



**BILL LANDYMORE:
NAVAL OFFICER**

Admiral made war on unification and went down, guns blazing...

Decorated in wartime after two ships were sunk under him, he rose to the top of the RCN only to defy Ottawa's plan to integrate the military. As a result, he lost his job, but won the hearts of the rank and file.

Two decades after he fought the German and Japanese navies during the Second World War, Rear Admiral Bill Landymore threw himself into the battle of his life when he took on the government of Canada in an epic struggle that transfixed the nation.

In 1965, Rear Adm. Landymore, a fighting sailor who had two ships sunk under him in four months in 1940, chose to deliberately defy Paul Hellyer, the minister of national defence, over the latter's ambitious and controversial plan to unify Canada's three services into a single force wearing a common green uniform.

At stake was the unique identity and soul of Rear Adm. Landymore's beloved Royal Canadian Navy, along with its traditional blue uniform and rank structure. He'd served three years with the Royal Navy before the war, and believed passionately in the RCN's British heritage.

As the head of the post-integration Maritime Command and Commander Canadian Atlantic Sub-Area, he was in an extremely difficult position. Theoretically, he had no choice but to follow the elected government's orders. If he didn't agree with Mr. Hellyer's plans, he could resign.

But Rear Adm. Landymore felt he had a strong moral duty to oppose unification, which split opinion in the armed forces and across the country. "If I didn't speak out, who would?" he said. At a senior officer's briefing in Ottawa in November, 1964, he told Mr. Hellyer that he couldn't accept a plan that meant demolishing the navy. "In his professional opinion, economy and proper command and control could be achieved by integration alone," wrote Tony German in his 1990 book *The Sea is at Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy*. "Unification was unnecessary and highly unpalatable to the vast majority, he said - and Landymore knew his people."

It was a solid shot across Mr. Hellyer's bow from an officer described as a "tough-minded, tireless professional and a first-rate leader." Now, with the navy facing institutional chaos, shrinking budgets, recruitment falling by 40 per cent and suffering an acute identity crisis, Rear Adm. Landymore was determined to restore morale to the fleet and fight for the RCN's very soul.

To organize opposition against Mr. Hellyer, he convened a series of meetings of high-ranking officers in Halifax during the summer of 1965. Among other things, he wanted to make sure his officers would not ask to be retired. "Of 367 officers at the meetings, three didn't fully agree. Landymore reported what he'd done and the views of his officers to the chief of personnel," wrote Mr. German.

Shocked that Rear Adm. Landymore would oppose him in such a public manner, which seemed disloyal in the extreme, Mr. Hellyer considered disciplining him or firing him. Problem was, that would have meant sacking a second top operational commander in less than a year.

In fact, Mr. Hellyer displayed a grudging respect for his opponent in his 1990 autobiography, *Damn the Torpedoes: My Fight to Unify Canada's Armed Forces*. "To his credit, and unlike some of the others, he took me seriously and worked out a strategy not unlike a political campaign. He made frequent visits 'below decks' to ingratiate himself with the sailors. He volunteered to act as their agent in redressing grievances. He would be their champion."

Known as a sailor's sailor, Rear Adm. Landymore was "popular, admired by all ranks, and is remembered as being a forthright, four-square, hands-on commander and staff officer," wrote Robert Caldwell in the 2006 book *The Admirals: Canada's Senior Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century*.

On April 11, 1966, the undeclared war between minister and admiral reached a new low when *The Globe and Mail* quoted an unnamed DND spokesman who said, "naval officers still retain to some extent an above-decks, below-decks mentality ... Sailors just don't scrub decks now, they're skilled men and the old attitudes of officers just doesn't fit. We're trying to change that."

Considered a gratuitous and unfounded attack, the remark was thought by many to have come from Mr. Hellyer's special assistant, former RCAF wing commander Bill (Leaky) Lee. Rear Adm. Landymore was incandescent with rage and demanded a denial or public apology. He was ignored. Suddenly, it seemed to him as though it was open season on admirals.

Two months later, Rear Adm. Landymore was scheduled to testify on naval matters to Parliament's standing committee on defence. Following protocol, he submitted his remarks to Mr. Hellyer the day before. The next day he discovered that his brief on personnel issues, which had outlined serious morale problems because of unification, had been changed.

"Hellyer claims Landymore made no protest about the changes as they made their way to the committee meeting," wrote Marc Milner in his 1999 book *Canada's Navy: The First Century*. "As it turned out, the minister's office had wanted a more positive spin on the situation than the tone contained in Landymore's original report. Later, one of Hellyer's staff took responsibility for altering the report." Believing he had no choice but to obey his minister, Rear Adm. Landymore "choked down his disgust and delivered the report as changed. Hellyer had effectively stopped expert evidence key to the defence of Canada from being heard," Mr. German wrote.

The Globe and Mail

The final showdown occurred on July 12, 1966. Mr. Hellyer asked for his resignation. Rear Adm. Landymore refused to give it to him. He preferred to be sacked.

"There was no alternative but to fire Landymore," wrote Mr. Hellyer. "He didn't seem too surprised when he heard the verdict."

Depressed and discouraged, he had just one more card to play. He asked a retired RCN officer, Liberal MP David Gross, to set up a meeting with prime minister Lester Pearson. The following day, Rear Adm. Landymore went up to Parliament Hill and met with Mr. Hellyer's boss.

Mr. Pearson said he "fully supported" integration but didn't know how far Mr. Hellyer would go in the process. He promised the government would not interfere with naval traditions.

"Landymore felt a final sense of betrayal," Mr. Milner wrote. "It was some time later that Pearson confided to Landymore: 'If one more admiral had resigned I was going to tell Hellyer to stop unification.' None did, and Pearson failed to protect the traditions that Landymore and others held dear. 'I believed the Prime Minister of Canada was an honest, thoroughly sincere man,' Landymore concluded years later. But he wasn't."

Back in Halifax, Rear Adm. Landymore decided to go public about his dismissal, which made front-page headlines across Canada. The publicity created an enormous controversy. "By late July, Landymore's name was a household word," Mr. Caldwell wrote. "Open warfare was conducted between opponents of unification and the government. Critics of unification seemed to be galvanized ... Hundreds of letters and telegrams were sent to the prime minister, the minister and members of Parliament. The debate on Bill C-243, the unification bill, became a highly sensational and contentious issue."

It was arguably the most controversial defence issue in Canadian history and Rear Adm. Landymore, who at 50 could have served five more years, had gone down guns blazing in the best naval tradition. In two

years, the RCN's six senior admirals had been retired prematurely or fired. Generals and air marshals had also left.

Confident he had followed his conscience and done the right thing, Rear Adm. Landymore prepared to haul down his flag. First, though, his sailors paid their admiral a heartfelt tribute by giving him an emotional farewell.

Exactly a week after he was fired, personnel turned out in strength at the dockyard in Halifax. "Ship's sides and roadways were lined with cheering sailors and civilian employees," Mr. German wrote. "Every ship in harbour flew signal flags spelling Landymore's name; above them flew flags BZ: Bravo Zulu: 'Well done, Landymore.' There was nothing else to say."

Seven months later, on Feb. 23, 1967, Mr. Hellyer couldn't resist one final salvo when he told a parliamentary defence committee that Rear Adm. Landymore was fired for "18 months of consistent disloyalty to the people he was paid to serve."

Disgusted by that spurious charge, Rear Adm. Landymore gave his version. Four days later, Mr. Hellyer was forced to retract his statement but had the last laugh when the government rammed the unification bill through on Apr. 25, 1967, and the RCN passed into history.

Raised in Brantford, Ont., he was the only son of Frederick and Gladys Landymore, and graduated from Brantford Collegiate Institute before attending the Royal Military College in Kingston.

In 1934, he matriculated as a gentleman cadet, and two years later was commissioned as an acting sub-lieutenant in a tiny RCN that had no immediate need for his services. Instead, he was sent to the Royal Navy to serve on three cruisers before the war started on Sept. 1, 1939.

By March, 1940, he was a torpedo and communications officer aboard HMCS Fraser, a River-class destroyer. Three months later, he survived his first sinking when his ship collided with the British cruiser HMS Calcutta. Sent to HMCS Margaree some months later, he survived the loss of that ship when it collided with a merchant vessel in October, 1940. Clearly, Rear Adm. Landymore was quickly using up his nine lives.

He served in various staff appointments before his appointment to HMCS Uganda as gunnery officer in 1944, where he later witnessed the majority of the ship's company voting themselves out of the final months of the war in the Pacific. That service won him a mention-in-despatches (MID).

After the war, his first notable appointment occurred in 1951 when he was made captain of HMCS Iroquois. He commanded the destroyer during two tours of duty during the Korean War. He received a second MID and was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

In 1958, he was given a plum appointment when he was made captain of HMCS Bonaventure. The 16,000-ton carrier flew McDonnell Banshee jet fighters and Grumman Tracker anti-submarine aircraft in support of NATO operations in the Atlantic.

During his command, he pioneered the idea of sustained operations, keeping aircraft airborne around the clock. "If the carrier and its aircrew could not do that, he reasoned, the viability of naval aviation could be threatened," wrote Mr. Caldwell. He left the "Bonnie" in September, 1959, and three years later was promoted rear admiral.

On Nov. 16, 1964, he took over the East Coast fleet from Rear Adm. Jeffry Brock, who had been fired by Mr. Hellyer three months earlier. Thus, he became de facto head of the navy, since the position of chief of naval staff had been abolished in August of that year.

During his retirement, Rear Adm. Landymore performed charity work and served as chairman of the board of Halifax's Grace Hospital. He never spoke about unification and what it had cost him, preferring to stay

silent in the tradition of the "silent service."
BUZZ BOURDON Special to the Globe and Mail
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