

From Bonaventure to Iraq:
The Evolution of Maritime Aviation within the Royal Canadian Air Force

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From 1924 until the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 1968, the motto of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) was “Per Ardua Ad Astra”, which translated from Latin states: “Through Adversity to the Stars”.¹ While this old motto, which was borrowed from the RCAF’s British parent, The Royal Air Force (RAF), has long been retired, it nonetheless has never been more fitting than it is today.² Since the late 1960’s the Canadian Armed Forces including Air Command (which was once again legislated to be the RCAF in 2013) has faced critical cutbacks, aging equipment, and a broad redefinition of its mandate. Nowhere is this more evident than in the sub categories of naval or maritime aviation, which will be the focus of this paper. Yet despite chronic underfunding, staffing issues, and deeply seeded partisan political problems embedded within the procurement process, the RCAF, and the men and women who serve within the organization, have stepped up in an ever shifting and evolving world to fill the dynamic role of the RCAF within Canada and around the world.

This paper will examine the history of maritime and naval aviation within the CAF from the beginning of the Cold War to the present day. It will pay special attention to the problems faced by naval aviators over the past several decades, the emergence of maritime aviation, and explore how the RCAF has come to thrive in a rapidly changing world under a dynamic mandate. To do this, this paper will rely heavily upon first hand accounts from several retired naval aviators through a series of oral history interviews. These oral histories will also be supplemented by official state histories, and where appropriate, a number of other primary and secondary sources. Reference to these interviews, and where they can be accessed, can be found largely in the footnotes and within the accompanying bibliography. The Oral histories being used

¹ Joanna Calder. “RCAF unveils new badge.” Royal Canadian Air Force News. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/article-template-standard.page?doc=rcaf-unveils-new-badge/hlouagzd> (accessed March 25, 2018)

² Ibid.

in this paper were gathered specifically for the purpose of writing on the topic of naval aviation and thus form the very foundation upon which the topic is being explored. Each of the three veterans interviewed have had long and distinguished careers within the CAF and provide valuable insight into the organization, the profession, the past, and the future of naval aviation within the RCAF.

The Bonaventure and the Golden Age of ASW

Laid down late 1943, and launched at the tail end of The Second World War in late February of 1945, the British aircraft carrier HMS Powerful was never deployed into a theatre of operation.³ Instead she remained laid up in port, and work on the vessel was suspended in early 1945 until the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) agreed to purchase the vessel in 1952.⁴ This Majestic-Class aircraft carrier, was then recommissioned and rechristened the HMCS Bonaventure in 1957; she would be Canada's third and final vessel of this type.⁵ The addition of the Bonaventure to the fleet signaled the beginning of an era, albeit a brief one, dominated by naval aviation in the purest sense of the term. As tensions between the Soviet Union and the West began to rise, the Bonaventure would provide a critical function for the RCN as a platform for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) carrying a number of different aircraft designed specifically for that purpose, including the CS2F Tracker, the Sikorsky HO4S helicopter, and the CHSS-2 Sea King.⁶ It should be noted however, that the Bonaventure also carried a number of fighter

³ "HMCS Bonaventure" Royal Canadian Navy <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/navy-history/bonaventure.page> (accessed March 25, 2018).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ted Gibbon, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 10, 2018, In Courtenay British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC; Hugh Avi Gordon, University of Victoria (B.C.), and University of Victoria (B.C.). Department of History. "The End of the Big Ship Navy: The Trudeau Government, the Defence Policy Review and the Decommissioning of the HMCS Bonaventure." (Victoria, 2003).

aircraft such as the McDonnell F2H Banshee, until they were retired from service in the early 1960's.⁷

While in service, the Bonaventure took part in shows of NATO force throughout the Atlantic region. Her first and last major test would come in the form of the Cuban Missile Crisis where she was deployed as part of the United States' "Quarantine" of Cuba.⁸In his 2018 interview Colonel Ted Gibbon, a Tracker Pilot on Bonaventure, described the tension aboard the ship prior to departing the Bedford Basin near Halifax, Nova Scotia, stating that there was a "feeling of overwhelming dread, that you need to do your job or there might not be anything to come home too."⁹ The Bonaventure did its job, and as tensions deescalated she went back to her usual maneuvers with NATO allies. The Bonaventure was, by all accounts, the pride of the Canadian fleet. However, Bonaventure was costly to operate and maintain leading to discussions about her retirement, within the Government of Canada.

The history of HMCS Bonaventure is just as much a part of Canadian political history as it is a part of Canadian military history; her decommissioning proves that. Between 1966 and 1967 the HMCS Bonaventure underwent a midlife refit; this is where her political troubles began.¹⁰ With a slated cost of 8 million dollars in 1967, the refit of Bonaventure was going to be a costly enterprise.¹¹ However, as the refit commenced, more and more problems began to appear within the ship pushing the costs significantly upwards and expanding the amount of time the ship would have to remain out of service.¹² These additional costs were, according to Captain J.A.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ted Gibbon, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 10, 2018, In Courtenay British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ J. Allan Snowie, 1945. The Bonnie, HMCS Bonaventure, (Erin, Ont: Boston Mills Press, 1987), 261 - 272

¹¹ Ibid, 263.

¹² Ibid, 266-270.

Lynch, who oversaw the refit at the Davie shipyard in Lauzon Quebec, unavoidable.¹³ In his opinion the unexpected costs were due only in part to the status the ship was in, but also largely due to economic factors far beyond the control of himself or the shipyard, including unionized workers and legislated workplace standards.¹⁴ These mounting costs, in turn, attracted a “zealous Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee” which began to dissect the financial situation of Bonaventure and her operation while generating substantial amounts of unflattering media coverage.¹⁵ When called before the committee as a witness, Captain Lynch stated defiantly that he believed the costs were justified and that “the taxpayers of Canada had better fire me if they do not agree with the way I do my job!”¹⁶

There are numerous different accounts as to how much the refit ultimately cost, The Globe and Mail reported sums of 11 and 13 million dollars.¹⁷ In his definitive history of the Bonaventure J. Allen Snowie reported that by the time Bonaventure had returned to service, including the cost of labour, the Department of National Defence had spent over 17 million dollars on the refit; more than twice as much as had been originally projected and budgeted.¹⁸ The Accounts Committee ultimately found that the refit had gone far over budget, but there was little that the committee could actually do to harm the longevity of Bonaventure’s operational life time; that is, except shift the court of public opinion.¹⁹ To the public the Bonaventure represented not the pride of the Canadian fleet, as it did to the thousands of sailors and aviators whom had

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 261, 271.

¹⁶ Ibid, 266-267.

¹⁷ "After \$11 Million Bill, Bonaventure's Ready." *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Sep 14, 1967.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1270298714?accountid=14846>;

"Halifax Ceremony Brings End to Carrier's 13½-Year Career." *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, Jul 04, 1970.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1242182986?accountid=14846>.

¹⁸ J. Allan Snowie, 1945. *The Bonnie, HMCS Bonaventure*, 270.

¹⁹ Ibid, 269-271.

served and continued to serve upon her, but rather a money pit for taxpayers.²⁰ Not long after the refit was concluded, only two years in fact, the majority Liberal Government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau made the decision to sell the ship for scrap in 1970.²¹ Despite the intensity of the attack against Bonaventure leveled by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts, its chair, the Hon. Alfred Hales, the Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Wellington south, and later Wellington, voiced his displeasure with the governments decision, stating: “It seems very foolish, after spending so much money on a ship, that they should simply scrap it.”²² The decommissioning of the Bonaventure would mark the end of the golden era of Canadian naval aviation and drastically redefine the discipline in general.

The End of the Cold War and the Search for a New Mandate

The decommissioning of the Bonaventure and the fall of the Iron Curtain ushered in a new era of political and military strategy and largely spelled the end of the traditional ASW role that Canadian naval aviators had performed. While ASW operations did not totally disappear at the conclusion of the Cold War, and likely never will, with the pressure of spontaneous attack lifted, naval aviation faced a kind of identity crisis. In his 2018 interview Major-General Scott Eichel described the post Soviet era as “a whole new ball game”.²³ CAF Air Command (RCAF) responded to this crisis by attempting to fill other auxiliary rolls such as fisheries and pollution

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “HMCS Bonaventure.” Royal Canadian Navy, <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/navy-history/bonaventure.page> (accessed March 25, 2018)

²² J. Allan Snowie, 1945. *The Bonnie, HMCS Bonaventure*, 270.

²³ Scott Eichel, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 18, 2018, Victoria, British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria BC.

patrols on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. These operational roles consisted of monitoring both foreign and domestic vessels.²⁴

In regard to fisheries patrols, these vessels were largely Spanish and Portuguese which were often found fishing off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Labrador, the aircrews were tasked with documenting and reporting their presence so that the department of Fisheries and Oceans could document the cause of the Atlantic fisheries collapse, and in particular, the collapse of Atlantic Cod stocks.²⁵ On the Pacific coast these vessels were typically identified as Soviet fleets or even domestic violators.²⁶ In regard to pollution patrols, aircrews attempted to prove that any given vessel that appeared to be leaking fuel or waste was indeed the point source.²⁷ They did this by photographing the waters both in front of and behind the vessel to prove definitively that the vessel was in fact the source of whatever pollutant had been released.²⁸ These operational roles involved primarily fixed wing aircraft such as the CS2F Tracker, the CP – 107 Argus, and CP- 140 Aurora, while the CAF's fleet of Sea Kings operated in support of the naval vessels upon which they were stationed.²⁹ In addition to this support role, the Sea King fleet also largely maintained its role as an ASW aircraft, however crews were trained in how to deal with potential fuel spills or pollution violations.³⁰ It's at this point that

²⁴ Scott Eichel, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 18, 2018, Victoria, British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria BC;
Ted Gibbon, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 10, 2018, In Courtenay British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Ted Gibbon, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 10, 2018, In Courtenay British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

²⁹ Ian Lightbody, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 17, 2018, Sidney, British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

³⁰ Ibid.

naval aviation transformed into maritime aviation wherein all operations apart from the Sea King Fleet, began to operate strictly from land.

Maritime aviation also began to move into the fields of Search and Rescue, a task that was given to squadrons designed specifically for that purpose such as 442 Squadron at 19 Wing Comox, British Columbia, 103 Squadron at 9 Wing Gander Newfoundland and Labrador, and 413 Squadron at 14 Wing Greenwood, Nova Scotia.³¹ Other air crews and squadrons such as Long-Range Patrol, and ship board Sea Kings, would also participate in search and rescue and recovery missions if they were called upon to do so. Such was the case with the tragic 1998 Swiss Air 111 accident.³² Swiss Air 111 plunged into the Atlantic Ocean while attempting to make an emergency landing at Stanfield International Airport in Halifax, Nova Scotia with a loss of all life.³³ In an effort to determine what brought down the plane the RCN and the Sea King fleet were called in to aid in the recovery of bodies and debris. This operation was recounted by Colonel Ian Lightbody, who was a sea King Pilot stationed at 12 Wing Shearwater at the time of the accident.³⁴ Maritime aviators, specifically those stationed at 14 Wing Greenwood, had also been tasked periodically with sovereignty patrols in the Canadian Arctic.³⁵ These patrols are a

³¹“442 Transport and Rescue Squadron” Royal Canadian Air Force. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/19-wing/442-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018);

“413 Transport and Rescue Squadron” Royal Canadian Air Force. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/14-wing/413-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018);

“103 Search and Rescue Squadron” Royal Canadian Air Force. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/9-wing/103-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018)

³² Canada, Transportation Safety Board, *Aviation Investigation Report In-Flight Fire Leading to Collision with Water*, Report #A98H0003, 2 September 1998. (<http://www.tsb.gc.ca/eng/rapports-reports/aviation/1998/a98h0003/a98h0003.pdf>)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ian Lightbody, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 17, 2018, in Sidney, British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria BC.

³⁵ “405 Long Range Patrol Squadron.” Royal Canadian Air Force. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/14-wing/405-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018).

simple expression of Canadian sovereignty over arctic territories but remain uniquely important given the proximity to Russian territory and lasting vestiges of Cold War mentalities.³⁶

Procurement, Political Interference, and the Decline of the CAF

The decommissioning of the Bonaventure dealt a major blow to the institution of fixed wing, ship-board naval aviation in Canada in that it effectively ended it, but the RCAF (Air Command) in particular, and the CAF in general, had been dealing with declining influence and prestige within the eyes of the Canadian Government for sometime. This allowed a disconnect between the political structures of government and the military bureaucracy and command structure to fester and solidify. This disconnect can arguably be traced back to the 1968 unification of Canada's three semi-autonomous service branches: the RCAF, RCN, and the Canadian Army, into a unified CAF with various commands under an overarching structure.³⁷ All members of the new unified CAF wore the same uniform, but belonged to vastly different military cultures stripped of their individual identities which caused a great deal of animosity between soldiers, sailors, and airman, and a government that had become so very tone deaf.³⁸ The move to unify alienated many of the members of the three distinct service branches, and this alienation was further compounded by the decommissioning of the Bonaventure just two years later.³⁹ This same type of political interference remains a problem to this day as is showcased most effectively, and provocatively, by the CH-148 Cyclone procurement process.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ted Gibbon, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 10, 2018, In Courtenay British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

Scott Eichel, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 18, 2018, In Victoria British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, Uvic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

If one is to include Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and I strongly believe that one should given that only a handful of aircraft as of March 2018, have been delivered, the Cyclone procurement process has spanned the careers of six different Prime Ministers and eight minority and majority governments split across three different political parties. Michael Byers and Stewart Webb explore the intricacies of the procurement process in their provocatively titled article: “The Worst Procurement in the History of Canada” Solving the Maritime Helicopter Crisis”.⁴⁰ In this article they describe an aircraft that has become a hazard rather than an asset, and stress that the Government of Canada and the Department of National Defence need to move to replace the Sea Kings immediately, if for no other reason, simply to protect the crews that fly them.⁴¹ Byers and Webb also published articles at with the Rideau Institute and the National Post at the same time in regard to the same issue.⁴²

However, it’s important to note that, as Major-General Scott Eichel points out in his 2018 interview, the Sea King is never referred to within the ranks of the military as “decrepit”, or as Byers and Webb put it, “unsafe” and “dilapidated”, but rather as venerable.⁴³ The language says much about the legacy. This is not an aircraft whose crews have given up on it but rather a long lived “workhorse” which will be sorely missed in the coming years as it is phased out of

⁴⁰Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Canadian Electronic Library (Firm). “The Worst Procurement in the History of Canada: Solving the Maritime Helicopter Crisis.” (Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2013),

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, “Michael Byers and Stewart Webb: A government blunder teaches us how not to buy helicopters.” *National Post*, February 11, 2013, <http://nationalpost.com/opinion/michael-byers-and-stewart-webb-a-government-blunder-teaches-us-how-not-to-buy-helicopters> (accessed March 25, 2018); Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, “Byers and Webb op-ed: A government blunder teaches us how not to buy helicopters.” *Rideau Institute*, February 12, 2013, <http://www.rideauinstitute.ca/2013/02/12/byers-and-webb-op-ed-a-government-blunder-teaches-us-how-not-to-buy-helicopters/> (accessed March 25, 2018).

⁴³ Scott Eichel, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 18, 2018, in Victoria British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, Uvic Libraries, Victoria, BC; Michael Byers and Stewart Webb, “Michael Byers and Stewart Webb: A government blunder teaches us how not to buy helicopters.”

service.⁴⁴ These are views once again affirmed by Colonel Ian Lightbody, who, as the commanding officer of CFB Shearwater, wrote an op-ed published in the *National Post* entitled “Kings for a Reason”.⁴⁵ In this letter to the editor, Colonel Lightbody offers a defence of the Helicopter and the work that its crews so professionally undertook, and as of March 2018, continue to undertake.⁴⁶ This letter was directed at Michael Byers and Stewart Webb in relation to their articles published both by the Rideau Institute and the *National Post*.⁴⁷ In his letter to editor Colonel Lightbody states:

Recently Michael Byers and Stewart Webb published a paper with the Rideau Institute, a piece in the *National Post* and interviews with the media where they referred to the Sea King helicopter as “unsafe” and speculated that “their dilapidated condition poses a daily threat to the lives of Canada’s naval aviators.” As the commander of Canada’s naval aviators, I would suggest that if they had done any primary research, they would have found the reality of daily Sea King operations to be more impressive and less sensational than their paper portrays.⁴⁸

The letter that Colonel Lightbody submitted to the *National Post* was published in a shortened format. In the unedited version of the letter, which I have obtained directly from Colonel Lightbody, the Colonel issues an invitation to the authors of the article to visit CFB Shearwater to talk to the men and women whom work with the Sea Kings on a daily basis, saying: “To help correct Mr. Byer’s and Mr. Webb’s misperceptions I invite them to visit 12 Wing in either Halifax or Victoria so they can talk first hand to the men and women of 12 Wing

⁴⁴ Ian Lightbody, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 17, 2018, in Sidney British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

⁴⁵ Ian Lightbody. “Kings for a Reason.” *National Post*. February 16, 2013, <http://nationalpost.com/opinion/letters/todays-letters-oscar-pistorius-does-not-represent-most-elite-athletes>(accessed March 25, 2018)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

who fly, maintain and support the Sea King. There they will hear first hand that they're Kings for a reason."⁴⁹

This brings up an important academic point. As Colonel Lightbody points out in his letter to the editor, Byers and Webb clearly did not engage in a level of research sufficient enough to be making claims about the safety status of the aircraft. Furthermore, their lack of inquiry prohibits them from using, with any amount of legitimacy, any allusions as to the well being of military personnel. The lack of meaningful consultation presents their use of "safety concerns" as a seemingly shallow attempt to use military personnel as pawns in their political portrayal of the Sea King and the Cyclone procurement process, on behalf of the Rideau Institute and the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives, a think tank and lobbying group with offices across the country.⁵⁰ While their article is primarily concerned with public policy it nonetheless neglects the broader historical scope and misrepresents many of the facts which Colonel Lightbody has alluded to. Yes, the Sea King is old, yes, it needs to be replaced, but Byers and Webb should not pretend to speak on behalf of the maintenance and flight crews that keep the aircraft in operational condition.

However, Byers and Webb do raise important points about the political nature of the procurement process; putting aside the feelings of the multiple generations of military personnel who worked with the aircraft, the procurement process itself is fatally flawed. According to their article, the Cyclone procurement debacle began as early as 1975 when it became evident that there were gaps forming in the Sea King's capabilities, as the nature of warfare, and military

⁴⁹ Ian Lightbody (Commanding Officer (Retired), 12 Wing Shearwater, Shearwater Nova Scotia) Unedited letter to the editor of the *National Post*, Sent to: Anthony Auchterlonie (Department of History, University of Victoria, HSTR 426A Veterans Oral History Program, Victoria British Columbia) March 18, 2018.

⁵⁰ "About the Centre for Policy Alternatives." The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/offices> (accessed March 25, 2018).

priorities, began to change.⁵¹ The first attempt at replacement would come in 1990 under the administration of Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives who awarded a contract to European Helicopter Industries (EHI) for the procurement of the EH -101 Merlin aircraft.⁵² The EH-101 was to serve both search and rescue and military functions within the CAF.⁵³ This contract prompted a debacle that would effectively span the careers of six Prime Ministers, from Brian Mulroney to Justin Trudeau, and about twice as many minority and majority governments.

Following the fall of the Mulroney/Campbell government the Chrétien government abruptly canceled the contract with EHI resulting in hefty fines on the Government of Canada for breach of contract.⁵⁴ In 2004 the Liberal government of Paul Martin would subsequently award a contract to Sikorsky, which denoted that the first deliveries of fully functional helicopters would be made in 2005.⁵⁵ As of March 2018, more than a decade after the initial delivery deadline, the RCN and RCAF are still waiting to acquire the majority of the aircraft that were ordered.⁵⁶

Issues with the procurement process and the disconnect between military and political structures have been echoed time and again by politicians and academics alike. This disconnect, as is exemplified in procurement policies, is once again the subject of Aaron Plamondon's book *The Politics of Procurement: Military Acquisition in Canada and the Sea*

⁵¹ Michael Byers and Stewart Webb "The Worst Procurement in the History of Canada: Solving the Maritime Helicopter Crisis." 5.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Michael MacDonald. "Sea King helicopters finally ready for full retirement on Canada's East Coast." *Global News*. January 18, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3976316/sea-king-helicopters-retirement/> (accessed March 25, 2018).

King Helicopter.⁵⁷ This book, which is written by a military historian, is simply an extension of the arguments made in Byers and Webb's article. However, while Byers and Webb look specifically at the procurement of the CH-148 cyclone, Plamondon looks at the grander history of the procurement process in Canada, though he does focus on the Sea King.⁵⁸

In his book Plamondon exposes what has long been an issue for members of the military: that is, partisan politics and constantly changing bureaucracies that do what is politically expedient at the time while simultaneously neglecting the long-term needs and requirements of the CAF to properly perform its duties.⁵⁹ Ultimately Plamondon presents a troubling conclusion: Canadians do not care about the needs of their military.⁶⁰ It's made clear in both the Byers and Webb article and in Plamondon's book that procurement is an inherently political action and issue. However, Plamondon takes his argument further, and rightly so, pointing the finger not wholly at the Canadian government, but also at the Canadian public for not prioritizing the needs of its military.⁶¹ He states clearly that military procurement will only occur if it is politically expedient, and that procurement will only become politically expedient when Canadians decide that it is.⁶² The conclusion that Plamondon appears to point to, is that Canada has a culture in which the military, while respected, is not prioritized politically or economically.

This issue of procurement is incredibly important in terms of maritime air in the greater sense, and the Sea King in the particular, because the procurement process for the Sea King's replacement has tainted public opinion of the military procurement process and the legacy of the

⁵⁷ Aaron Plamondon, *The Politics of Procurement: Military Acquisition in Canada and the Sea King Helicopter*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 189-190.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Sea King itself. Published in 2001 in *The Hill Times*, Michael Forrestall's article "Chrétien's Government is Courting Danger with Sea King Copters [Maritime Helicopter Project]" is a damning exposé on the politics of the time. While ultimately Chrétien would be forced from office not over the procurement debacle, but rather by his own party in the wake of the sponsorship scandal, this article proves that in 2001 there was, in the minds of many, a serious possibility that the government could fall over this ill conceived policy move which ended up costing Canadian tax payers hundreds of millions of dollars for literally nothing in return.

Forrestall goes on to explain why it is necessary to replace the aging fleet of Sea Kings. He emphasises the fact that up to 50% of missions assigned to Sea King crews were forced to be abandoned despite highly trained and proficient aircrews because the platform from which they were expected to operate (the Sea King) had become unreliable and incapable.⁶³ It should be noted, however, that Michael Forrestall at the time this article was published was a Conservative senator and vice chair of the senate standing committee on National Security and Defence.⁶⁴

What Forrestall states in his article, directly contradicts what was written, and explicitly stated, by Colonel Lightbody who spent his 32-year career with the RCAF flying the Sea King and in command of various elements of the Sea King fleet.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Forrestall also does not state where he is getting these statistics. He also makes it abundantly clear that all members of the opposition, regardless of party line, were eagerly awaiting a resolution to this crisis, in fact he moves to directly address then Prime Minister Chrétien in that regard.⁶⁶ Forrestall,

⁶³ Michael Forrestall, "Chrétien's Government is Courting Danger with Sea King Copters [Maritime Helicopter Project]." *The Hill Times* no. 590 (2001): 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ian Lightbody, interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 17, 2018, in Sidney British Columbia, University of Victoria Veterans Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

⁶⁶ Michael Forrestall, "Chrétien's Government is Courting Danger with Sea King Copters [Maritime Helicopter Project]."

interestingly, has a long political history within the defence community; as a Progressive Conservative MP from Halifax, according to a *Globe and Mail* article published in 1967, he was also critical of the refit being undertaken on the *Bonaventure*.⁶⁷

The *Cyclone* of course is not the only fatally flawed procurement process that Canada has been plagued with in recent years. There has been plenty of effort put into replacing Canada's aging fleet of *Cf-18 Hornet* fighter jets. Initially the replacement was to be the *F-35* which Canada has already spent hundreds of millions of dollars developing.⁶⁸ However, the *F-35* was dumped by the incoming Liberal government of Justin Trudeau in 2015 over fears of a rising sale price and an inability to meet the capability demands of the CAF.⁶⁹ The RCN has also been plagued by poor procurement policies involving the current Liberal Government. This is showcased in the procurement of the *MV Asterix* and the unflattering and deeply troubling criminal charge of Breach of Trust that has been leveled against Vice Admiral Mark Norman.⁷⁰ While this story is very much still in its infancy, the *Globe and Mail* has reported on the issue, painting the picture of a commander fiercely loyal to the sailors under his command and tired of government interference in the functioning of the military bureaucracy, so much so, that he was willing to jeopardize his own career and possibly freedom, to ensure that the procurement of an interim replenishment vessel would go forward after the change in government in 2015.⁷¹ The

⁶⁷ "Carrier Refit." *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*, May 09, 1967.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1270140110?accountid=14846>.

⁶⁸ "Globe editorial: Canada's incurable case of fighter-jet lag." *Globe and Mail*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/globe-editorial-canadas-incurable-case-of-fighter-jet-lag/article37309723/> (accessed March 25, 2018)

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Daniel LeBlanc and Robert Fife "Vice-Admiral Mark Norman charged with breach of trust by RCMP" *The Globe and Mail* March 9, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/rcmp-lay-breach-of-trust-charge-against-vice-admiral-mark-norman/article38260930/> (accessed March 25, 2018)

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

CBC describes the current situation that Vice Admiral Mark Norman, and all Canadians, now find themselves in as a “political, bureaucratic, and business fecal storm”.⁷²

Procurement is not the only issue that plagues the CAF and the RCAF: since 1960 defence spending in Canada as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), has fallen precipitously from 4.16% of Canada’s GDP in 1960 to 0.99% in 2016.⁷³ These issues have also been compounded by an inability to recruit new members into the CAF.⁷⁴ According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), whom does not reveal their source, as of 2016 the CAF has been struggling to fill a shortage of 2,000 regular-force members and 5,300 reservists.⁷⁵ Yet, the Government of Canada has committed the force to foreign missions such as peacekeeping in Mali, sending a battle group to Latvia, and continued participation in Operation Impact, Canada’s contribution to the global coalition against ISIS.⁷⁶ This proves that the CAF is required to maintain a consistent level of operational capability but is consistently expected to do so with less financing and political support.

A Growing Mandate: Aurora’s Over land

Today maritime air is primarily tasked to Canada’s three long range patrol squadrons; 407 squadron based out of 19 Wing Comox on the East Coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia; as well as 404 Long Range Patrol and Training Squadron and 405 squadron based out

⁷²Murray Brewster, “The RCMP vs. Mark Norman: It’s about more than just leaks.” *CBC News*, March 10, 2018, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mark-norman-liberals-court-1.4570800> (accessed March 25, 2018).

⁷³ Military Expenditure (% of GDP), Index Mundi, <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/canada/military-expenditure> (accessed March 25, 2018)

⁷⁴ Lee Berthiaume “Military short thousands of personnel despite small increase in ranks.” *CBC News*. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/military-personnel-numbers-1.4473134> (accessed March 25, 2018).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Murray Brewster, “Canada sending troops to UN peacekeeping mission in Mali.” *CBC News*. March 16, 2018, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadian-peacekeeping-mission-mali-1.4580482 (accessed March 25, 2018);

“Operation REASSURANCE.” National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad/nato-ee.page> (accessed March 25, 2018);

“Operation IMPACT.” National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-current/op-impact.page> (accessed March 25, 2018).

of Greenwood, Nova Scotia on Canada's Atlantic coast.⁷⁷ While these aircraft are capable of ASW duties, and their aircrews are proficient in ASW tactics, they spend a majority of their time undertaking peacetime operations which includes surveillance of Canadian waters and coast lines actively looking out for smugglers, illegal fishing, polluters, and people whom maybe violating Canadian or international law.⁷⁸ Beyond this these crews have begun to operate in search and rescue roles (along with several dedicated squadrons such as 103, 442 and 413 squadrons) and have begun to aid domestically in times of natural disaster.⁷⁹

In recent years these aircrews have also expanded their mandate in an operational capacity to provide support to coalition forces in the war on terror.⁸⁰ CP-140 Aurora crews have in recent years participated in operations such as Operation Apollo and Operation Athena in the skies above Afghanistan from 2001-2003 and 2009 respectively.⁸¹ These crews also actively participated in Operation Mobile in the skies over Libya from 2010-2011.⁸² Moreover, CP-140 crews have also been actively participating in Operation Impact, Canada's contribution in support of the Global Coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria; in this case, according to the Department of National Defence, CP-140 crews flew 881 sorties between October 30, 2014 and December 11, 2017.⁸³

⁷⁷ "407 Long Range Patrol Squadron" Royal Canadian Air Force;

"404 Long Range Patrol and Training Squadron" Royal Canadian Air Force;

"405 Long Range Patrol Squadron" Royal Canadian Air Force.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Operation REASSURANCE." National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces

Sea King crews which are a part of 423 and 443 Maritime Helicopter Squadrons have also developed remarkably flexible operational capabilities.⁸⁴ These crews now undertake missions including anti-drug operations both domestically and abroad as well as anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, as Colonel Ian Lightbody alluded to in both his National Post piece and in his 2018 interview.⁸⁵ Furthermore, they are capable of operating in conjunction with the RCN with very little notice, as was the case with the 2010 earthquake in Haiti as well as the 2016 earthquake in New Zealand where crews were called upon to render aid.⁸⁶ This is a significant departure from the typical ASW and maritime patrol roles which these squadrons have traditionally fulfilled and shows just how dynamic the aircraft and their crews have become.

Conclusions

Speaking in regard to oral history, and its reception within the academy, the Italian academic, Alessandro Portelli, stated that “there seems to be a fear that once the floodgates of orality are opened, writing (and rationality along with it) will be swept out as if by a spontaneous, uncontrollable mass of fluid, amorphous material.”⁸⁷ The oral tradition has been largely rejected by the academy arguably since the day that Plato wrote his famous, or infamous, *Republic*, in which his clear mistrust of the arts and of the oral tradition of knowledge transmission is made abundantly clear throughout books II and III.⁸⁸ It is in the same spirit that

⁸⁴ “423 Maritime Helicopter Squadron.” (Royal Canadian Air Force, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/12-wing/423-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018);

“443 Maritime Helicopter Squadron.” Royal Canadian Air Force, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/12-wing/443-squadron.page> (accessed March 25, 2018).

⁸⁵ Ian Lightbody, Interview by Anthony Auchterlonie, March 17, 2018, Sidney, British Columbia, University of Victoria Military Oral History Collection, UVic Libraries, Victoria, BC.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Alessandro Portelli, 1979, “What Makes Oral History Different” in *The Oral History Reader: Second Edition* ed. Robert Perks and Alister Thomson, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 33

⁸⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allen Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 2016)

the German historiographer Leopold Von Ranke suggested that history should be undertaken from the perspective of official documentation only, in what seems to be a cold and calculated methodical and almost scientific manner.⁸⁹ However, Portelli makes an important argument in his rationale for the acceptance of oral history, for oral history “tells us less about *events* than it does their *meaning*”.⁹⁰ Portelli goes on to explain that “oral sources tell us not just what they did, but what they wanted to do. What they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”⁹¹ While official documentation certainly captured the events surrounding the decommissioning of the Bonaventure, the scrapping of the EH-101 contract, or the routine nature of a typical recovery mission such as that of Swiss Air 111, the official documents do not capture the anger, urgency, frustration, or devastation associated with such events or how they resonated with those who witnessed or participated in them. Oral history, as Portelli suggests, provides context. This context, in the case of this paper, came from the personal accounts of Colonel Ted Gibbon, Colonel Ian Lightbody, and Major-General Scott Eichel. These accounts, in turn, clearly helped to create a deeper understanding of how the RCAF has been able to develop and grow into its various and evolving global roles, thus I would argue, oral history, and the context it provides, is very important to the representation of any history.

Since the end of the Cold War the RCAF has seen a myriad of technical and tactical changes. With the decommissioning of the HMCS Bonaventure and the collapse of the Soviet block, Canada’s corps of naval aviators has shrunk to just a handful of shipboard Sea King crews, operating aircraft long awaiting their retirement. However, out of naval aviation’s precipitous decline rose an enhanced maritime air service with a dynamic mandate. From anti-

⁸⁹Leopold Von Ranke, “On the Character of Historical Science,” *The Theory and Practice of History*, edited by G. Iggers & K. von Moltke. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 197), 33-44.

⁹⁰ Alessandro Portelli, 1979, “What Makes Oral History Different”, 36

⁹¹ Ibid.

submarine warfare and sovereignty patrols here at home, to inland surveillance and disaster relief half a world away, the maritime aviators of the RCAF have shown an unparalleled ability to operate in dynamic and demanding situations. However, it is important to note that this is accomplished though an increasingly politicized environment which could, and to an extent already has, jeopardize(d) the efficiency of the CAF, and in doing so, has put into jeopardy the essential services that the CAF provide. Operating on an ever-declining budget, short of staff, and on airframes that are in some cases over 50 years old, the men and women who form Canada's RCAF squadrons are consistently forced to overcome stifling obstacles that have been needlessly thrown in their way. As Canada seeks to reinvent its international reputation through commitments overseas, it will become vitally important to ensure that the RCAF and the Canadian Forces in general, are give the tools and freedom necessary to support their continued operation. Sic Itur Ad Astra, such is the pathway to the stars.

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