

2023

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FEATURE

Tria Juncta in Uno

Early Draft Versions of Canadian Armed Forces Senior Officer Flags and Pennants

BRIAN BERTOSA

Abstract: Distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers are a feature of many of the world's militaries and the armed forces of Canada are no exception. With unification in 1968 came the need to harmonise the disparate patterns employed by the former Navy, Army and Air Force. The priority of the new designs was to assert unification and national identity. The approval process was lengthy, with setbacks, and not all of the proposed designs saw the light of day. Nevertheless, with only minor changes, the original draft versions have proven remarkably successful over the succeeding decades.

DISTINGUISHING FLAGS and pennants are intended to indicate the rank or status of an individual in the armed services. Sometimes referred to as rank flags, they are flown to indicate the actual presence of the person at an establishment or in a ship, boat, vehicle or aircraft.¹ They are normally intended only for senior officers; however, the lowest rank entitled to a flag can vary depending on the service.

¹ Alistair B. Fraser, "The Flags of National Defence," in *The Flags of Canada* (1998), accessed 10 January 2023, <http://fraser.cc/FlagsCan/Nation/NatDefence.html>; and Canadian Armed Forces, A-AD-200-000/AG-000, *The Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1999), 14-3-1, last modified 2 December 2021, <http://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/heritage-manual/chapter-14/section-3.html>.

Prior to the unification of Canada's three armed services to form the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 1968,² the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) each employed a very distinctive set of distinguishing flags and pennants with little commonality between them. With unification on the horizon, steps were taken in 1966 and 1967 to create an entirely new system for the soon-to-be single service. In addition to the traditional functions of identifying rank and branch of service, the new designs were meant to assert both the fact of unification and, perhaps most important of all, unambiguous national identity.

The focus of this paper will be on these early designs as well as the discussion surrounding them preserved in the available documentation. Given what the new flags and pennants were intended to do, they represent a fascinating blend of continuity and innovation. In addition, a look back at the patterns that preceded them will provide necessary context, while a postscript, looking at the distinguishing flags and pennants in use today, will show that not all of the proposed designs went on to see the light of day.

DISTINGUISHING FLAGS AND PENNANTS BEFORE UNIFICATION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

The RCN was far and away the most conservative of the three services; "conservative" in this context referring to a tendency to stick closely to the British model. It was so close, in fact, that the British government publication from which the illustrations in this section are drawn, *Flags of All Nations* (1958),³ refers the reader to the United Kingdom section for the distinguishing flags and pennants of Canadian naval officers (Figure 1). There can obviously then be no question of Canadian symbolism on these flags, with only the English cross of St. George giving any indication as to nationality.

² On unification, a good starting point is John Boileau, "Unification of the Canadian Armed Forces," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified 11 November 2021, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/unification-of-the-canadian-armed-forces>.

³ Great Britain, BR 20 (2), *Flags of All Nations*, Vol. 2 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1958).

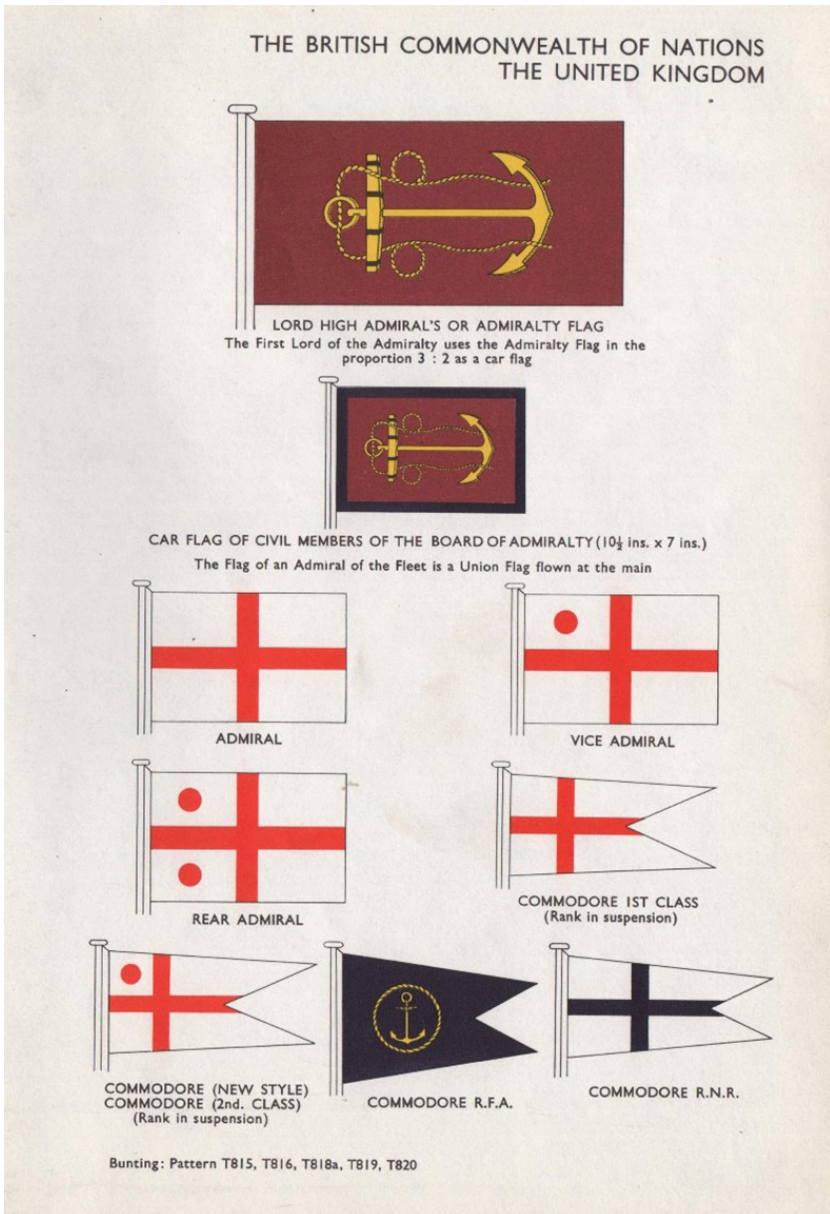


Figure 1. Distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1958. Shown are the British versions, which, for the rank flags, were identical. ["Flags of all Nations BR20 (2)," London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Photo via Alamy]

The rectangular distinguishing flag used by an admiral, a vice-admiral or a rear-admiral was referred to as a “flag,”⁴ hence the term “flag officer.” The tapered swallowtail used by a commodore, on the other hand, was called a “broad pennant.”⁵ The Navy did not have a distinguishing pennant for officers of the rank of captain or below, although the ship’s commissioning pennant could be said to perform that function for officers, of whatever rank, commanding a warship in commission.⁶

CANADIAN ARMY

As in the case of the Navy, distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers of the Canadian Army were based closely on those used by the British. Unlike their naval counterparts, however, the British Army flags made provision for their defacement with the insignia of the formation commanded by the officer in question.⁷ In Canadian use, this allowed ample scope for the addition of distinctive national symbolism, much of which, not surprisingly, consisted of the maple leaf.⁸

The Chief of the General Staff would have been a lieutenant-general, as would a corps commander; these officers were distinguished by a rectangular flag. Major-generals were entitled to a swallowtail while brigadiers and colonels had a triangular pennant (Figure 2).

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

The distinguishing flags of the RCAF differed considerably from those of the Navy and the Army by dispensing with the use of shape as a means of indicating rank. All senior officers had a rectangular flag of the same dimensions. Rank was indicated by a series of red bars at the hoist precisely analogous to the sleeve rings on the RCAF officers’

⁴ Royal Canadian Navy, *The Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Navy*, Vol. 1: *Administrative* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1952), 62.19 (2).

⁵ Royal Canadian Navy, *Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the RCN*, 62.19 (3).

⁶ Royal Canadian Navy, *Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the RCN*, 62.22.

⁷ Fraser, “Flags of National Defence.”

⁸ Colin MacGregor Stevens, “WWII and Post-War Canadian Senior Officers’ Flags, Pennants, Swallowtails and Licence Plates,” *MilArt*, 2 November 2013, accessed 11 January 2023, <http://milart.blog/2013/11/02/wwii-and-post-war-canadian-senior-officers-flags-pennants-swallowtails-and-licence-plates/>.

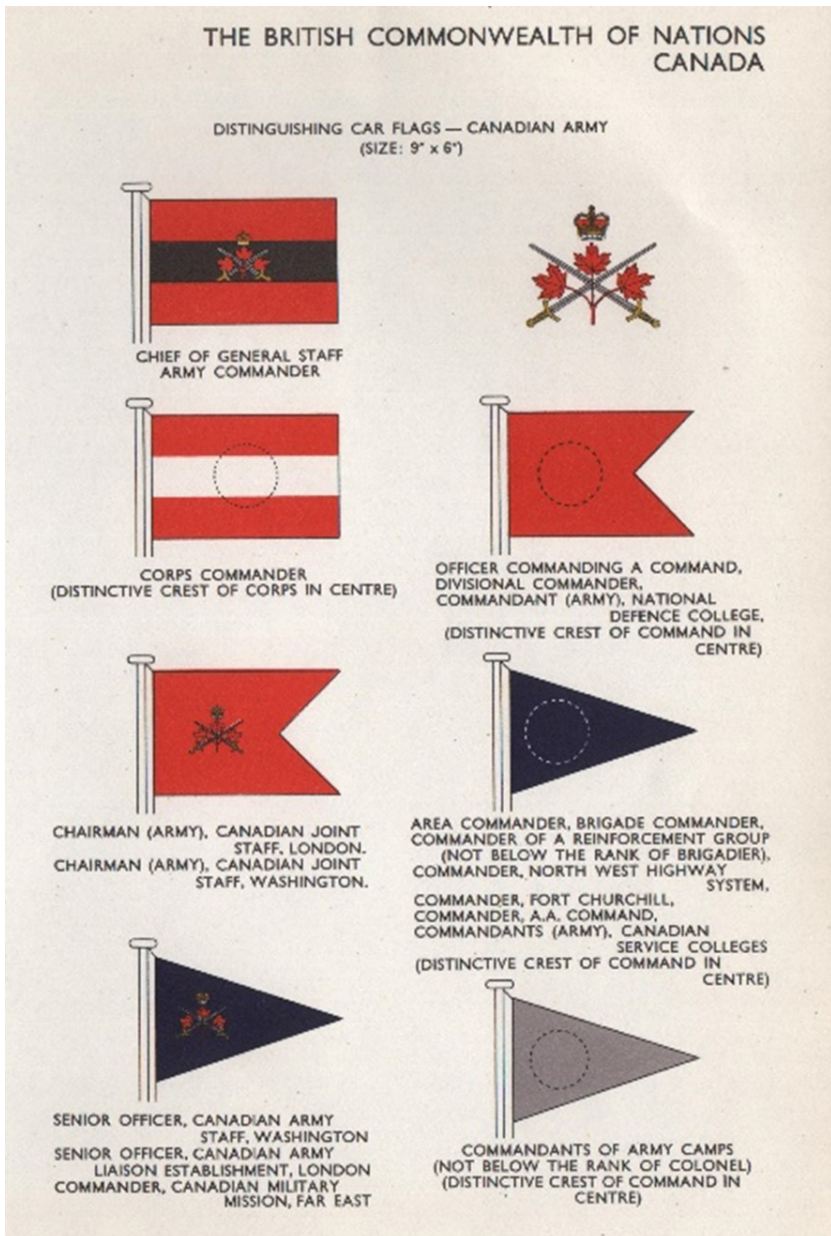


Figure 2. Distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers of the Canadian Army, 1958. ["Flags of all Nations BR20 (2)," London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Photo via Alamy]

uniform. The roundel, derived from the RCAF Ensign adopted in 1940, provided unambiguous national identity (Figure 3).⁹

It should be noted that the distinguishing flag of the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) was in fact the RCAF Ensign, a privilege accorded him as professional head of that organisation. His actual rank was Air Marshal. When the RCAF Ensign was replaced by the new National Flag of Canada on 15 February 1965, the use of the former as a distinguishing flag for the CAS ceased.

The advent of the maple leaf flag did not, in itself, provide the impetus for the creation of new senior officer flags and pennants for any of the three services. Upon its introduction, the new flag replaced the Canadian Blue Ensign (used as a jack) and White Ensign in use with the Navy,¹⁰ the Union Jack and Canadian Red Ensign used by the Army (which, like the British Army, did not have a service-specific ensign of its own) and the RCAF Ensign.¹¹ None of the flags that did not contain a Union Jack posed any lingering challenge to the new symbolic order, hence the existing distinguishing flags and pennants could continue in service with the three services as before—until, that is, the three services themselves, as independent legal entities, ceased to exist.

NEW FLAGS FOR A NEW SERVICE

THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES ENSIGN

The replacement of the separate service ensigns by the National Flag of Canada was not carried out with a possible future unification of the armed forces in mind. Nevertheless, it imposed an unprecedented degree of uniformity upon the flag poles, jack staffs and ensign staffs of the nation's military forces. So much so that, before the new flag even entered service, consideration was already being given at Cabinet level to the desirability of a new ensign, "to be patterned

⁹ Fraser, "Flags of National Defence."

¹⁰ Norman Jolin, "The Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 23, 3 (2013): 269-70.

¹¹ Fraser, "Flags of National Defence."

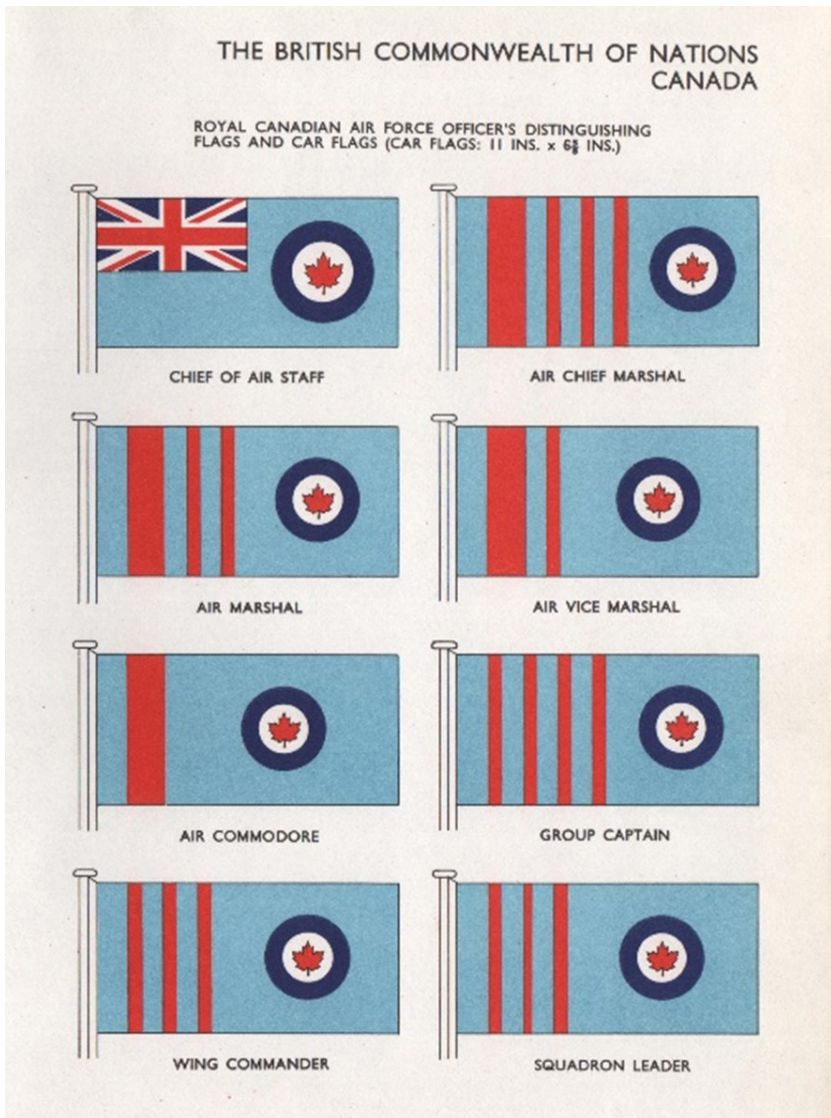


Figure 3. Distinguishing flags for senior officers of the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1958. The use of the RCAF Ensign as a distinguishing flag for the Chief of the Air Staff was discontinued as of February 1965. ["Flags of all Nations BR20 (2)," London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Photo via Alamy]



Figure 4. Draft Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, 1966. Identical to the one in use today, it is also the distinguishing flag for the Chief of the Defence Staff. [Illustration accompanying J. V. Allard to the Minister, Canadian Forces Flags, Ensigns and Pennants, 13 March 1967, P 1810-11 (DGA) P 1145-4, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence]

on the new Canadian flag,” to represent all three services.¹² As of May 1965, though, it was felt within the military that integration and unification had not yet progressed to the point where a general consensus existed in favour of a new ensign.¹³

By October 1966, the situation had changed. On the 12th of that month, a set of draft designs for a new version of “Ensign and Pennants” was shown to the Armed Forces Council.¹⁴ Intended to embody the “new look” of the new service, the package consisted of a draft ensign, naval jack, ship’s commissioning pennant and distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers.¹⁵ The Council’s

¹² Record of Cabinet Decision, Meeting of December 23rd, 1964, The Flag, para. (f), Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence (hereinafter DHH).

¹³ G. F. Jacobsen to CP [Chief of Personnel], Ensign – Tri-Service, 6 May 1965, paras. 2-3, P 1145-2 TD 5012 (DC), DHH.

¹⁴ E. M. Reyno to CDS [Chief of the Defence Staff], Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants, 13 January 1967, para. 5, P 1810-11 (DGA) TD 6361, DHH.

¹⁵ Memorandum to Defence Council from Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, para. 1, P 1810-11 (DGA), DHH. On the naval jack, see Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 276-79 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 (2022): 545-74. On the commissioning pennant, Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 279.

preferred choice for a new Canadian Armed Forces Ensign (Figure 4) was unanimous.¹⁶

The importance of the CAF Ensign in relation to the distinguishing flags and pennants for the purposes of this paper was twofold. Firstly, possibly inspired by the use of the RCAF Ensign as the distinguishing flag for the Chief of the Air Staff, it was decided that the CAF Ensign would fulfill the same role for the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS),¹⁷ a position held by a general.¹⁸ In addition, the basic design of the Ensign was intended to form the basis of a “family” of similar flags for the Canadian military,¹⁹ asserting what would be referred to nowadays as “corporate identity.” This is readily apparent in the design of the proposed distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers.

NEW DISTINGUISHING FLAGS AND PENNANTS

By far the boldest, most ambitious graphic to come out of the 12 October meeting of the Armed Forces Council, Figure 5 depicts the earliest attempt to create a unified set of distinguishing flags and pennants for Canadian officers. These designs, too, are said to have been the Council’s unanimous preference.²⁰ A large amount of information is assembled in that image and the several characteristics of the patterns on display will be examined one by one.

To begin, the uniform white colour of all of these flags is certainly a distinctive feature. While it may be thought that the choice of this colour was intended as a nod to the Navy, it was in fact the combination of a white background and the red cross of St. George that was the distinctive colourway of the White Ensign, the ship’s commissioning

¹⁶ Memorandum to Defence Council from CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, para. 5. None of the illustrations of the “also-rans” from that meeting are known to survive. A number of potential patterns for the Ensign were in circulation as early as April 1965: Jacobsen to CP, Ensign – Tri-Service, 6 May 1965, para. 1.

¹⁷ Reyno to CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 13 January 1967, para. 3; and Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, 14-3-7.

¹⁸ For the unification period, only Army ranks will be provided here to agree with the ranks given in Figure 5. The equivalent naval rank can be assumed when the holder is from that branch of the service. Traditional Air Force ranks were abolished at unification in favour of Army titles. For rank equivalencies, see the Appendix.

¹⁹ Memorandum to Defence Council from CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, paras. 4-5.

²⁰ Memorandum to Defence Council from CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, para. 5.

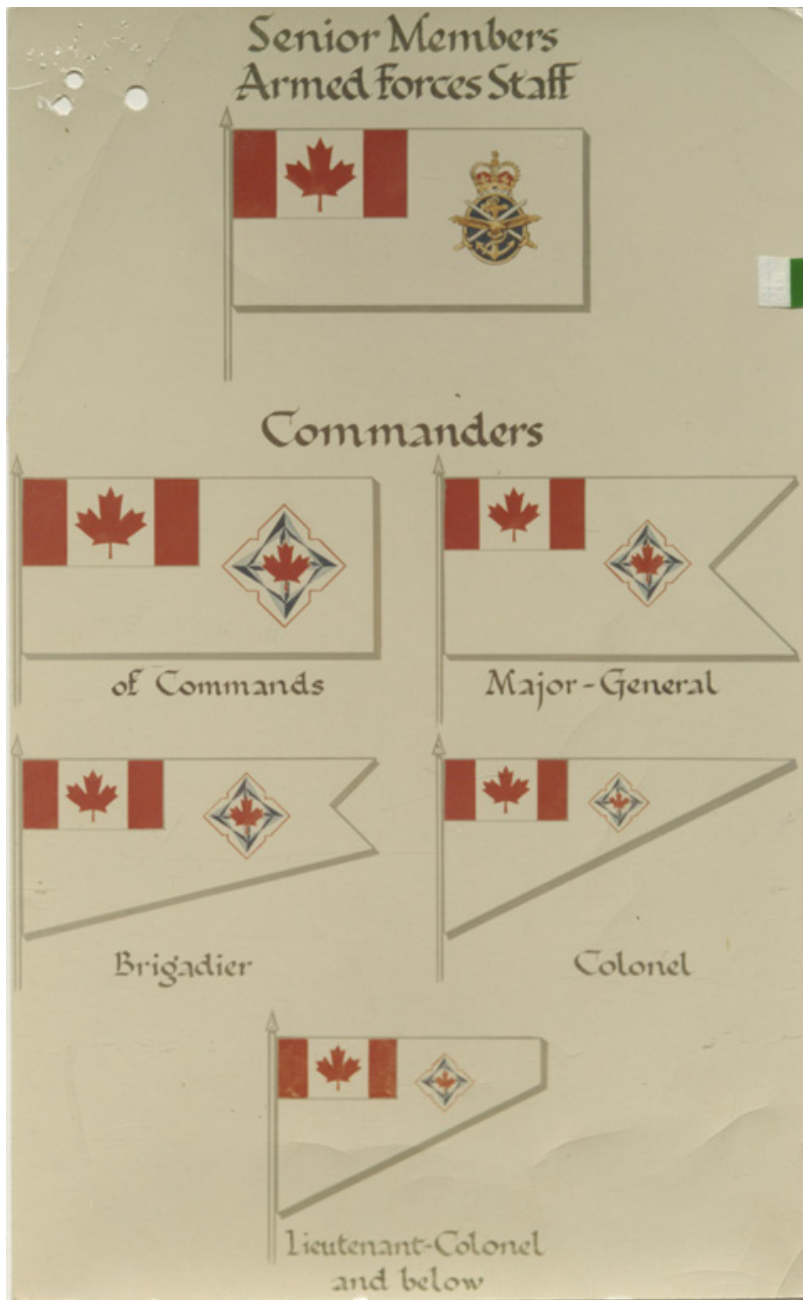


Figure 5. Proposed distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers, Canadian Armed Forces, 1966. [Illustration accompanying J. V. Allard to the Minister, Canadian Forces Flags, Ensigns and Pennants, 13 March 1967, P 1810-11 (DGA) P 1145-4, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence]

pennant and the Navy's distinguishing flags and pennant. White by itself was not associated with any military service and, in the context of unification, that was precisely the point. Traditional military heraldry assigns the colour dark blue to the Navy, scarlet to the Army and light blue to the Air Force.²¹ Given that, in the projected single service, these three entities would literally cease to exist as legal constructs, the three colours representing them also had to be discontinued in contexts that would otherwise be seen as asserting the identity of one of the former services. Red, for example, was fine as the colour of the leaves on the tri-service Canadian Armed Forces emblem²² (in the fly in Figure 4), but not of an entire flag: that would imply the existence of a separate Army, which was no longer the case.²³ White was the choice because it was “none of the above.”

Following closely the direction that they all be based upon the CAF Ensign, each of these flags contains the full National Flag of Canada in the canton. Unfortunately, the resultant requirement to keep the top edge parallel to the ground created some cramped, ungainly designs. This was necessary, though, because rank in this scheme is designated by shape. It is not entirely consistent, however. “Senior Members Armed Forces Staff” held the rank of lieutenant-general, but so did some commanders of commands; other commands were headed by a major-general. “Lieutenant-Colonel and below” ought really to be “Lieutenant-Colonel and Major” because there was no intention of providing distinguishing flags to junior officers. The fact that there is no separate pennant for a major suggests that the designer may have run out of ideas for another distinctive shape that

²¹ See, for example, Canadian Armed Forces, A-DH-265-000/AG-001, *Canadian Forces Dress Instructions*, 1 February 2017, 1-16, s.v. “Environmental Colours,” last modified 17 August 2022, <http://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/dress-manual/chapter-1.html>.

²² The fairly straightforward, uncomplicated development of the Canadian Armed Forces badge is described in Brittany Dunn, “Summary of the Evolution and Policy of the Badges of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force,” (unpublished manuscript, December 2013, DHH), 11-15.

²³ Similarly, the example of the British joint services flags, divided equally into dark blue, red and light blue bands, would not have been suitable because in that case the colours represent services that, although working together, remain separate legal entities. Unification was something entirely different. See H. Gresham Carr, *Flags of the World*, rev. ed. (London: Frederick Warne, 1961), 133. For colour illustrations of the British flags in question, see “United Kingdom: Ministry of Defence,” *Flags of the World*, last modified 5 February 2022, <http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/gb-def.html>.

kept the top edge horizontal; merely lopping off the end of the Colonel pennant already looks like a bit of a desperate measure.

The badge in the fly of the flag for senior members of armed forces staff was the Canadian Armed Forces badge without the wreath of maple leaves, indicating their subordinate position to the Chief of the Defence Staff. The flag for a commander of a command would contain the badge of the command in question. Shown in Figure 5 is the badge of Mobile Command (roughly equivalent to the former Army). It is copied across the remaining flags merely as an example of the placement of a device on each of them, if used.

In the main, the system is a modification of that used by the Army, in which the flags indicated both rank and position or appointment. Naval influence appears in the use of a (semi-)tapered swallowtail for the rank of brigadier. The Air Force practice of extending the privilege of a distinguishing flag to wing commanders and squadron leaders was maintained (For rank equivalencies, see the Appendix). The approach taken here was therefore an inclusive one, with none of the former services entirely left out.

A LONG ROAD TO APPROVAL

With respect to the proposed new distinguishing flags and pennants, selection of a set of designs by the Armed Forces Council constituted an essential first step. At this early stage, though, only one other level of approval, by the Defence Council, was thought to be needed.²⁴ As it turned out, the actual sequence of events would prove to be much more complicated.

DEFENCE COUNCIL – FIRST MEETING

A memorandum to the Defence Council from the CDS on 23 December 1966 is a very early reference to the new flags and pennants. It is stated there that

- a. requirement exists for a common series of distinguishing flags and pennants for Commanders and other senior officers, which will be flown, as appropriate, at military bases, establishments and units

²⁴ Reyno to CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 13 January 1967, para. 3.

and on warships, military vehicles and aircraft. In keeping with the intent and purpose of the Canadian ensign, the design of the proposed distinguishing flags and pennants should be based on the Forces Ensign. The Ensign itself would be the personal flag of the CDS.²⁵

The file “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants” was ready for discussion at the Defence Council meeting of 1 May 1967. The bulk of the discussion on the proposed distinguishing flags took place that day and is quoted here:

8. Turning then to the proposed pennants for senior officers, the Minister [of National Defence, the Honourable Paul T. Hellyer] mentioned that the various sizes and shapes did not particularly appeal to him. He said that he would like to see a set of pennants prepared based on a standard size, with the National flag in the canton, and the ranks and perhaps commands distinguished by symbols somewhere in the fly. A/C [Air Commodore] Weston said that this approach had been tried but that the pennants appeared to be cluttered and were not attractive. He agreed to arrange for the Minister to see the other variations that had been developed and discarded.

9. In the design of the senior officer pennants, the Minister asked whether it was more important to meet the traditions of the Armed Forces rather than to provide for ready recognition by the public. The CDS replied that the former was the primary consideration. It was necessary for the Forces themselves to recognize senior officers and it was part of the training of servicemen to be able to readily identify by their pennants senior officers who they may encounter. Agreeing, A/C Weston said that it was very difficult to design a set of pennants, the significance of which the public could easily grasp.

- [...]

11. After further discussion, the Minister deferred a decision on the proposals in the CDS memorandum of 13 March, 1967, and stated

²⁵ Memorandum to Defence Council from CDS, Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, para. 4.

that the recommendations would eventually have to be submitted to the Cabinet [...]

12. The Minister also requested additional information on alternate designs of pennants for senior officers of the Canadian Forces.
13. After there has been an opportunity to study this additional material the Minister said that he intended to include the item again on a forthcoming Defence Council agenda.²⁶

A surprising outcome of the meeting was the decision of the Minister of National Defence, contrary to prior expectations, that the proposed distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers would require approval by Cabinet. No reason for this was provided, however.

The first paragraph is perhaps the most interesting. Regrettably, there are no surviving copies of the drafts shown to the Minister, therefore it is unclear what the preferences of the Armed Forces Council may have looked like. For his part, the Minister expressed a preference for designs based on a standard size, with the National Flag in the canton and bearing rank and/or formation insignia in the fly. This, however, was a close description of the flags and pennants in Figure 5, which contains many patterns forming the basis of the ones in use today. The most likely explanation for this is that the drawing depicting the Armed Forces Council's original preference was subsequently removed from the file, with Figure 5 inserted in its place, because it is the only drawing of senior officer flags and pennants in the file.

A summary of the decisions taken at the meeting, prepared two days later, stated laconically—but perhaps instructively—that the Minister “expressed the view that a simpler system of senior officers pennants might be desirable.”²⁷ This view would eventually prevail.

²⁶ Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, held in the Minister's Conference Room at 0930 hours on Monday, 1 May, 1967, paras. 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

²⁷ M. J. Kealy to DGA [Director General of Administration], Extract of Summary Record of Decisions – Defence Council Meetings, 3 May 1967, para. 2, P 1810-11 (SEC CP-2), DHH.

DEFENCE COUNCIL – SECOND MEETING

In accordance with the Minister's direction, a draft memorandum to Cabinet entitled "Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces" was ready by 1 June 1967. In it, the rationale for sending the distinguishing flags and pennants to Cabinet for approval becomes clearer, although not explained outright. The reasoning was that "since the entire family of flags and pennants being proposed are based on the Ensign, it is suggested that only the Ensign requires Governor-in-Council approval";²⁸ that is to say, the approval of the governor general acting on the advice of Cabinet. To provide for distinguishing flags and pennants, approval was being sought from Cabinet for "modification of the Ensign."²⁹ Why such approval was thought to be necessary was not stated, but the implication seems to be that, given the high level of authorisation foreseen to be needed for the Ensign, the Minister was disinclined to take personal responsibility for any changes to it—that should be decided by the entire Cabinet. It must be kept in mind that all of the proposed designs contained the new National Flag of Canada, which had only been approved two years previously over a great deal of emotional opposition.³⁰ Moreover, the acknowledged "father" of that flag, Lester B. Pearson, still presided over Cabinet as Prime Minister. Under the circumstances, given the number of new flags and pennants projected to be flying with the maple leaf flag in the canton, it was probably felt best to play it safe.

A memorandum to the Defence Council of the same date makes clear that what was being sought was "the Cabinet's approval in principle of these modified ensigns,"³¹ meaning that, rather than being expected to approve each and every flag drawn up by the military that happened to be based on the Ensign, Cabinet would approve the

²⁸ Minister of National Defence, Memorandum to the Cabinet (Draft), Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces, 1 June 1967, para. 9, DHH.

²⁹ Memorandum to Cabinet (Draft), Distinctive Flags, 1 June 1967, para. 10 b (2).

³⁰ For a quick overview, see Andrew McIntosh, "The Great Flag Debate," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified 11 December 2019, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/flag-debate>.

³¹ Memorandum to the Defence Council from the Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, Flags and Pennants, 1 June 1967, para. 7 c, P 1810-11 (DGPS), DHH.

practice of modifying the Ensign, with the military left alone to do the job as and when required.

In a set of brief introductory remarks prepared for the next—and, as it would turn out, last—meeting of the Defence Council to have “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants” on the agenda, it was noted that “several design proposals for personal and rank flags and pennants were prepared for the Minister to consider.” The hope was expressed that “it will be possible to reach a decision at this meeting on the designs to be adopted.”³²

But it was not to be. The minutes of the Defence Council meeting of 5 June 1967 show that the bulk of the discussion on this file that day consisted of a rather testy exchange between the Minister and some of the officers present over an attempt to insert an entirely new class of flags into the program.

Briefly, the new unified service was to be divided into a number of functional commands, some of which—for example, Maritime Command, Mobile Command, Air Defence Command and Air Transport Command—mapped reasonably closely onto the former Navy, Army and Air Force.³³ Included in the draft memorandum to Cabinet was a detailed justification urging the introduction of flags to identify these various commands.³⁴ Flags such as these, however, formed no part of the original package of “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants” nor was there any hint of them mentioned at the Defence Council meeting of 1 May. In fact, the Minister had reiterated on that occasion his belief that “there should be but one Canadian Forces ensign to serve all the requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces.”³⁵

Not surprisingly, this bid to perform what can only be described as an end run around the Minister was firmly quashed, with

³² R. C. Weston to CP, Introductory Remarks – Defence Council 5 Jun 67, Flags and Pennants, 2 June 1967, para. 4, P 1810-11 (DGPS), DHH.

³³ “Unification of the Canadian Armed Forces,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

³⁴ Memorandum to Cabinet (Draft), Distinctive Flags, 1 June 1967, para. 6; see also para. 10 b (1).

³⁵ Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, 1 May 1967, para. 4. Flags to identify the functional commands of the Canadian Armed Forces did eventually appear and, as the Minister no doubt feared, they paved the way for the introduction of Canadianised versions of the old service ensigns—although they are not called that. There is still only one Ensign for use on land; see Canadian Armed Forces, “Canadian Forces Camp and Branch Flags,” last modified 2 June 2021, <http://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/flags.html>.

instructions to remove the unauthorised material on command flags from the draft memorandum to Cabinet.³⁶ Once that was ready, the document was sent to Cabinet.³⁷ The plan to seek “agreement in principle” for the distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers remained unchanged.³⁸

CABINET – FIRST MEETING

After a couple of rewrites, the memorandum to Cabinet, which was titled “Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces,” dated 5 July 1967, was signed by the Minister. In view of its intended audience, the document set out a detailed explanation, in language geared to those without a military background, of the various flags for which approval was being sought, namely, the Ensign, the naval jack and the distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers. The proposed new ship’s commissioning pennant had been quietly dropped.³⁹ On the distinguishing flags and pennants, the memorandum informed members of Cabinet that

there is a frequent requirement to identify Commanders, Senior Officers, and officials of the Canadian Armed Forces. This type of identity has been provided by a very large number of different flags and pennants in the three Services. To avoid a proliferation of different flags, and obtain a simplicity of recognition, it is proposed that the flags used for this purpose should maintain identity with the Ensign, and that the number of flags and pennants be reduced to a minimum. By modifying the basic Ensign, either by altering its shape or changing the insignia on the fly, a relatively small number of flags and pennants would meet the full requirements of the Service. These flags and pennants would identify the functional Command to which a Commander belongs as well as his rank.

The identifying flags and pennants would be flown at bases, units, ships and other defence establishments, along with, but in a smaller size than

³⁶ Defence Council – Minutes, 220th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room at 0930 hours on Monday, 5 June, 1967, para. 9 c, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

³⁷ Defence Council – Minutes, 220th Meeting, 5 June 1967, para. 8.

³⁸ Defence Council – Minutes, 220th Meeting, 5 June 1967, para. 9 c.

³⁹ Jolin, “Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign,” 279.

the Ensign, to indicate the presence of a Commander, Senior Officer or other official. Also they could be flown on vehicles, boats, and aircraft when such persons were travelling within the limit of their jurisdiction on official business.⁴⁰

When comparing the roles played by the Minister in Defence Council and in Cabinet, an interesting role reversal can be seen to take place. In the Council, he was seen as the civilian, representing the elected government, who holds the purse strings and who may or may not accede to the wishes of the senior officers of the Canadian military. In Cabinet, comprised entirely of elected members of parliament, all of whom are civilians, the Minister was now seen as the representative of the military and, once again, the wishes of the military may or may not be granted.

The Cabinet meeting of 16 August 1967 unexpectedly turned out to be an example of the Minister not getting what he wanted. After the Minister of National Defence introduced the memorandum, the Prime Minister said that “he had been under some pressure from Naval personnel and from Lord Louis Mountbatten of the United Kingdom” over the proposed naval jack.⁴¹ Getting onside with the Prime Minister, at least for now, the Minister replied that “while he preferred the Naval Jack that had been designed in Canada, he would like to have further discussions with Naval personnel before making any proposal to the Cabinet concerning a Naval Jack.” The jack was therefore off the table for the time being.

As for the views of others among the Minister’s colleagues,

during the discussion, several Ministers expressed disapproval of the principle of identifying flags for Commanders, and questioned the desirability of having either a Service Ensign or a Naval Jack. It was

⁴⁰ Minister of National Defence, Memorandum to the Cabinet, Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces, 5 July 1967, paras. 6-7, P 1810-11 TD 7163 (DC), DHH.

⁴¹ Specifically, the Prime Minister stated that his petitioners were requesting “a White Ensign displaying both the maple leaf of Canada and the George Cross.” This highlights the tension between views of the red cross on a white field as a purely *naval* colourway, which is no doubt how Pearson’s petitioners saw it—they mentioned to him both “sea traditions” and “Naval ancestry”—and views, more likely held by persons not in the military, that saw it as a symbol of England. In light of Pearson’s insistence on a design that was “free from colonial associations” in his drive for the maple leaf flag, the suggestion here stood no chance.

pointed out in reply that the Cabinet had earlier agreed that an Ensign for the Armed Services would be adopted.

The Minister “therefore proposed that the Cabinet at present only approve the proposed Ensign as the official military flag of the Canadian Forces, leaving in abeyance [. . .] the question of special flags for Commanders and senior officers.” Accordingly,

[t]he Cabinet, on the recommendation of the Minister of National Defence, agreed:

- a. that authority be granted for the adoption of a proposed Ensign as the official military flag of the Canadian Forces; and
- b. that consideration be given at a later date to the questions whether a Naval Jack and flags and pennants for Commanders, Senior Officers and officials of the Canadian Armed Forces should be adopted.⁴²

Both the naval jack and the distinguishing flags and pennants would have to be brought before Cabinet a second time, but it would not be under this minister. Paul Hellyer took over the Transport portfolio on 19 September 1967, scarcely more than a month after this meeting, to be replaced by the Honourable Léo Cadieux, the former Associate Minister under Hellyer.

CABINET – SECOND MEETING

A minister new to a portfolio is always going to need time to become acquainted with its workings and Cadieux, who “recognized that he lacked the same experience as his predecessor,”⁴³ was no exception. Nevertheless, by the first week of November, senior officers were beginning to wonder what had happened to the file. A memorandum

⁴² Cabinet Conclusions, 16 August 1967, 7-8, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6323, Library and Archives Canada, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=29491>.

⁴³ Defence Council – Minutes, 230th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room, A Building, NDHQ, Monday, 18 September and Tuesday morning, 19 September, 1967, para. 47, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

of that week from the Chief of Personnel (CP) to the CDS reminded him that Cabinet approval of distinguishing flags and pennants was still pending and recommended that, if unification should take place first, that “authority be granted for the continued flying of existing service identifying flags and pennants, subsequent to Unification, by those currently authorized to fly them.”⁴⁴

At a meeting of the Defence Council on 27 November 1967, the Deputy Minister reminded the members present that “if the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act was to be proclaimed on 1 January, 1968, as planned,” that Council should conduct a review of “matters that may attract special attention, both inside the Services and in the minds of the general public and press, at the time the Act is proclaimed.”⁴⁵ While nothing as minor as flags was envisioned as part of that review,⁴⁶ it may nevertheless be no coincidence that two days later the CP informed the CDS that a memorandum on the topic for the Minister’s attention had been prepared.⁴⁷ Echoing the language of the Deputy Minister, it reminded the Minister that “should approval of these flags be delayed until after proclamation of Bill C-243 [the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act], the requirement to continue flying the existing flags of the three Services will remain, a situation that will not enhance the image of Unification in the public eye.”⁴⁸ In effect urging the Minister to get a move on, it was recommended that “consideration be given to pressing Cabinet for a decision on the question of flags and pennants for the Armed Forces at an early date, if possible, prior to Proclamation date.”⁴⁹

Little appears to have happened over the holiday season, although proclamation of the new service was put back a month—possibly

⁴⁴ E. M. Reyno to CDS, Distinctive Flags – Canadian Armed Forces, 2 November 1967, para. 2, P 1810-11 TD 7303 (DC), DHH.

⁴⁵ Defence Council – Minutes, 234th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room at 0930 hours on Monday, 27 November, 1967, para. 31, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

⁴⁶ This becomes clear by examining the minutes of the following week’s meeting at which the review urged by the Deputy Minister was the only item on the agenda: Defence Council – Minutes, 235th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room on Tuesday morning, 5 December, 1967 and Friday Afternoon, 8 December, 1967, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

⁴⁷ E. M. Reyno to CDS, Distinctive Flags – Canadian Armed Forces, 29 November 1967, para. 2, P 1810-11 TD 7303 (DC), DHH.

⁴⁸ J. V. Allard to The Minister, Distinctive Flags – Canadian Armed Forces, 5 December 1967, para. 2, P 1810-11 TD 7303 (DC), DHH.

⁴⁹ Allard to The Minister, Distinctive Flags, 5 December 1967, para. 3.

due to concerns raised by the Judge Advocate General over the issue of compulsory release age.⁵⁰ In the time remaining, though, things moved very quickly. On 19 January, the CP reminded the CDS of the memorandum sent to the Minister the previous month, pointing out that “no further indication of the status of these items, which include the Ship’s Jack and pennants for senior officers, has been received.”⁵¹ Seemingly unbeknownst to the CP, however, a memorandum to Cabinet had been signed by the Minister the previous day. Brief and to the point, this document, “Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces,” began by reminding the members that they had agreed to defer a decision on the naval jack and distinguishing flags and pennants at the meeting held the previous August.⁵² Now, the view was expressed that “in the interim it has become increasingly clear that it would be highly desirable to replace existing pennants of the three Services as soon as possible after the proclamation of Bill C-243.”⁵³ Therefore, the Cabinet was being asked to grant, in addition to its approval of the naval jack, authority for “the modification of the Ensign to provide a family of identifying flags and pennants for Commanders, senior officers, and officials of the Canadian Armed Forces.”⁵⁴

In an indication that this was being taken seriously indeed, and that there may have been a sense that time was running out, the unusual step was taken of drafting a letter to the Prime Minister, urging upon him the importance of timely approval of the naval jack and distinguishing flags and pennants “in view of the impending proclamation of the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act.”⁵⁵ The majority of the letter was devoted to a defence of the proposed Canadian naval jack, with reference to the objections to it voiced by Mountbatten and others that were mentioned by Pearson at the August meeting of Cabinet. Because the Prime Minister was not a military man, the difference between an ensign and a jack was expounded at some length. As for the distinguishing flags and

⁵⁰ Defence Council – Minutes, 235th Meeting, 5 December 1967, para. 4.

⁵¹ E. M. Reyno to CDS, Distinctive Flags – Canadian Armed Forces, 19 January 1968, para. 1, P 1145-18 TD 8018 (DGPS), DHH.

⁵² Minister of National Defence, Memorandum to the Cabinet, Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces, 18 January 1968, para. 1, P 1145-18 TD 8018 (DGPS), DHH.

⁵³ Memorandum to Cabinet, Distinctive Flags, 18 January 1968, para. 2.

⁵⁴ Memorandum to Cabinet, Distinctive Flags, 18 January 1968, para. 3 b.

⁵⁵ The Minister of National Defence to The Prime Minister, Draft Letter, 22 January 1968, P 1145-18 TD 8018 (DGPS), DHH.

pennants, the paragraph devoted to them recapped what was said in the memorandum to Cabinet of 5 July, with an interesting new twist. Pointing out, as was done previously, that the new flags and pennants would simplify and greatly reduce the numbers in use, actual figures were now being provided: “at present . . . there are 28 basic designs for flags and pennants within use in the three Services, whereas this number would be reduced to 6 if the proposals at hand are approved.” The number of patterns depicted in Figure 5 happens to be six. Combined with the fact that the discussion of the subject at the 5 July meeting of the Defence Council was terminated without the expected decision on the design of the distinguishing flags and pennants, it appears very likely, then, that “the proposals at hand” were those shown in Figure 5.

It is not known if the letter was sent; in any case, as the presiding member of Cabinet, Pearson would have been well aware of the contents of the memorandum to Cabinet on the subject. The meeting itself, the second of the Cabinet at which “Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces” was discussed, was anticlimactic. According to the minutes, the Minister of National Defence introduced the memorandum and then, without discussion, Cabinet proceeded to approve both the naval jack and “the modification of the Ensign to provide a family of identifying flags and pennants for Commanders, Senior Officers and Officials” as requested.⁵⁶ Why the members were disinclined to object to the proposal this time around is impossible to know.⁵⁷ Yet a clue may be provided by the date on which their meeting was held: 1 February 1968 was also the date that Bill C-243, the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act, went into effect, abolishing the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force and establishing in their place the unified Canadian Armed Forces. While the concern that the distinguishing flags and pennants of the former services would have to continue in use after proclamation date does not seem particularly compelling today, the correspondence on the subject examined here shows that,

⁵⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 1 February 1968, 8, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6338, LAC, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=3752>.

⁵⁷ The episode has left no trace, for example, in Pearson’s memoirs: Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, ed. John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis, Vol. 3: 1957-1968 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

at the time, that worry was very real, perhaps because none of the staff work necessary for the continuance of the existing flags had been started. Whatever the case, the fact that the new distinguishing flags and pennants were approved the very same day that the new service came into effect does not look like a coincidence.

POSTSCRIPT: DISTINGUISHING FLAGS AND PENNANTS AFTER UNIFICATION

Although there have been a few changes made to them over the years, the unified distinguishing flags and pennants created in 1966 have shown remarkable stability over the years and can only be described as a success. Figure 6 is an early illustration of the official designs as promulgated. Probably the most noticeable change from the draft patterns in Figure 5 is that the number of basic shapes has been reduced from five to three, with the pennants for a colonel and lieutenant-colonel and below allowed to lapse. Improvements were made to the shape of the two swallowtails compared to the draft designs. To make the flag less cramped and therefore increase the visibility of the insignia in the fly, the “bite” in the swallowtail of a major-general is noticeably shallower than that in the draft version. Likewise, the tapered swallowtail of a brigadier-general has had the angle of the taper of the bottom edge reduced, so that the height of the flag at the fly end has increased from half that at the hoist end to three-quarters.⁵⁸ It can also be seen that there exist flags that are blank, without a device in the fly, functioning purely as rank flags for those general officers not leading a command or field formation.⁵⁹

Officers in command of a region or base—who would most likely be colonels—were to fly the distinguishing flag of a brigadier-general, regardless of their actual rank.⁶⁰ While this arrangement may have been satisfactory to the Navy, which had not traditionally employed rank flags for officers below the rank of commodore, the Army and

⁵⁸ The exact dimensions of all of the parts of these flags and pennants are given in Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, figs. 14-3-3 and 14-3-4. Note also that “swallowtail” and “tapered swallowtail” are the official names.

⁵⁹ Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, 14-3-6 c.

⁶⁰ Canadian Forces Administrative Order 62-3, “Royal Standards, Personal and Distinguishing Flags, Pennants, and General Officer Plates,” 20 December 1968, para. 12, Director Strategic Corporate Services, Department of National Defence.

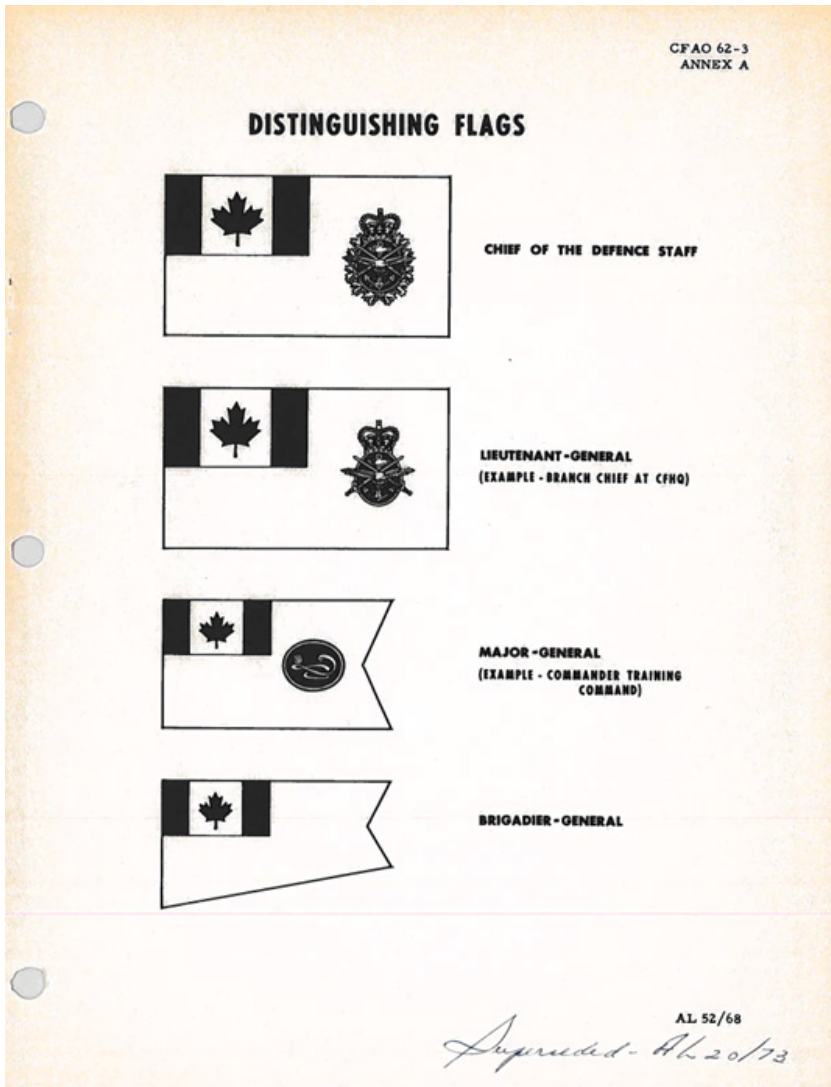


Figure 6. Distinguishing flags for senior officers, Canadian Armed Forces, 1968. [Canadian Forces Administrative Order 62-3, "Royal Standards, Personal and Distinguishing Flags, Pennants, and General Officer Plates," 20 December 1968, Annex A, Director Strategic Corporate Services, Department of National Defence]

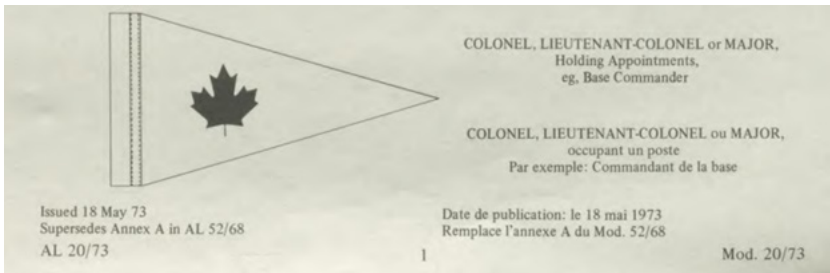


Figure 7. Distinguishing pennant for a colonel, lieutenant-colonel or major, Canadian Armed Forces, 1973. [Canadian Forces Administrative Order 62-3, "Royal Standards, Personal and Distinguishing Flags, Pennants, and General Officer Plates," 18 May 1973, Annex A (detail), Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence]

the Air Force were not likely content with this arrangement for by 1973 a triangular distinguishing pennant for colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors was introduced (Figure 7). In arriving at this design, which is reminiscent of the pennants used in the traditional Army scheme (Figure 2), some pragmatism was clearly applied to the question of including the full National Flag in every design, opening up the possibility of employing a shape that did not need to have the top edge parallel to the ground.⁶¹ Together with the distinguishing flags in Figure 6, the distinguishing pennant is still in use today.⁶²

One final point concerns the process of gradual creeping de-unification, by which I mean the re-assertion of the former service identities of Navy, Army and Air Force in terms of organisation, practices and symbolism, that has been nibbling away at the edges of the unification project arguably since the day that Minister Hellyer shut the door behind him. Today, an outside observer would be hard pressed indeed to recognise that the Canadian Armed Forces do, in fact, comprise a single service. One has to know where to look. The distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers, for example, have held surprisingly steady as visual indicators of unification, but even here a few small concessions to individual service identities have been made.

In the early 1980s, the former broad pennant of a commodore was adapted for use by the commodores commanding the Canadian

⁶¹ The stylised eleven-point maple leaf from the flag has, in any case, arguably gone on to be as much, if not more, of a national symbol than the flag itself.

⁶² Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, figs. 14-3-1 and 14-3-2.

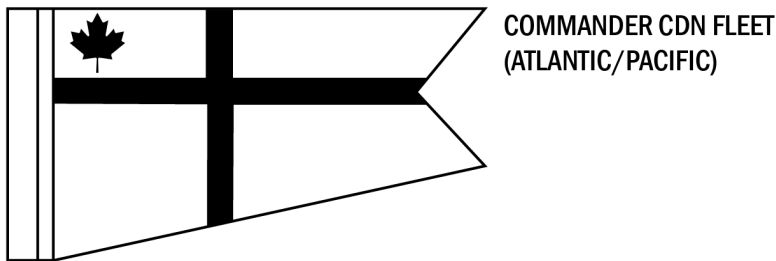


Figure 8. Distinguishing flag for Commander Canadian Fleet, Atlantic and Pacific. The rank is that of Commodore. Red cross of St. George and maple leaf on white background. [Canadian Armed Forces, A-AD-200-000/AG-000, *The Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1999), fig. 14-3-1 (detail), <http://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/heritage-manual/chapter-14/section-3.html>]

fleets on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (Figure 8).⁶³ A skilful blend of the old and the new, the red cross of St. George has made a return as a traditional naval symbol. The red disc has been replaced by a red maple leaf and the arrangement sits very well within the tapered swallowtail of a brigadier-general.

Army or Air Force colonels in command of a combat-capable formation are entitled to a coloured version of the triangular distinguishing pennant. In the case of a colonel in charge of an Army brigade, the pennant is rifle green instead of white, with the insignia of the brigade in place of the maple leaf. Similarly, a colonel commanding an Air Force wing has a light blue pennant bearing the insignia of the wing in question.⁶⁴ Along with the distinguishing flags of the Navy's fleet commanders, these examples represent a significant departure from the uniform white of the original designs.

In light of the current trend toward de-unification, the question may be asked: why not continue what has already been started and dismantle the whole edifice altogether? The multiple colourful designs of the original three services, perhaps with a bit of an update, would no doubt warm the heart of a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist. A cynical reply might be that, given that these flags and pennants

⁶³ Maritime Command [Canada], *Maritime Command Ceremonial Manual* (1 August 1984), para. 342.

⁶⁴ Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, 14-3-10 b. There is a monochrome illustration at fig. 14-3-2, but it is very poor and will not be reproduced here.

only apply to a small proportion of Canada’s military personnel, it is simply not worth the bother. It must be pointed out, too, that a great many senior officers since unification have occupied genuine tri-service billets, for which any colour but white would simply not be appropriate. The distinguishing flags and pennants of the Canadian Armed Forces, although based primarily upon the Army model, were designed with flexibility in mind, which has allowed them to serve the needs of all three branches of the service as well as its unified, tri-service requirements. Their undoubted effectiveness under the unique conditions of Canada’s single armed service is the best argument for leaving them intact.

APPENDIX

Comparative military ranks of senior officers of the three armed services of Canada prior to unification in 1968. Ranks in bold were entitled to a distinguishing flag or pennant prior to unification. All ranks shown were entitled to a distinguishing flag or pennant after unification.

<i>Royal Canadian Navy</i>	<i>Canadian Army</i>	<i>Royal Canadian Air Force*</i>
Admiral	General	Air Chief Marshal
Vice-Admiral	Lieutenant-General	Air Marshal
Rear-Admiral	Major-General	Air Vice-Marshal
Commodore	Brigadier**	Air Commodore
Captain	Colonel	Group Captain
Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel	Wing Commander
Lieutenant-Commander	Major	Squadron Leader
* RCAF rank titles were abolished at unification, to be replaced by Army titles. ** Renamed “Brigadier-General” upon unification.		

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Bertosa is an unaffiliated researcher who lives in Cobourg, Ontario, Canada. He is the author of book chapters, articles, and reviews, mostly in the field of military history, that have been published in Canada and internationally.

The present paper would not have been possible without the assistance of Captain Norman Jolin, RCN (retired), who kindly made available the research material used in the preparation of his important 2013 *Northern Mariner* article “The Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign.”