

ON ADVISING THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

It began with a message to call a stranger named Fred Drummie at DND in Ottawa. To judge by the name, he was likely a fellow New Brunswicker. Indeed, he was the assistant to the new defence minister. And, yes, Doug Young would like to have lunch with a select group, most of them old friends. That would be pleasant. But what did Young really want?

Ministers, especially new ones, get a ton of advice, most of it unsolicited. By January 1997, no one needed to tell Doug Young that his new department had problems.

The Deputy Chief of Defence Staff had been fired for padding expense accounts. The army's first woman infantry officer had been tied to a tree and beaten. A naval officer showed that a hunger strike could reverse his demotion. Vague charges of sexual misbehaviour at a mental hospital in the former Yugoslavia had turned out to be largely true — but too late for prosecutions. An enquiry into allegations against Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia had destroyed the careers of a Chief of Defence Staff though he had been half a world away running the Royal Military College when a Canadian corporal supervised the torture and death of Shidane Arone. Captains, corporals and most of the media speculated on how many more generals the Enquiry would get before it was through. A continuing flood of letters poured grievances, allegations and abuse into his in-basket. A magazine called *Esprit de Corps* continued to unveil about a scandal a month, most of them repeated in the *Globe & Mail*.

So no one needed to tell Young that the Canadian Forces had problems about morale, discipline, accountability. What he wanted to know was what to do about them, and a lot faster than the Somalia Inquiry was ever likely to report, even if he refused to give it any more extensions. Could we oblige — preferably before the end of February?

January is not a great time to start a new project. Mid-winter Montreal can be a struggle all by itself. The first post-Christmas stack of essays loomed. So did a pair of conferences, one of which I was hosting. Still, who could refuse? After all, I had grown up as a soldier's son in successive "married patches". The Canadian Forces had been my career for eleven years, and I had affection and admiration for most of those who had endured the frustrations of peacetime soldiering for Canada. For much of my academic career, I had studied and written about the Canadian experience of political-military relations in peace and war. If history had relevance to the current problems of the Canadian Forces, surely I had a contribution to make.

Of course the time was short, and it would have to be squeezed out of an over-stuffed agenda, but Young said he understood. The clinching argument was that I would not be alone. A separate panel, headed by former Chief Justice Brian Dickson, would untangle the complexities of military justice and policing.

Jack Granatstein, David Bercuson and Albert Legault were colleagues I had known and respected for years. We disagreed, sometimes furiously, about a lot of things but not about core fundamentals. We all began with a mixture of knowledge and respect for the institutions we would criticize. Some critics claimed that we know too much. Would ignorance and contempt for the military have been a better foundation? Could a pure-minded neophyte have found time to plough through the cartons of background documents generously provided by DND's policy staff without mystification? Thanks to a certain preoccupation with Canada's military, many of the documents were familiar. All our questions were promptly answered. And we were hunting for answers to policy problems, not for villains or scapegoats.

I had a couple of other advantages. Just as our role was publicised, I fulfilled a long-standing commitment to speak at a major annual conference organized by the Canadian Defence Association, an assembly of most of the branch and service associations. I could explain my task and invite their advice — one side of one piece of paper, please, faxed to my office in Montreal. Ultimately, I collected a couple of hundred replies. Most were terse, tough-minded and persuasive arguments, often from middle-ranking reserve and regular officers. A few were long, predictable rants against unification, bilingualism, other services and a promotion system that had ended careers somewhere well short of the top. I learned a lot from both kinds of messages.

In the fall I had discussed leadership and morale with officers and chief petty officers at Halifax. Because of other prior speaking engagements, I also had a chance to meet groups of regular and reserve officers in Quebec City, Calgary and Toronto. Later, after my report was drafted, I had a chance to test some of its ideas with audiences from Canadian Forces Bases in Gagetown and at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Was I sufficiently briefed? Of course not. There was no time to do more consulting, if I were to respect the timetable and my responsibility to my own daytime work. Like most decision-makers, I acted on imperfect knowledge. Historians should be used to that challenge. If there had been time, I would have especially welcomed more contact with the non-commissioned ranks. Too much of my final report was devoted to officers. Still, with one officer for every five members of the Canadian Forces, officers are the source of most problems and almost all solutions.

The resulting report, submitted on time and without a budget, will have to speak for itself to the tiny minority of specialists who take the trouble to read it. Translated and neatly printed, it appeared in mid-March as part of a thick bundle of supporting documents for Doug Young's hundred-point announcement of change. I think I found my specific views reflected in about five of the Minister's points. I was fully satisfied.

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Some of my proposals - for a much younger, much smaller officer corps, for example, and for service-based personnel policies - were designed more to provoke thought than to be adopted. My belief that RMC should be a centre for the study of war, leadership and military technology, not a tiny university for the Arts, Sciences and Engineering, would have fired up the ex-cadet clubs. My colleagues agreed that all officers, not a small majority, should have degrees, but changing RMC's role was too radical for them or the Minister. And it was his neck, not mine, that would feel exposed. Like my colleagues on the advisory panel, I was grateful

that the Minister had ignored pressure from influential Liberals to create a kind of peace-keeping gendarmerie. If successful policy-making involves ignoring bad advice more often than adopting good ideas, probably the country was better served by the consensus than by my hurried thoughts.

Would I do it again? Of course. Should I? Fortunately that is for others to judge.

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A RARE BIRD ON THE EARTH

On 4-5 October 1997 at the University of Ottawa there will be a conference in honour of Ramsay Cook. There will be sessions on nationalism and the Canada-Quebec question, women's history and intellectual history. Invited participants include: Doug Francis, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Michael Behiels, Mary Vipond, Phyllis Senese and Barry Ferguson. For more information and registration forms contact: Marcel Martel, Department of History, University of Ottawa, Ottawa ON, K1N 6N5; fax: (613) 562-5995.

UN OISEAU RARE EN CE MONDE

Les 4 et 5 octobre 1997 aura lieu à l'Université d'Ottawa une conférence en l'honneur de Ramsay Cook. Les séances porteront sur le nationalisme et la question des relations Canada-Québec, l'histoire de femmes et l'histoire intellectuelle. Parmi les conférenciers, nommons entre autres Doug Francis, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Michael Behiels, Mary Vipond, Phyllis Senese et Barry Ferguson. Pour obtenir plus d'information ou pour se procurer des formulaires d'inscription, veuillez vous adresser à Marcel Martel, Département d'histoire, Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5; télécopieur : (613) 562-5995.

NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES / NOUVELLES DES ARCHIVES

The Canadian Catholic Historical Association (English Section) announces the formation of an Archives Special Interest Group within the CCHA to provide a supportive network for Catholic religious congregational, diocesan and institutional archivists. Archivists caring for Catholic archives are invited to contact either Marc Lerman, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, 1155 Yonge St, Toronto, ON M4T 1W2 or Margaret Sanche, Archivist, St. Thomas More College, 1437 College Dr., Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W6 (sanchem@sask.usask.ca) for more information.

ERRATUM

We apologize for an error in the CHA 76th Annual Conference Programme. On page 6 in the "Acknowledgements" we inadvertently thanked the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for support for joint and thematic sessions. While thanks are owed to the SSHRC for their travel grant, the thanks for the support for the thematic and joint sessions should, of course, have gone to the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada.

Une erreur s'est glissée dans le programme du 76^e congrès annuel de la S.H.C. Dans la partie «Remerciements», à la page 6, nous avons remercié le Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada d'avoir participé à l'organisation de séances conjointes et thématiques. Ces remerciements reviennent en fait à la Fédération canadienne des sciences sociales et des humanités. Le CRSHC doit être plutôt remercié pour l'octroi des subventions de voyage.