, and apparent mandate by the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, to revitalize culture and structure, there is a growing warmth of expectation in an old sailor's bones that we are entering a new form and age of naval forces for projection of power and humanity from the sea.

This same feeling was widespread in 1946 as the RCN, stripped to a tiny fraction of its wartime strength began the rebuilding and transition from the "Corvette Navy" to a balanced modern fleet backed by air power as an integral element.

Tactical aviation will be a vital component of our expeditionary forces to be delivered and supported by a new generation of "carriers" best described politically as well as factually as amphibious LPD

transport and LHD assault ships. This transformation can and should restore an essential breed of leadership by sailors and soldiers with cross-trained knowledge and experience in air operations. Two such examples are Admiral Bob Falls and Vice Admiral Harry Porter, former naval pilots and Chief of Defence Staff and Maritime Commander respectively.

No doubt this will require a modicum of "re-education" again, particularly by some in Light Blue who want to retain ownership, control and operation of aviation that is fundamentally and inherently a vital and integral element of naval and land force units. Their reasons are certainly understandable, threatened as they are by the spectre of diminished flying careers. An historical note: former Defence Minister, Paul Hellyer, knocked heads, transferred and consolidated former RCAF shore-based maritime air with sea going aviation under the Navy and ordered the continuing retention of aviation by the Army.

With Hellyer gone, a resurgent air force reconstituted as Air Command took over both. I will not dwell upon the resultant damage and loss of capability that is so painfully evident today. Of concern was not just the loss of our highly versatile naval and army aviation, including a bargain cost carrier with expeditionary capabilities... it was the loss of a generation of officers with the broad-based expertise and vision that has been so tragically lacking, and needed to support leaders like Rick Hillier and Andrew Leslie.

Rebuilding requires more than efficient equipment. It needs above all, the human changes in military organizations, ethos, attitudes and culture essential to leadership from the top down. It will also demand an unprecedented level of moral courage and resolution to face and enforce vital reforms of the deeply entrenched status quo. Hopefully, Generals Hillier and Leslie will have equally resolute support and encouragement by all of us "outside the tent." **FL**


Cdr (ret'd) Ralph E. Fisher served as an engineering officer on both the marine and aviation sides of the Navy, in operations, maintenance and development of ship and aircraft systems, including detached duty with the British and United States navies.

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