

Documents on the Introduction of the Maritime Command Flag, 1984–85

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The sea element of the Canadian Armed Forces was allowed to enter the unification era with a distinctive flag, the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack of 1968. It was the only one of the three elements granted this privilege. Two decades on, increasing signs of separate environmental or “service” identities were emerging in the unified force. In 1984, the Commander of Maritime Command asked to have the Jack renamed and flown ashore as a command flag and in HMC Ships as the ensign. Through a close examination of four key documents associated with the episode, this commentary explores the request in detail, as well as the reaction to it on the part of the Chief of the Defence Staff, a staunch unificationist. In so doing, it serves as an excellent case study of the latent tensions that existed between single-service traditionalists and those committed to what was seen at the time as the “new way” in military organization.

L'élément maritime des Forces armées canadiennes a été autorisé à entrer dans l'ère de l'unification avec un drapeau distinctif, le pavillon de marine des Forces armées canadiennes de 1968. Il était le seul des trois éléments à bénéficier de ce privilège. Vingt ans plus tard, des signes de plus en plus nombreux d'identités distinctes environnementales ou des services sont apparus au sein des Forces unifiées. En 1984, le commandant du Commandement maritime a demandé que le pavillon soit renommé et hissé à terre comme drapeau de

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commandement et comme pavillon national à bord des navires canadiens de Sa Majesté. Au moyen d'un examen approfondi de quatre documents clés liés à cet épisode, ce commentaire analyse en détail la demande, ainsi que la réaction du chef d'état-major de la Défense, un fervent partisan de l'unification. Ainsi, il constitue une excellente étude de cas des tensions latentes qui existaient entre les traditionalistes opposés à la fusion des services et ceux qui adhéraient à ce qui était perçu à l'époque comme la « nouvelle voie » en matière d'organisation militaire.

Introduction: The Flags of Unification

When the single military service combining sea, land, and air elements known as the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) was proclaimed on 1 February 1968, a flag to represent the organization as a whole, the CAF Ensign, had already been approved by the federal cabinet.¹ This was the only flag for the new service shepherded through to approval by the architect of unification, Minister of National Defence Paul T. Hellyer, before leaving the department in September 1967.² On the same day the new service came into effect, Hellyer's successor, Léo Cadieux, obtained the approval of his cabinet colleagues of the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack.³

¹ "Distinctive Flags For The Canadian Armed Forces," 16 August 1967, 7–8, RG2 A-5-a, volume 6323, Cabinet Conclusions, Privy Council Office fonds, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=2733&ecopy=e000837680>. It should be noted that the CAF Ensign functions as a *service* ensign, not a *ship's* ensign, which is an entirely different category of flag. The closest equivalent to the CAF Ensign, functionally speaking, prior to unification was the RCAF Ensign.

² Brian Bertosa, "Hellyer's Flag: The Origins of the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign in Documents, 1964–68," *Canadian Military History* 32, no. 2 (2023), <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2150&context=cmh>.

³ "Distinctive Flags For The Canadian Armed Forces," 1 February 1968, 8, RG2 A-5-a, volume 6338, LAC, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Home/Record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=2782&ecopy=e000836194>. Also approved by cabinet that day was a set of distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers, but these were personal flags, not organizational flags. On the origins of the CAF Naval Jack, see Norman Jolin, "The Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 23, no. 3 (July 2013): 273–78, <https://tnm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/article/view/285/267>; and Brian Bertosa, "It Was Supposed to Be Blue: Roads Not Taken with the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack, 1967–68," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2022): 545–74, <https://tnm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/article/view/1045/996>.

Formally announced together in *The Canada Gazette* on 13 April 1968, the CAF Ensign and Naval Jack were the only organizational flags permitted the new service.⁴ Of the two, the Naval Jack was very much the junior flag, relegated to the jackstaff of Her Majesty's Canadian Ships in commission and nowhere else.⁵ On land, the only military flag to fly from the nation's flagpoles, including on naval bases, was the CAF Ensign. There the matter rested for a good many years.

The first loosening of the tightly circumscribed role assigned to the Naval



Canadian Armed Forces
Ensign

National Defence Headquarters
16 August, 1967

A. Buckley
Director of Ceremonial

Canadian Armed Forces
Ensign, approved by
cabinet 16 August 1967.
(Directorate of History and
Heritage, Department of
National Defence, Ottawa)



Canadian Armed Forces
Naval Jack

National Defence Headquarters
1 February, 1968

A. Buckley
Director of Ceremonial

Canadian Armed Forces
Naval Jack, approved by
cabinet 1 February 1968.
(Directorate of History and
Heritage, Department of
National Defence, Ottawa)

⁴ *Canada Gazette* 102, no. 15 (13 April 1968): 891 (Ensign), 892 (Jack), <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=11930>.

⁵ *Manual of Ceremonial for HMC Ships*, 3 June 1974, 2–4, para. 206, <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/RCN-DOCS/Manual-of-Ceremonial-1974.pdf>.

Jack occurred in 1975 when it was permitted to be paraded on shore by units of Maritime Command.⁶ Prior to that, when the occasion was not one of the few important enough to warrant the uncasing of the Queen's Colour of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the only flag carried on parade was the National Flag of Canada.⁷ This put the sea element of the CAF at a disadvantage relative to the land and air elements inasmuch as infantry units paraded with their colours, while many air squadrons had been granted squadron standards. Moreover, during this period all three elements wore a single-breasted rifle green service dress commonly referred to as the "CF Green" uniform. Dressed in this manner, and without any sort of distinctive flag, units of Maritime Command on parade were difficult to identify as "naval." Allowing the jack to serve as a naval identifier on land in this way may thus, in hindsight, seem only logical, as well as relatively trivial, given that it consisted merely of an expansion of the use of an already existing flag.

Nevertheless, the move was conceptually significant. It must be remembered that the jack in use prior to the introduction of the National Flag in 1965, the Canadian Blue Ensign (sometimes referred to, unofficially, as the Canadian Blue Jack),⁸ had not been displayed ashore in any capacity.⁹ Now, in 1975, a jack was appearing for the first time on shore (albeit only carried by hand). Furthermore, before 1965, when not parading the Queen's Colour, the flag paraded by the RCN was the White Ensign.¹⁰ By allowing the CAF Naval Jack to be paraded ashore, that flag had now assumed one of the functions of the former ensign. The lines between jack and ensign were thus beginning to blur.

It will not have been lost on the nation's naval traditionalists that there

⁶ NDHQ (National Defence Headquarters) Ottawa to HQ MARCOM (Headquarters, Maritime Command) Halifax, Message DC 605, 12 November 1975, file 1145-18, file name: Colours, Flags – Canadian Forces Ensign and Naval Jack, Central Registry fonds, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence, Ottawa (hereafter DHH).

⁷ Documents of the period make no mention of units of the sea element parading the CAF Ensign; see especially D.S. Boyle to distribution list including National Defence Headquarters, Director of Ceremonial, 25 September 1975; and J.W. Quinn to Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) through Vice CDS, 22 October 1975, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁸ Alistair B. Fraser, "The Flags of National Defence," chap. 6 in *The Flags of Canada*, accessed 20 November 2023, <http://fraser.cc/FlagsCan/Nation/NatDefence.html#n36>; Jolin, "Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," 270, 272. For a quick visual overview of the changes undergone by Canada's naval flags, see "Display of naval flags on Her Majesty's Canadian ships over time," Government of Canada, Canadian Armed Forces, last modified 24 October 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/naval-flags-uniforms/diplay-naval-flags.html>.

⁹ *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Navy*, vol. 1, *Administrative* (Queen's Printer, 1952), art. 62.46 (1) (a), 62.47.

¹⁰ *Queen's Regulations and Orders for the RCN*, art. 62.39 (1).

remained other functions of the former White Ensign that were being fulfilled by flags without a naval character. One of those functions had been to fly from the ensign staff of HMC Ships in commission.¹¹ As admirably recounted in 2013 by Captain (retired) Norman Jolin, RCN, in this journal, since 1965 the ship's ensign of the CAF was the National Flag of Canada and would remain so until 2013.¹² A no less important role of the White Ensign had been to fly at naval establishments on land.¹³ In 1975, the only permissible flags for that purpose were the National Flag and the CAF Ensign.¹⁴ If the Jack could be displayed on parade by units of Maritime Command, could it not also be flown from the establishments on land belonging to that same command?

“A Desirable Development within the Concept of Environmental Identity”

Flags to represent the functional commands of the unified service, of which some (but not all) mapped reasonably closely onto the former navy, army, and air force, had been stoutly resisted by Paul Hellyer in 1967, who rightly viewed such symbols as a challenge to the principle of a single service.¹⁵ Rather than “differing ensigns for the separate environments,” it was Hellyer’s view that the CAF Ensign should “serve all the requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces.”¹⁶ By the early 1980s, however, unificationist orthodoxy was no longer being observed to quite the extent that it had been. With respect to flags, a major development was the introduction in 1983 of the Canadian Forces Air Command Flag.¹⁷ With an update to the maple leaf in the roundel and the replacement of the Union Jack in the canton by the National Flag of Canada, the new flag was essentially a reprise of the light blue Royal Canadian Air Force Ensign withdrawn in 1965. That said, the Air Command Flag was not intended to replace the CAF Ensign – which remains to this day Canada’s only true service ensign – but to fly in addition to it in a subordinate position, a matter that had been sorted out at the highest levels as a condition of acceptance

¹¹ *Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the RCN*, art. 62.38 (1).

¹² Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 280–82.

¹³ *Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the RCN*, art. 62.38 (2) and (3), 62.39.

¹⁴ *Manual of Ceremonial – HMC Ships*, 9 May 1980, para. 310 a (3) (National Flag), 311 a (1) (CAF Ensign), <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/RCN-DOCS/Manual-of-Ceremonial-1980.pdf>.

¹⁵ Defence Council – Minutes, 220th Meeting, 5 June 1967, paras. 5 and 6, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, Fonds 73/1223, Series 3, Subseries 3, file 1392, DHH.

¹⁶ Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, 1 May 1967, paras. 4 and 5, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, Series 3, Subseries 3, file 1392, DHH.

¹⁷ *Canada Gazette* 117, no. 45 (5 November 1983): 9895, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=10479>.

of the new flag by cabinet.¹⁸

Indicative of the new attitude, the Air Command Flag was described within the department as “a desirable development within the concept of environmental identity.”¹⁹ “Environment” here refers to the elements of sea, land, and air, represented institutionally by their respective commands. As we have seen, visual expressions of loyalty at that level of the organization had formerly been suppressed to the point where naval units were not permitted to parade with a naval flag. In 1984, with the Air Command Flag now available as an undeniable precedent, proponents of a comparable Maritime Command Flag judged the moment opportune to move forward with a second expansion of the role of the CAF Naval Jack.²⁰

Document 1: A Letter from the Commander of Maritime Command to the Chief of the Defence Staff, 23 November 1984

The initiative began with plans more grandiose than simply gaining approval to fly the jack as a command flag from naval establishments ashore, as is clear from the following letter of 23 November 1984 from Vice-Admiral J.C. Wood, Commander of Maritime Command²¹ to the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) in Ottawa.²²

1. The approval of the Air Command Flag last year has been applauded in this Command as a desirable

¹⁸ “The national flag and the flag of the Canadian Forces are always given precedence over the Air Command flag, and ... the latter is flown only when the other two are also displayed,” Serge Joyal, Secretary of State of Canada to J. Gilles Lamontagne, Minister of National Defence, 25 May 1983, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

¹⁹ D.B. Dewar, Deputy Minister of National Defence to the Minister of National Defence, Canadian Naval Jack and Maritime Command Flag, n.d., para. 2, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH. This phrase is repeated verbatim, or near verbatim, in a great deal of the correspondence found in the file. The lengthy, stilted wording suggests a careful attempt on the part of someone in a position of authority in the matter – perhaps the Director of Ceremonial, N.A. Buckingham – to arrive at a politically acceptable phrase to describe a process that was regarded by many of us serving at the time as gradual, creeping de-unification.

²⁰ What follows has been dealt with in brief by Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 278–79.

²¹ On whom, see Government of Canada, Canadian Armed Forces, “Vice-Admiral James Crilly Wood, CMM, CD,” last modified 17 August 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/leaders/commanders-list/james-crilly-wood.html> or the obituary “James Crilly Wood, C.M.M., C.D., O.St.J.,” For Posterity’s Sake: A Royal Canadian Navy History Project, accessed 29 November 2023, <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/CTB-BIO/MEM002166.htm>.

²² Vice-Admiral J.C. Wood, Commander Maritime Command to CDS, 23 November 1984, MARC: 1150-9 (COMD), file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

development within the concept of environmental identity. A parallel case can be made for a Maritime Command Flag to be flown in HMC Ships and on bases and stations in this Command.

2.I propose that the current Canadian Naval Jack, flown in HMC Ships alongside and underway when dressed overall, be approved as the Maritime Command Flag. The Naval Jack is familiar to officers and men in this Command having been worn in Canadian warships since 1968. It is already approved as heraldically correct. It incorporates the Canadian flag in the upper left canton and thus the national symbol is paramount. It also displays the anchor and naval crown on the fly. These symbols represent Canadian as well as environmental identity and maintain the traditional link with the Crown which remains a feature of Canadian life, historically, constitutionally and philosophically.

3.The Maritime Command Flag would be flown in HMC Ships at sea and in harbour in the position currently occupied by the National Flag. In the case of ships, it is proposed that the National Flag be flown as the Naval Jack. In addition, the Maritime Command Flag would be flown ashore at Maritime Command and Maritime Forces Pacific Headquarters as well as the Headquarters of all MARCOM formations, bases and stations, including naval reserve divisions. It would be flown in the same manner as the Canadian Forces Ensign.

4.The adoption of a distinctive Maritime Command Flag flown as the ensign in HMC Ships is justified on historical grounds inasmuch as from 1910 until the White Ensign was replaced by the National Flag on 15 February 1965, the Canadian Navy flew a distinctive ensign. Amongst maritime nations, 42 out of 82 countries or just over 50% wear a distinctive naval ensign. Within NATO, ten of the 14 navies have distinctive naval ensigns; and in the Commonwealth, the proportion is even larger. Thus, there is a strong case based on international usage and tradition for the adoption of a distinctively Canadian naval ensign to be flown in HMC Ships underway and alongside.

5.The adoption of a Maritime Command Flag, and

its use in warships, bases and stations, would provide a meaningful corporate identifier recognizable internationally, by Canadians everywhere and by all personnel serving in this Command, just as the Air Command Flag is doing for members of the Canadian Forces serving there.

6. Your approval in principle is requested in order that a cabinet submission may be prepared for approval for 1985, the 75th Anniversary of the Naval Service of Canada. If approved, it is proposed that the new Maritime Command Flag be consecrated with appropriate ceremony on the Battle of the Atlantic Weekend, 4-5 May 1985.

In view of the continued lack of a specifically naval flag flying either at naval establishments on land or, for that matter, from the ensign staff of the nation's warships in 1984, the Commander of Maritime Command decided to go big in this letter, asking for the Naval Jack to be renamed and used in both roles. However, the precedent he cites of the Air Command Flag, which can only fly from bases and stations, ought really to apply solely to the use of the proposed Maritime Command Flag on land. In no way is it a "parallel case" (paragraph 1 of Wood's letter) to the displacement of the National Flag of Canada from the ensign staff of HMC Ships, which was a question of great political sensitivity.²³ No doubt reasoning on the analogy of the former White Ensign, there appears to be no thought given by Wood to the possibility that the Jack might be assigned to *one* of the requested roles, that of flying on land as the flag of Maritime Command, and not the other, in which case its role aboard ship would remain that of the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack.

Problematic, too, is the stated intent to fly the Maritime Command Flag "in the same manner as the Canadian Forces Ensign" (paragraph 3). Perhaps Wood was aware of the thorny question of precedence vis-à-vis the National Flag and the CAF Ensign that had to be dealt with in the case of the Air Command Flag, perhaps not. Nevertheless, an individual at his level of authority ought to have known better; to say that he wished to fly the proposed flag "in the same manner" as the CAF Ensign implied no less than equality with the ensign, if not outright replacement of it. Not unreasonably, Wood may have

²³ This was certainly the case in the 1960s, when the National Flag was new (on which see Jolin, "Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," 276 and Bertosa, "It Was Supposed to Be Blue," 557), but I believe it to have been just as true in 1984 while the federal Liberals remained in power.

been influenced by the longstanding practice in HMC Ships, where the CAF Ensign was not allowed to fly.²⁴ This, too, was something for which the precedent of the Air Command Flag, blatantly ignored here, was not going to provide any help.

Wood was clearly attempting to bring down pillars of unificationist practice beyond what may be justified by the precedent set by the Air Command Flag, and it may fairly be asked why. Was there something else that led him to believe that an initiative as sweeping as the one laid out in this letter was going to be successful? An answer may lie in the political context of the time, which saw the Progressive Conservatives under Brian Mulroney win an overwhelming majority in the federal election of 4 September 1984.²⁵ Among the party's campaign promises was to abolish the CF Green uniform and to replace it with separate uniforms for the three elements.²⁶ Moreover, Mulroney's first Minister of National Defence, Robert Coates, was from Nova Scotia, the province with Canada's



Vice-Admiral James C. Wood, Commander Maritime Command, 1983–87. The admiral is wearing an early version of the Distinctive Environmental Uniform for flag officers of the sea element, therefore the photo cannot have been taken prior to 1985. (Department of National Defence)

²⁴ The CAF Ensign “shall not be flown in Her Majesty’s Canadian Ships”; A-AD-200-000/AG-000, *The Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces* (DND Canada, 1999), 4-5-3 a, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/heritage-manual/chapter-4/section-5.html>.

²⁵ “Brian Mulroney wins stunning landslide victory in 1984,” CBC Archives, last updated 4 September 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/brian-mulroney-wins-stunning-landslide-victory-in-1984-1.4675926>.

²⁶ Fred Langan, “Canada plans to muster out green uniforms of Armed Forces,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 October 1984, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1984/1004/100438.html>. Fulfilling that promise, the first versions of today’s Distinctive Environmental Uniform were revealed to the public the following year.

largest naval base. While none of this has to do with flags per se, I remember the era very well, and speculation was rife as to how far the new government was prepared to go with dismantling unification, which had hit the navy particularly hard. Given the atmosphere of the time and the expectations raised by it, the changes to the Naval Jack requested by the Commander of Maritime Command, representing significant pieces of “unfinished business” in the eyes of naval traditionalists, do not appear unreasonable.

Whether seen as perfectly reasonable or a brazen bit of cheek on the part of the admiral, the contents of Wood’s letter met with no challenge at this stage from the Director of Ceremonial (DC), N.A. Buckingham. Apparently not anticipating any possibility of rejection, on 12 December 1984 the DC had drawn up unsigned, undated approval memos intended for the attention of the Chief of Personnel Services and the Assistant Deputy Minister (Personnel), as well as an undated letter of approval to be signed by the CDS.²⁷ Meanwhile, personnel in Halifax were so confident of success that on 13 December a materiel request for new Naval Jacks was approved by the Deputy Commander of Maritime Command, Rear-Admiral F.W. Crickard.²⁸

Perhaps Not So Desirable

The eagerness with which Wood seized upon this opportunity to reassert outward signs of naval identity indicates the extent to which unification was regarded negatively by many within the CAF, particularly the sea element. Indeed, looked at from the viewpoint of today, when strong-service²⁹ traditionalists must surely have the military that they, as a group, had been striving for since

²⁷ N.A. Buckingham, DC (Director of Ceremonial) to CPS (Chief of Personnel Services) with two attachments, 12 December 1984, 1145-0096-1 TD 4347 (DC3), file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

²⁸ Lieutenant (N) R.J. MacQueen, SO OPCOMMCEN (Senior Officer, Operations Communications Centre), Canadian Forces Materiel Authorization Change Request, with attached Annexes A and B, 13 December 1984, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH. It is clear that shore establishments were all going to need an issue of flags; as for ships, the situation was not one of simply switching flags front to back because the jack was normally one size smaller than the ship’s ensign. Moreover, the ensign was available in two sizes – an extra-small one, for use as a boat’s ensign, and an extra-large one – that did not exist for the jack.

²⁹ The term “strong-service” comes from J.P.Y.D. Gosselin, “A 50-Year Tug of War of Concepts at the Crossroads: Unification and the Strong-Service Idea,” in *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives: Context and Concepts*, eds. Allan English, Daniel Gosselin, Howard Coombs, and Lawrence M. Hickey (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/dn-nd/D4-3-1-2005-eng.pdf. The signs of a resurgence of unificationist thinking in the military seen by Gosselin do not appear to have had lasting momentum.



General G.C.E. Thériault, Chief of the Defence Staff, 1983–86. He is wearing the CF Green uniform for general and flag officers. (Department of National Defence)

1968, it may be difficult to credit that anyone of importance in the forces in 1984 could have held a contrary opinion.

Nevertheless, the CDS at the time, General G.C.E. Thériault, was one such person.³⁰ Described as “a strong believer in a unified armed forces,”³¹ Thériault took a very dim view of the proposed new uniforms promised by Mulroney,³² stating in retirement his belief that “by 1984 the Forces enjoyed growing internal cohesion, which healthy trend was arrested, if not reversed, by the government’s ordered introduction of distinctive ‘environmental’ uniforms in what remained in law a unified Force.”³³ Flags of course were not the same as uniforms, which were on their way whether the CDS liked them or not; however, despite the fact

that Wood’s proposals would not even require a new flag, the spirit of what he was requesting could only have been viewed by Thériault as another reversal of “growing internal cohesion” in the unified service.

The first hint of possible pushback against the ideas coming out of Halifax is dated 19 December 1984. A handwritten memo to the CDS, probably penned by his executive assistant (EA), summarizes the contents of Wood’s letter of 23 November. The tone is entirely neutral in the matter, although a mild note of skepticism can be detected when the writer states that “Admiral Wood refers

³⁰ On whom, see Norman Hillmer, “Gérard-Charles-Édouard Thériault,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last edited 15 December 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/gerard-charles-edouard-theriault>.

³¹ Hillmer, “Thériault.”

³² A very interesting anecdote to this effect is related by Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 279n43.

³³ G.C.E. Thériault, “Reflections on Canadian Defence Policy and its Underlying Structural Problems,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (July 1993): 8, https://navymarinearchive.com/research/navies/pdf/theriault_july_1993.pdf.

to the Air Command Flag in his letter as somewhat of a parallel.”³⁴ In reply to the EA, a laconic note added to the bottom of the memo by Thériault states that the CDS “shall await an assessment by D Ceremonial.” In asking for an assessment rather than a reassessment by the DC, it appears that Thériault may not have been aware of Buckingham’s recommendation of concurrence from the previous week.

Whatever the CDS may have heard in response from the DC, by the time work resumed early in the new year Thériault had come to a decision “to permit MARCOM Flag to be flown only on bases – not ships.”³⁵ Given that the Air Command Flag was introduced on his watch, it is no surprise that Thériault approved of the proposal to fly the Naval Jack from shore establishments as the Maritime Command Flag. The more interesting question, which will be examined presently, concerns his refusal to allow the Jack to become what it is today, the Canadian Naval Ensign.

In the meantime, the leadership in Halifax appears to have been none the wiser. As late as 29 January 1985 the Deputy Commander, Crickard, signed a letter to the Windsor branch of the Royal Canadian Naval Association on behalf of Wood which recapitulated the contents of the 23 November letter to the CDS, including the proposal to fly the Jack as an ensign. Expressing appreciation for the concern of the members of the association “in things naval and Maritime Command in particular,” this letter, too, betrays no sense that anything but a positive reply was expected to both components of Wood’s request.³⁶

However much we may marvel at the ability of the people in Ottawa to have kept the news from spreading, it is clear that Wood would have to be told of Thériault’s decision, and soon. To help him draft a suitable reply, the CDS asked for help from the person whose job it was to know a thing or two about military flags.

Document 2: A Handwritten Memo from the Director of Ceremonial to the Executive Assistant to the Chief of the Defence Staff, 8 January 1985

That the most awkward parts of Thériault’s eventual reply to Wood were in fact composed for him by the DC is revealed in the following handwritten

³⁴ Illegible (but probably EA to CDS), handwritten memo under Office of CDS letterhead, n.d. but on or before 19 December 1984, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

³⁵ “MARCOM Flag Action Record,” entry for 3 January 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

³⁶ Vice-Admiral J.C. Wood, Commander Maritime Command to G. Gibb, 29 January 1985, MARC: 1150-9 (COMD), file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

memo from Buckingham to the Executive Assistant to the CDS dated 8 January 1985.³⁷

1. *As it is my perception that the CDS does NOT favour displacing the National Flag as HMC Ships ensign by a flag of any other design, I attach a draft response to Comd [Commander] Marcom which is unequivocally negative.*
2. *However, the draft indicates Cabinet approval will be sought to establish the Naval Jack as the Marcom Flag.*

Having a qualified specialist draft a reply intended to carry the signature of the CDS ought not to be wondered at; as a professional aviator, Thériault would not likely have had the specialized knowledge needed for a detailed refutation of a proposal of this kind. In fact, given the enormous range of responsibilities inhering in the position, a great deal of the correspondence of a CDS must surely be composed in this way. The actual draft by the DC has not been preserved; however, there is every reason to suppose that it would have been carried over verbatim, or near verbatim, in the formal reply from Thériault to Wood. This assumption is supported by the fact that some of the wording of Buckingham's draft approval letter for the CDS from 12 December, which is preserved in the file, appears unchanged below.

Document 3: A Letter from the Chief of the Defence Staff to the Commander of Maritime Command, 5 February 1985

1. I have considered your request that approval be given to a Maritime Command Flag which might be flown in HMC ships as the Ensign, and in bases and stations of the Command, and that the current Naval Jack become that Maritime Command Flag.

2. I concur in your proposal to adopt the Naval Jack as the Maritime Command Flag, and I have directed that a submission be prepared to seek Cabinet approval for the flag to be flown ashore at Maritime Command and Maritime Forces Pacific Headquarters as well as the headquarters of all Maritime Command formations, bases, and stations, including Naval Reserve divisions. As you are no doubt aware, obtaining

³⁷ N.A.B. Buckingham, DC to EA/CDS, 8 January 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

Cabinet approval can be a lengthy and involved process, particularly as no control can be exercised after the submission leaves the Department. Rest assured, however, that every effort will be made in the attempt to obtain a Cabinet decision before May 1985.

3. When the Air Command Flag was approved, the Secretary of State, in writing to the Department, charged the Minister of National Defence to the effect that "you must ensure that the National Flag and the Flag of the Canadian Forces are always given precedence over the Air Command Flag, and that the Air Command Flag is flown only when the other two are also displayed." You can anticipate a similar caveat if and when the Maritime Command Flag is approved.

4. In giving consideration to the proposal that the approved Canadian Naval Jack replace the National Flag as the ensign on HMC ships, I note that according to international convention, the ensign is the principal flag in a warship's suit of colours. It is worn for the purpose of providing national identity on the international scene. The major navies of NATO and the westernized world, including Australia and New Zealand, wear either the national flag as is, or a readily recognizable modified version of it in shape or, in the case of Australia and New Zealand, in colour. In some cases, the flag incorporates a national symbol such as the nation's Coat of Arms, or a traditional symbol with national connotations, such as the St. George's Cross of the Royal Navy.

5. Neither the Naval Coronet nor the anchor and eagle in the Naval Jack symbolize Canada. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to incorporate these devices on HMC ships' ensigns as symbols of the nation on the international stage. Because the nation does not possess a distinctively Canadian symbol which is universally recognizable, other than the maple leaf, the alternative to the proposed ensign would be one with a plain white fly, which would have little significance.

6. 1985 marks the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of the National Flag as the Naval Ensign and it is now recognized as such by the sea-going community world-wide. For this reason, if none other,

it is considered that little advantage would accrue to a change in the current design of HMC ships' ensigns, and so I do not intend to seek Government approval for one.

7. The Director of Ceremonial is presently working on the submission for the Command Flag, and as mentioned above, we will do our best to enable you to consecrate the flag during Battle of the Atlantic weekend.³⁸

Whether Wood would have been pleased or not with the reply he received from Thériault would have depended on the importance he attached to each of the elements of his request, of which there were three. The decision in favour of flying the Maritime Command Flag from establishments ashore could hardly have been in doubt given the precedent set by the Air Command Flag. A refusal, for whatever reason, would have been near on impossible to justify under the circumstances, and therefore this cannot have been a difficult decision for the CDS to make.

That said, Wood's impertinent hint that the CAF Ensign would not have precedence over the new command flag was certainly picked up on, if not by the CDS then certainly by the DC. All of paragraph 3 in Thériault's letter, therefore, is devoted to letting Wood know, in no uncertain terms, that the Maritime Command Flag was not going to receive more favourable treatment than the Air Command Flag with respect to the question of precedence.

The request to fly the Naval Jack as the ship's ensign, easily the most controversial component of Wood's initiative, certainly had a great deal of compelling logic behind it but was ahead of its time. It is undoubtedly for this reason that three full paragraphs of Thériault's reply are devoted to the question. It is here, with phrasing clearly composed by a specialist, that the text of Buckingham's draft "unequivocally negative" response is revealed.

It cannot be said that the specialist has done particularly well here, though, as his logic breaks down in paragraph 5. While it is true that the White Ensigns of Australia and New Zealand, for example, contain symbols of national identity in the fly – as they must, for they are simply national flags with a white background in place of blue – in the case of Canada's Naval Jack the situation is reversed, with national identity proclaimed by the National Flag in the canton. The naval (and air) symbols in the fly of the Jack were never intended to indicate national identity, nor do they need to. By perversely

³⁸ General G.C.E. Thériault to Commander Maritime Command, 5 February 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

insisting on an additional national symbol in the fly, the writer appears to be willfully discounting the fact that the National Flag of Canada, complete and of the correct proportions, is already present in the design.³⁹

The strained reasoning on display here is frankly risible; it did no credit to Thériault and must surely rank as a low point professionally for Buckingham. The CDS would have done better to have simply stated “I do not intend to seek Government approval” (paragraph 6) for the requested change and to have left it at that.⁴⁰ While such a move may have been regarded as professional discourtesy towards Wood, the proffered explanation for the refusal, bordering on the absurd, was arguably just as bad. That said, the fortuitous circumstance of the upcoming 20th anniversary of the National Flag (on 15 February) pointed out in paragraph 6, whoever it may have been that picked up on it, was a rhetorical masterstroke that can only have helped Thériault’s case. Since its introduction, the maple leaf flag had turned out to be very popular among the nation as a whole, and for Maritime Command to take an action that would appear to be “demoting” the National Flag in the latter’s anniversary year



The White Ensigns of Australia (left) and New Zealand (centre) indicate national identity primarily by the different configurations of the constellation of the Southern Cross in the fly. In the case of the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack (right), national identity is provided by the National Flag of Canada in the canton. (All images Wikimedia Commons)

would have looked very bad to an outside observer. In any event, the decision – handed down, as it was, from the Chief of the Defence Staff – was not one that was subject to appeal.

³⁹ Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 279n43 relates that “anecdotally, Gen Thériault considered the Maritime Command flag ‘insufficiently distinctively Canadian’ to qualify for use as an ensign.” The only flag more Canadian than the Jack is the National Flag itself, which is no doubt the conclusion intended by Thériault.

⁴⁰ A better explanation may have been to state that unlike the flagpoles on a base or a display of military flags indoors, the ensign staff can only carry one flag, therefore it is impossible while a warship is underway to display the subordinate position of a command flag with respect to the National Flag and the CAF Ensign. The most conservative approach under those circumstances is to fly the flag with the highest precedence.

“Canadian Naval Jack and Maritime Command Flag”

The following day, 6 February 1985, the DC sent a memo to the Directorate of Procurement and Supply Common User asking to have sufficient flags on hand for the combined Battle of the Atlantic and 75th anniversary commemorations scheduled for 4–5 May of that year.⁴¹ In the memo, he informed his correspondent that “the CDS has approved the renaming of the current ‘Canadian Naval Jack’ to the ‘Canadian Naval Jack and Maritime Command Flag.’”⁴² The name was certainly a mouthful, but it is difficult to see, in the interests of accuracy, how a shorter name could have sufficed. Aboard ship, the flag performed the narrowly circumscribed role of ship’s jack and none other; although of identical design to the Maritime Command Flag, in that time and place that is not what it was. Similarly, on land, when flying from an establishment of Maritime Command, the flag was obviously not functioning in the role of ship’s jack, despite the fact that it looked the same. While perhaps unimaginative, the dual name accurately captured the distinctiveness of the two roles now assigned to the flag.⁴³

Elsewhere, Buckingham notes that because “the proposed Maritime Command Flag is actually a re-naming of the Canadian Naval Jack ... there will be no necessity to go through the normal design approval procedures.”⁴⁴ This was fortunate, because the timeline was now going to be very tight. Had Wood submitted his request a year earlier, there might then have been time, if desired, to create an entirely new command flag, distinct from the Jack, perhaps something with the full Maritime Command badge in the approved command badge frame in the fly. As it was, there were scarcely three months in which to work before Battle of the Atlantic weekend.

⁴¹ It was also recognized that there was no longer a need to have the Jack available in the extra-small and extra-large sizes previously restricted to the ship’s ensign (see above, n28), as revealed in a number of memos of that month cancelling the request; see, for example, MARCOMHQ Halifax to NDHQ Ottawa//DMATA/DC//, Message COMM 095, MACR 50007, 15 February 1985, para. 2, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁴² N.A. Buckingham, DC to distribution list including DPSCU (Directorate of Procurement and Supply Common User) 2-2-3, 6 February 1985, para. 1, 1145-0096 TD 4347 (DC3), file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁴³ The first component of the name often appears in the documentation as “Canadian Forces Naval Jack” or “Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack,” making the full name even more unwieldy. At least one authoritative source has the two components of the name reversed: see Canadian Armed Forces, A-AD-200-000/AG-000, *Flags, Ensigns, Colours, Pennants and Honours, for the Canadian Forces* (DND Canada, 1988), figure 2-3-1, “The Maritime Command Flag and Canadian Forces Naval Jack.”

⁴⁴ N.A. Buckingham, DC to D Mat A (Director Materiel Authorization) 2-2-3, MACR 50007, 30 January 1985, para. 2, 1145-0096-1 TD 4347 (DC), file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

The DC also expressed his belief that “no changes can take place to the scale of issue until Governor in Council’s approval is obtained for the re-naming of the flag and authority is given for the new locations in which it may be flown.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as early as 6 February Buckingham was arranging to have enough flags available, estimated to be a minimum of 53, in time for the observances.⁴⁶ This too was fortunate because, as will be shown below, if no administrative action had begun until Governor in Council approval had been obtained, there would have been no possibility of acquiring anything in time. In the event, even with an item already in the supply system with NATO stock numbers in the needed sizes, the required flags would not be available before 15 April.⁴⁷

“The Same Authority is Required to Extend Use of the Flag to Land Units”

A comprehensive package of documents was prepared over the following weeks in support of the submission to the Governor in Council, in which the cabinet provided advice to the Governor General for approval. Among the more interesting pieces of information in the package, the reason for approval at such a high level is said to be that “as the Naval Jack was approved by Governor-in-Council for flying on ships only, the same authority is required to extend use of the flag to land units as the Maritime Command Flag.”⁴⁸ Although it was stated, once again, that the “Maritime Command Flag will promote environmental identity within the command,”⁴⁹ the caution was given that “it will follow in precedence the Canadian national flag and Canadian Forces ensign,” and, in addition, that it “will not affect the status of the national flag

⁴⁵ Buckingham to D Mat A 2-2-3, 30 January 1985, para. 3. With respect to Governor in Council approval, “orders-in-council are drafted by Cabinet and formally approved by the governor general. Orders-in-council are not discussed by Parliament, and do not require legislation by Parliament, before being implemented”; Eugene A. Forsey, “Order-in-Council,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last edited 4 May 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/order-in-council>.

⁴⁶ Buckingham to DPSCU 2-2-3, 6 February 1985, para. 2, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH. Fifty-three flags would allow no more than one to each of the land establishments of Maritime Command that were to begin flying the new flag.

⁴⁷ N.V. Traversy, DPSCU 2-2-3-5 to DC 3, 11 March 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁴⁸ Captain J.R. Shaftoe, DC 3, briefing note for ADM (Per), 9 April 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁴⁹ Background note to Members of the Privy Council, n.d. but approved as to form and legality by Major “S.S.S.” for Judge Advocate General (JAG), 1 April 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

as the Naval ensign.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the Treasury Board was informed that the initiative would cost the princely sum of \$8,226.00 that fiscal year, surely a point greatly in its favour.⁵¹

The draft order-in-council for the signature of the Governor General, prepared by the Directorate of Ceremonial, was not ready before 17 April 1985, and so a charge of tardiness cannot be fairly attributed to the staff of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General.⁵² The leisurely approach suggested by this late date may be a reflection of the fact that “the Department already [had] authority under the Government Contract Regulations to procure the necessary additional flags,”⁵³ and no problems were experienced in the procurement. Nevertheless, regardless of the number of flags on hand, they could not be legally unveiled without the anticipated approval, and this arrived barely in time.

Document 4: P.C. 1985-1487, 2 May 1985

HER EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL IN COUNCIL,
on the recommendation of the Minister of National
Defence, pursuant to section 12 of the National
Defence Act, is pleased hereby to approve, for use as
the Maritime Command Flag, the Canadian Armed Forces
Naval Jack described as follows:

“A white flag, of the proportions two by length
and one by width, containing in its canton the
National Flag of Canada and, centered on the
fly, a fowl anchor, surmounted by an eagle volant
affrontee with head lowered to the sinister; all
ensigned with a naval crown”.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Captain J.R. Shaftoe, DC to Treasury Board of Canada, n.d. but approved as to form and legality by Major “S.S.S.” for JAG, 1 April 1985, para. 4, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁵¹ Shaftoe to Treasury Board, 1 April 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁵² Problems were encountered with the French version of the order, among which was failure to recognize the need for the subjunctive mood in one of the verbs. Noteworthy, also, is the fact that today’s feminine version of the title, *gouverneure générale*, did not exist; see draft order-in-council, n.d. but approved as to form and legality by Major “S.S.S.” for JAG, 17 April 1985, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁵³ D.B. Dewar, Deputy Minister of National Defence to Gordon F. Osbaldeston, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, n.d., file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH.

⁵⁴ Canada, Privy Council, P.C. 1985-1487, 2 May 1985, 1145-0096-1 TD 4347, file 1145-18, Central Registry fonds, DHH. Surprisingly, this version contains a misspelling of the word “sinister” (silently corrected in the block quotation above), while the numerous draft versions preserved in the file all spelled the word correctly.

The description of the Jack is taken directly from the notice in *The Canada Gazette* when it was first promulgated in 1968,⁵⁵ highlighting once again the fact that Wood's initiative had not asked for a new flag and that had one been needed, there is no likelihood that it would have been available in time for the weekend of 4–5 May 1985.

Postscript

In 2013, after enough political support had finally been received to displace the National Flag of Canada from the ensign staff to the jackstaff of Canada's warships, the Canadian Naval Jack and Maritime Command Flag received another name change, becoming the Canadian Naval Ensign.⁵⁶ It had not, in fact, been the flag of Maritime Command since 2011, when the name of that command had been changed to the Royal Canadian Navy,⁵⁷ but no action was taken at that time to change the official name of the flag. The new, shorter name reflects the fact that although the flag serves as a ship's ensign when afloat, the term *naval ensign* is also intended to encompass the broader role of flying on land from bases, stations, and naval reserve divisions, as was the case with the former White Ensign. Whatever its name, it is surely significant that the flag has now served Maritime Command and the Royal Canadian Navy for a period longer than that of the White Ensign (1911–65). In light of the sustained repudiation of the outward signs and symbols of unification that has been going on for years now in the Canadian Armed Forces, it is in some ways remarkable that the flags of 1968, the CAF Ensign and the renamed Naval Jack, are still with us unchanged.

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⁵⁵ *Canada Gazette* 102, no. 15 (13 April 1968): 892, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=11930>.

⁵⁶ *Canada Gazette* 147, no. 48 (30 November 2013): 2708, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=11930>.

⁵⁷ Canadian Forces Organization Order (CFOO) – Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), 29 August 2011, UIC 9970, 1901-9970 (DDFP 7), CFOO fonds, DHH.