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FEATURE

Hellyer's Flag

The Origins of the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign in Documents, 1964-68

BRIAN BERTOSA

Abstract: As an unambiguous expression of both Canadian national identity and a unified military, the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign symbolises the victory of the Pearson government in two of its most contentious initiatives. The antecedents and development of the Ensign, however, have not previously been studied. Examined here will be the need for a service ensign after the introduction of the National Flag of Canada in 1965, lukewarm support for an ensign in the upper echelons of the military, hostility in the Cabinet and dogged determination on the part of the Minister of National Defence, Paul Hellyer, to have a design approved.

SECOND ONLY to the National Flag of Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign must surely be the flag most frequently displayed at Canadian military establishments at home and abroad.¹ The near-ubiquity of the Ensign, in service for more than a half century now, implies that it has come to enjoy an easy, untroubled acceptance. Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding its creation—the unification of Canada's three armed services to form

¹ Canadian Armed Forces, A-AD-200-000/AG-000, *The Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1999), fig. 4-2-1, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/heritage-manual/chapter-4/section-2.html>, indicates that a location with only one flagpole will fly the National Flag without the Ensign.

the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in 1968—were among the most bitterly contentious in the peacetime military history of Canada.²

This paper will consider the need for a service ensign (or ensigns) in the highly unusual circumstances, with respect to military flags in Canada, of the mid-1960s. Aspects of the design of the CAF Ensign will be examined, as well as its lengthy approval process, demonstrating that, even in the face of opposition from Cabinet colleagues, the Minister of National Defence, Paul T. Hellyer,³ was unwavering in his advocacy of the new design.

PEARSON, THE MAPLE LEAF FLAG AND THE DEMISE OF THE SERVICE ENSIGNS

The National Flag of Canada was introduced on 15 February 1965 under the minority government of Lester B. Pearson, Prime Minister from 1963 to 1968. Rising separatist sentiment in Québec during that decade was no doubt the most urgent impetus behind the initiative; as Pearson said, forcefully if inelegantly, to a group of journalists and MPs at 24 Sussex, “I’m going to push through a flag. Got to do this to make Quebec happy.”⁴ But there were other influences on Pearson’s thinking in the matter, as well. In the days when travel by sea was still common—and the British had a vigorous merchant marine—a ship carrying the Pearsons was entering Southampton harbour. Maryon Pearson remarked to her husband upon what she imagined to be the large size of the Canadian merchant fleet. As he records in his *Memoirs*,

I asked what she meant. She replied, “Look at all those ships with the Canadian Red Ensign.” It was, of course, the merchant flag of the

² On unification, a brief, introductory overview can be found at 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 On whom, a brief overview can be found at Taylor C. Noakes, “Paul Hellyer,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified 23 August 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/paul-hellyer>. Hellyer’s memoirs of the unification battle are a fundamental source: see Paul Hellyer, *Damn the Torpedoes: My Fight to Unify Canada’s Armed Forces* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

⁴ Quoted in Peter Stursberg, *Lester Pearson and the Dream of Unity* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1978), 155.

United Kingdom. This kind of confusion would have continued to exist had we kept the Red Ensign design with minor changes.⁵

Legally Canada's civil ensign, (i.e., the flag of her merchant ships), the Canadian Red Ensign also served as a widespread, but unofficial, national identifier on land prior to 1965.⁶

A more substantive influence, to judge by the amount of space devoted to it in Pearson's *Memoirs*, stemmed from the 1956 Suez crisis. Canada's contribution to the resulting United Nations peacekeeping force, UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force), was originally slated to be a battalion of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser objected to Canadian participation for a number of reasons, not the least of which were the name of the unit that was to be sent and their uniform, both of which risked misunderstandings on the ground given that British troops were still in the country. Although Canada went on, after a great deal of diplomatic wrangling, to contribute personnel from a number of supporting arms and services, the Queen's Own were not ultimately sent. The perplexity of having Colonel Nasser influence the makeup of the contingent in this way comes through clearly in the writings of Pearson, who was Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time.⁷ Although flags flown by the contingent are not mentioned by Pearson in connection with this episode—Egyptian objections were made known even before the advance party was ready to leave—the question of possible confusion with the British would have been no different.⁸

In the context of times that were unquestionably changing, problems were beginning to arise in more than one area of Canadian life due to the nation's historic links with the United Kingdom. These

⁵ 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), 281.

⁶ John Robert Colombo, "Canadian Red Ensign," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified 1 April 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/red-ensign>.

⁷ Lester B. Pearson, "Crisis and Resolution," in *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*, ed. John A. Munro and Alex. I. Inglis, Vol. 2, 1948-1957 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), especially 261-62.

⁸ James Eayrs, "Canadian Policy and Opinion during the Suez Crisis," *International Journal* 12, 2 (Spring 1957): 97-108. Neither Eayrs, writing very close to the events, nor Pearson make any mention of flags.

links were perhaps most visibly expressed on the country's flagpoles, including those on military bases. In this connection, it is necessary to distinguish the practice of the Canadian Army from those of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). The Army did not have a service ensign, that is, a flag representing the organisation as a whole; establishments belonging to the Army simply flew what served as the "national" flag prior to 1965, either the Union Jack or the Canadian Red Ensign.⁹ Ships of the RCN flew the White Ensign, identical to that of the Royal Navy, from the ensign staff at the stern and the Canadian Blue Ensign, serving as a jack, i.e., a national identifier, from the bow;¹⁰ on shore, the RCN used only the White Ensign.¹¹ RCAF stations flew but one flag, the RCAF Ensign, at the level of the institution as a whole.¹² With the Canadian Blue Ensign understood to be of lesser importance, there existed, then, two service ensigns prior to 1965, the White Ensign and the RCAF Ensign.¹³

There was going to be no risk of unwanted association with Britain or British foreign policy with the bold, new design of the maple leaf flag. Upon its introduction, the Canadian Red Ensign, the Canadian Blue Ensign and the two service ensigns were relegated to history, bringing a degree of uniformity to the flagpoles of the three armed services, both ashore and afloat, unprecedented both in Canada and the broader Commonwealth. Nevertheless, there was one person in the federal Cabinet still thinking about service ensigns. That was Paul Hellyer (Figure 1).

⁹ Alistair B. Fraser, "The Flags of National Defence," in *The Flags of Canada* (1998), accessed 26 May 2023, <http://fraser.cc/FlagsCan/Nation/NatDefence.html#n36>.

¹⁰ Fraser, "Flags of National Defence."

¹¹ Royal Canadian Navy, *The Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Navy*, Vol. 1, *Administrative* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), art. 62.38 (2) and (3), 62.39.

¹² Fraser, "Flags of National Defence."

¹³ Canadian Armed Forces, *Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*, 4-6-2, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/heritage-manual/chapter-4/section-6.html>.



Figure 1. The Honourable Paul T. Hellyer, Minister of National Defence, 1963-67. If the stand of flags behind the Minister looks a little meagre by today's standards, the National Flag of Canada was all that was available as of 15 February 1965. Hellyer had moved to a different department before the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign was introduced in 1968. (The flag on the left is that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.) [Library and Archives Canada Item ID 5054379]

EARLY DISCUSSION OF AN ENSIGN IN CABINET, DEFENCE COUNCIL AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hellyer had made clear his intention to eventually unify the armed forces in a meeting with the service chiefs in February 1964.¹⁴ The arrival of the maple leaf flag, although in no way introduced with this in mind, did a great deal of Hellyer's work for him, at least at the symbolic level, by eliminating what were arguably the most prominent visual expressions of naval and air force identity. Moreover, given the tradition of the Army of flying a flag indicative of the nation as a whole, rather than the service, there would have been ample warrant for the Minister to simply let matters lie at that point. Nevertheless, Hellyer had in mind a flag to serve as the most prominent visual expression of *his* new service.

CABINET, 23 DECEMBER 1964

The maple leaf flag was approved by the House of Commons in the early hours of 15 December 1964,¹⁵ and was one of the subjects of a Cabinet meeting on the 23rd of that month. It is clear from the minutes of that meeting that the Minister of National Defence had already been mulling over the idea of a service ensign, to be based on the new national flag, for his projected unified service.

The minutes of the meetings preserved in the series of Cabinet Conclusions are quite condensed; nevertheless, it is clear that even at this early stage, not every member of Cabinet was enamoured of Hellyer's idea of a service ensign.¹⁶

(f) The Minister of National Defence reported that consideration was being given to designing a single ensign for the armed services, based on the design of the new flag. Others suggested that Canada follow the practice of such countries as France and the United States, whose armed services flew only the national flag.

¹⁴ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 224.

¹⁵ Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967*, 204.

¹⁶ The Flag, Cabinet Conclusions, 23 December 1964, 4-5, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6265, Library and Archives Canada (hereinafter LAC), <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=25916>.

It is also noteworthy that no one in the Cabinet questioned the arithmetically unlikely proposal of one ensign for three services, suggesting that they were solidly behind Hellyer on unification. In any event, formal approval of a service ensign was not being sought at this stage because there was, as of yet, no service ensign to approve; accordingly,

The Cabinet, –

[...]

- f. agreed that the Minister of National Defence would submit to the Prime Minister designs for an ensign for the Armed Services, to be patterned on the new Canadian flag and that the question whether a special ensign for the services would be desirable should be considered further thereafter.

What Hellyer received from Cabinet was agreement that work on an ensign—singular—could go ahead, but due to the opposition of some of the members, there was no commitment that one would necessarily be approved. This obviously fell short of approval in principle, which may have been what Hellyer was seeking even at this early stage, but it was a start.

It was now time for the Minister to bring senior officers at Canadian Forces Headquarters (CFHQ) up to date on the government's thinking.

DEFENCE COUNCIL, 30 DECEMBER 1964

The minutes of the meeting of the Defence Council dealing with the “new Canadian flag” are revealing with respect to early thinking on the subject of service ensigns on the part of both Hellyer and senior military personnel.¹⁷

¹⁷ Defence Council – Minutes, 133rd Meeting, held in the Chief of Defence Staff Conference Room at 0930 on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 29 and 30, 1964, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1381, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence (hereinafter DHH).

INTRODUCTION OF NEW CANADIAN FLAG

[...]

37. The discussion centered around whether the new Canadian flag should be flown in place of the service ensigns, whether new service ensigns should be designed for the Navy and RCAF or whether one should be designed and adopted for the three services. The practice of flying service ensigns in the Navy and RCAF was reviewed. A number of designs for a new white ensign and for an RCAF ensign, each incorporating the red maple leaf in the basic elements of the existing designs, were displayed. Variations of these designs were discussed as a basis for a service ensign common to the three services.
38. The Minister mentioned that the government was interested in the matter and had assumed that the national flag would replace the service ensigns although he had mentioned when the subject was discussed by the government that the services may adopt a service emblem [probably an error for “ensign”]. In his view there were but two courses open; to fly the new Canadian flag exclusively or to design an ensign common to the three services.
39. CLED [Chief of Logistics, Engineering and Development, Air Vice-Marshal C. L. Annis] stated that the RCAF was opposed at this time to a common ensign and suggested the time was not appropriate to make such a move. It would be preferable to defer a decision and in the meantime fly the new Canadian flag exclusively.
40. After further discussion the Minister undertook to ascertain the mind of the government on service ensigns. In the meantime it was agreed:
 - a. to defer a decision on a new service ensign and it was proposed that following proclamation the new Canadian flag be flown in all cases in place of the Red and service ensigns.

It is clear from the minutes that, acting no doubt in good faith but perhaps with little idea of the pace at which the Minister intended to pursue unification, staff in the Department of National Defence (DND) had gone ahead and prepared new versions of the

White Ensign and the RCAF Ensign. With unification still only an aspirational goal, and with no one at this stage having any idea precisely how far it was going to go, this made perfect sense. By no means had thought been given to drawing up a draft tri-service ensign. The idea may have been only Hellyer's, until the Minister revealed to the members of Defence Council the confidential contents of the Cabinet discussion on the subject the week previous.

In Cabinet—and likewise now in Council—the maintenance of distinct Navy and Air Force identities under the maple leaf was not even an option. If the services were to have a distinctive flag at all, it was going to be common to all three of them. The lack of any recorded discussion or debate on that point in the minutes shows the extent to which it was clear to Council that Hellyer's views on that subject were not amenable to change. The option he *did* allow them—and this, again, reflective of what was agreed to in Cabinet—was to forego a service ensign and simply fly the National Flag of Canada.

We can imagine, perhaps, the dismay on the part of Air Vice-Marshal Annis at the Minister's swift dismissal of the proposed new White and RCAF Ensigns, which had no doubt been the result of considerable, if hurried, work on the part of the illustrators. Faced suddenly with a choice and a flag, representing a major symbolic step forward on the Minister's path to unification, that no one was likely expecting, Annis may very well have been caught flat-footed. This was certainly not a subject suitable to a snap decision, nor, fortunately, was the Minister insisting on one at this time.

Knowing the mind of the Minister, Annis and the other members of Council no doubt understood that, of the two possibilities, Hellyer's preference was for an ensign, not the least reason for which was that such a flag would unambiguously proclaim the fact of unification. While stating that the RCAF was therefore by no means ready for a common ensign "at this time," Annis wisely refrained from ruling one out entirely, preferring to "defer a decision." This, then, was the action—or, more accurately, lack of action—agreed to by Defence Council, just like the Cabinet before it.

On 31 December 1964, Hellyer recorded in his diary, "I couldn't get any agreement at this stage on a single service ensign, and therefore the above solution [that of having the services fly only the new Canadian flag] seems to me the best of the alternatives."¹⁸ It is difficult

¹⁸ Quoted in Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967*, 228.

to see, though, what those alternatives—plural—may have been, given that, as we have seen, the maple leaf flag was the only alternative to a service ensign Hellyer had allowed the military. Moreover, even if Defence Council had enthusiastically embraced the concept of a single ensign, a design for one was simply not ready. Whether as placeholder or permanent solution, the flying of the National Flag of Canada was the only alternative available at the time.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, 25 FEBRUARY 1965

Naval opinion was widely reported to be aghast at the prospect of retiring the White Ensign,¹⁹ a sentiment that made it all the way to the nation's Parliament. Ten days after the inauguration of the maple leaf flag, the Progressive Conservative member for Queens-Lunenburg rose in the House to ask the Minister a question.²⁰

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (Queens-Lunenburg): [...] In view of objections raised by the naval officers association of Canada and others to the abolition of the use of the white ensign on naval ships, is the government giving any reconsideration to its original decision on this subject, and will it restore the white ensign to the Royal Canadian Navy?

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of National Defence): The decision to which the hon. member refers was taken on the basis of the resolution passed by parliament; it was necessary to take action with regard to the service ensigns. The position of the government is that the three services will fly the flag of Canada. It is also proposed that at some future date an ensign will be authorized for the three armed services, an ensign which would be derived from the Canadian flag. This, however, is still in the formative stage.

Mr. Crouse: Would the minister state whether this ensign would contain the maple leaf in the corner in place of the jack? Is that the government's intention?

¹⁹ C. P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 215-16; and Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967*, 228-29.

²⁰ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26th Parl., 2nd Sess., 11 (1965): 11718, https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC2602_11/370.

Mr. Hellyer: I do not think I am in a position to comment on the design at this stage. I am sure it will be one which will make an attractive ensign and of which the hon. member would approve.

The Minister certainly knew how to stay on script. Once again, under consideration was but a single ensign, and it was only a proposal so far. In reply to Crouse's question, one gets the sense here that Hellyer was holding out the proposed new ensign as a perfectly suitable replacement for what went before, "of which the hon[ourable] member would approve." However, while it was probably not clearly understood at that early stage, the CAF Ensign was in fact never destined to serve as a ship's ensign. It could therefore only serve as a replacement for the White Ensign on land, not in its sea-going role, which is what Crouse ("the use of the white ensign on naval ships") had asked him about. The ship's ensign, already at the time of this discussion in the House, was the National Flag of Canada, and would remain so until 2013.²¹

"A SERVICE ENSIGN IS NOT REQUIRED AND WOULD SERVE NO USEFUL PURPOSE"

To judge by the dearth of documents on the proposed service ensign over the following year, it is clear that neither Hellyer nor anyone at Canadian Forces Headquarters was in any hurry to see it happen. The Army, as we have seen, had never flown an ensign, and so little enthusiasm for one could be expected from that quarter. The Navy and Air Force, on the other hand, may have been expected to welcome a new ensign, but in the wake of the Minister's rebuff of their proposed designs, an ensign common to all three services was likely no more palatable to them than it was to the Army. Then, too, there may have been hope on the part of senior officers of all three services that political opposition to unification would eventually prevail, or that Pearson's minority government would not last long enough to see it through.

²¹ Norman Jolin, "The Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 23, 3 (2013): 282, https://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern-mariner/vol23/tnm_23_267-286.pdf.

Two memoranda illustrate the thinking of senior officers at CFHQ with respect to an ensign. The first, dated 7 January 1965, was from the Director of Ceremonial (DC), Lieutenant-Colonel B. L. Button.²²

SERVICE ENSIGNS

[...]

2. [...] I discussed this matter with DGA [Director General of Administration, Air Commodore G. F. Jacobsen] and we both agreed that once the present ensigns are hauled down the Services have no requirement for an ensign – this of course is open for discussion.

3. In general, I think our recommendation should be that a Service ensign is not required and would serve no useful purpose either from the point of view of tradition or allegiance. I say this because in the first instance it would not be possible to include the Union Flag in the Service ensign and as this is the main traditional device in the present ensign, nothing would be gained. From the point of view of allegiance and expression of loyalty, the National Flag will fly over our Headquarters and installations, thus representing the country. Our other loyalty to the Queen and to the regiment, unit, squadron or ship, is expressed in the Queen's and other Colours. The RCN and RCAF may disagree with this and probably with every good reason. I am, of course, fairly neutral in this matter because the Army has never flown Service ensigns.

The DC justified his opposition to a new ensign under two heads, tradition and allegiance. His logic is a little difficult to follow in the first case, because, as a completely new flag, tradition in the sense that Button saw it, that is, the carry-over of pre-existing symbols, was to be intentionally excluded from the proposed ensign. One cannot expect instant tradition from a symbol that is entirely new. As for allegiance, his discussion breezily jumped from allegiance to country to allegiance to unit, seemingly ignoring, but for his awareness that “the RCN and RCAF may disagree,” the question of allegiance to service. Even under the unified service still to come, there might

²² B. L. Button to Protocol, Service Ensigns, 7 January 1965, P 1145-4 (DC) TD 5008, DHH.

be those who would value a symbol of allegiance at that level, and so Button's belief that such a flag "would serve no useful purpose" puts the lie, in my view, to his assurance that he was "neutral in this matter."

All the more valuable it is, then, that the remaining memorandum, from 6 May 1965, was the work of a senior Air Force officer, Air Commodore G. F. Jacobsen, Director General of Administration. As noted by the DC, though, and perhaps contrary to expectations, Jacobsen's views on the proposed ensign were in substantive agreement with his.²³

ENSIGN – TRI-SERVICE

[...]

2. There have been a number of informal discussions on a proposed ensign and in the course of these discussions it has become apparent that there is a strong consensus that no action should be taken to develop a Service ensign, for the time being at least. In this regard, it is noted that the Army never has had an ensign so the idea of the Services using a national flag alone is not new. Furthermore, the break from Service ensigns has been a "fait accompli" since 15 Feb and to my knowledge there have been no strong pressures brought to bear nor does there appear to be a general feeling for a Service ensign. In short it appears that the passing of Service ensigns has resulted in little protest of significance. Furthermore, it is very doubtful that a single ensign which would be generally acceptable could be introduced at present.
3. It is my view that integration (or unification) of the Services has not proceeded far enough to warrant an attempt to produce a single ensign. I suggest that the matter lie dormant for the present and that in due course when the Services become more closely unified, in fact as well as in name, a single ensign might emerge as a result of a real consensus and, possibly, a requirement for one.

[...]

²³ G. F. Jacobsen to CP, Ensign – Tri-Service, 6 May 1965, P 1145-2 TD 5012 (DC), DHH.

5. Accordingly, I recommend that the idea of a single Service ensign be dropped for the present.

While the DGA was aware of “no strong pressures” in favour of a single ensign, with “little protest of significance” at the retirement of the former service ensigns, it should be pointed out that the Navy and the Air Force were in fact very much attached to them,²⁴ and so it cannot be that now, after 15 February, personnel of those two services suddenly developed an amnesia with respect to those two flags. Rather, the reticence towards a new ensign that Jacobsen spoke of stemmed squarely from the fact that it was intended to be representative of all three of the services, and with respect to the unification horse, the DGA’s advice that “the matter lie dormant for the present” shows that he is not prepared to wager money on it yet. Such caution was surely warranted; with the amount of staff work required to bring about a new ensign and the number of approvals it would have had to go through, a tri-service ensign would not necessarily have been such an easy thing to back away from if unification were to fail in the end. Similar concerns over the fortunes of the unification project may, in fact, have lain behind the lack of any clear direction from the Minister at this time to move forward with the Ensign. With no desire to put the cart before the horse, Hellyer may have seen no value in driving an ensign while unification itself was still not assured.

“CANADIAN FORCES ENSIGN AND PENNANTS”

During 1966, though, the situation had changed, such that not only an ensign but an entire program of new military flags had been developed, all repudiating the old symbolic order. Going by the file name of “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants,” it comprised, in addition to the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, three other initiatives. Some of these were needed because, due to the size, shape or function of the flags to be replaced, the Ensign could not easily serve as a direct substitute. Distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers, some of which were small versions to be flown from

²⁴ Champion, *The Strange Demise*, 215-16.

vehicles,²⁵ as well as a new ship's commissioning pennant,²⁶ were the two classes of flags that came under this category.

The remaining flag in the program, which eventually became known as the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack (which flies today as the Canadian Naval Ensign),²⁷ was one that Hellyer did not even want, believing that the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign was perfectly suitable to be flown as a jack from Canadian Armed Forces warships. However, the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) from July 1966, General Jean V. Allard, had promised the Navy that they would have a distinctive naval jack.

A memorandum to the Defence Council from the Chief of the Defence Staff of 23 December 1966 presents the four components of "Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants," along with a detailed justification of each.²⁸

Purpose

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to request Defence Council approval for the design and adoption of:
 - a. A Canadian Armed Forces Ensign.
 - b. A Canadian Naval Jack.
 - c. A Ship's Commissioning Pennant.
 - d. Distinguishing pennants for senior officers of the Canadian Armed Forces.

As far as possible, the remainder of the document will be quoted only insofar as it concerns the Ensign, on which the remarks are fairly straightforward.

²⁵ Brian Bertosa, "*Tria Juncta in Uno*: Early Draft Versions of Canadian Armed Forces Senior Officer Flags and Pennants," *Canadian Military History* 32, 2 (2023).

²⁶ Jolin, "Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," 279 and Brian Bertosa, "The Curious Canadian Commissioning Pennants of 1967 and 1972," *Argonauta* 40, 3 (2023): 3-12.

²⁷ Jolin, "Restoration of a Canadian Naval Ensign," 280-82.

²⁸ Memorandum to Defence Council from: Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants, 23 December 1966, P 1810-11 (DGA), DHH.

Background

2. There is a need for a Canadian Armed Forces Ensign to provide a means of military identity and to contribute to the development of pride in the Service. On 25 February, 1965, the Minister, in replying to a question in the House, stated in part that it was proposed that “at some future date an ensign will be authorized for the three armed services, an ensign which would be derived from the Canadian flag”.

[...]

Discussion

5. To meet the requirement for a Canadian Armed Forces Ensign and the family of distinguishing flags and pennants, several designs were prepared and submitted to Canadian Forces Council. The unanimous preferences of the Council are attached as Annex A and C respectively. These are endorsed by the CDS.

The meeting of Armed Forces Council referred to here took place on 12 October 1966, providing a *terminus ante quem* for the preparation of the package of illustrations.²⁹ Annex A is the draft CAF Ensign (Figure 2).

8. Cabinet, and possibly Royal, approval will be required for the Ensign and Jack. It has been suggested that following approval, Her Majesty The Queen be asked to present the Ensign to the Canadian Forces during her planned visit to Canada in 1967.
9. It is proposed that the Ensign, when approved and presented, will be the flag flown at all defence establishments, bases and units. The Ensign will be the official military flag of Canada; inferior to the National Flag, but, since it incorporates the National Flag, it provides national as well as military identification.

Recommendations

²⁹ E. M. Reyno to CDS, Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants, 13 January 1967, para. 5, P 1810-11 (DGA) TD 6361, DHH.



Figure 2. Draft Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, 1966. With a dark blue background to the CAF badge, it is identical to the Ensign in use today. [Illustration (Annex A) 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]

10. It is recommended that:

- a. The design for the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, shown at Annex A, be approved by Defence Council with recommendations for Cabinet (and possibly Royal) approval, and subsequent presentation of the Ensign to the Canadian Armed Forces by Her Majesty during Her visit in 1967.

The outcome of the various milestones on the path to approval of the Ensign outlined in this memorandum, and their adherence to the projected timeline, will be revealed in due course. The memorandum underwent two revisions, with the last one dated 13 March 1967.

FINALISATION OF A DESIGN IN DEFENCE COUNCIL

DEFENCE COUNCIL, 1 MAY 1967

It may have been no accident that the first meeting of Defence Council to consider the program took place six days after Bill C-243, the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act, passed third reading in the House of Commons, effectively putting an end to viable political

opposition to unification. Any lingering concerns that concrete steps forward on the file may be premature were no longer valid.

Despite the fact that the four components of “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants” had all been agreed upon unanimously by Armed Forces Council, the Minister still insisted on having his say.³⁰

I. Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants

2. Defence Council had for consideration a memorandum from the Chief of the Defence Staff dated 13 March, 1967, entitled “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants”.
3. A/C Weston, Director General Administration, briefed the Council, providing additional details and showing designs of the proposed ensign, Jack and pennants which the CDS had recommended for adoption by the Canadian Forces.

Perhaps buoyed by his win in the House, Hellyer appeared to have been in a feisty mood that day, for a great deal of the discussion that followed consisted of his openly expressed scepticism of the need for the proposed Naval Jack and a vigorous defence of it on the part of General Allard and others. During the debate, Hellyer expressed his belief that “there should not be differing ensigns for the separate environments” and that “there should be but one Canadian Forces ensign to serve all the requirements of the Canadian Armed Forces.”³¹ Moreover, it appears that there were in fact *two* versions of the Ensign shown at the meeting.

11. After further discussion, the Minister deferred a decision on the proposals in the CDS memorandum of 13 March, 1967, and stated that the recommendations would eventually have to be submitted to the Cabinet and in preparation for this step asked for two copies of the proposed ensign to be made up, both in the official red of the National flag, and with the larger of the two proposed Canadian Forces Badges, which were displayed at the meeting, in the fly.

³⁰ Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room at 0930 hours on Monday, 1 May 1967, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

³¹ Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, 1 May 1967, paras. 4 and 5.

One of the ensigns should employ as the background to the Forces Badge the blue colour displayed at the meeting and the other a somewhat darker shade.

[...]

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.

Paragraph 11 is of crucial importance to the history of the development of the Ensign, but, regrettably, it is confusingly written, and must be read carefully to avoid unwarranted inferences. The “official red of the National flag” refers to precisely that, the National Flag of Canada in the canton of the Ensign. Likewise, the blue “background to the Forces Badge” applies strictly to that, the badge per se. That the Ensign was to have a white background is confirmed by the illustration at Annex A in the memorandum from the CDS (Figure 2), as well as verbally by Air Commodore Weston during the meeting.³²

With the colour and overall arrangement of the Ensign not being questioned, it becomes clear that what is really at issue here is the CAF badge appearing on it. While the responsible officers present may have thought that the design details of the badge had long been settled,³³ the Minister is now questioning the trivial detail of the precise shade of blue comprising its background. Whether this was no more than a peevish assertion of authority, an admittedly tempting interpretation given that the participants were approaching the end of a rather uncordial session, is of course impossible to say, yet it cannot have escaped the notice of other attendees that, while ostensibly examining flags, by questioning the badge Hellyer was now reopening, intentionally or not, a different file entirely. Whatever the case there, the badge was reported to have been originally on a

³² Defence Council – Minutes, 216th Meeting, 1 May 1967, para. 4: “to ensure that it [the Jack] differed from the Canadian Forces ensign, with a white background.”

³³ At the end of May 1966, according to 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), 13.

“neutral blue” background;³⁴ while not particularly descriptive, this is nevertheless not how one normally describes a dark blue colour. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that the two versions of the Ensign presented at the meeting differed only in the size of the badge, of which both were on the same medium blue background. The Minister preferred the Ensign with the larger badge and asked that the latter be reproduced in a darker blue. Illustrators had this ready by 1 June.³⁵ In accordance with the Minister’s statement that the file would have to be brought before the Cabinet, a draft memorandum to Cabinet was also prepared.

DEFENCE COUNCIL, 5 JUNE 1967

With a version of the Ensign in hand bearing a badge of the desired colour, no more was heard of competing designs; moreover, final approval of the CAF badge was now able to go ahead.³⁶ The second meeting of Defence Council to discuss “Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants,” held five weeks after the first, amounted to smooth sailing for the Ensign.³⁷

I. Canadian Forces Ensign and Pennants

2. Defence Council had for consideration a memorandum from the CDS dated 1 June, 1967, reference P 1810-11 (DGPS) entitled “Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, Flags and Pennants”.

The memorandum referred to here was little more than an updated version of the one from 23 December 1966 taking into account the decisions of the 1 May meeting of Defence Council. The idea of royal approval of the Ensign was no longer being considered.³⁸

³⁴ Minutes of CDS – Staff Meeting 10/66 – 23 Mar 66 (Draft), 23 March 1966, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1573, DHH.

³⁵ Memorandum to the Defence Council from the Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, Flags and Pennants, 1 June 1967, para. 4 a, P 1810-11 (DGPS), DHH; R. C. Weston to CP, Introductory Remarks – Defence Council 5 JUN 67, Flags and Pennants, 2 June 1967, para. 3, P 1810-11 (DGPS), DHH.

³⁶ In June or July 1967; Dunn, “Badges,” 14.

³⁷ Defence Council – Minutes, 220th Meeting, held in the Minister’s Conference Room at 0930 hours on Monday, 5 June 1967, fonds 73/1223, Robert Lewis Raymont fonds, series 3, file 1392, DHH.

³⁸ Memorandum to the Defence Council, Ensign, Flags and Pennants, 1 June 1967.

3. The CP [Chief of Personnel, Air Marshal Edwin M. Reyno] introduced this item stating that the revised designs to be presented were developed in accordance with the directions of the Minister at and subsequent to the 216th Meeting of Defence Council. He then called on A/C Weston, Director General Personnel Services, who displayed the revised prototype of the Ensign, a white flag containing in its canton the National Flag of Canada and, centred on the fly, the badge of the Canadian Armed Forces. The Minister agreed in principle to this design.

The appearance of the Ensign thus settled, that of the Jack was unfortunately still not finalised, and the Minister may have been losing patience with it.

8. Concluding the discussion, the Minister said he would like to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. With this in mind he said that he intended to clear the item secretarially within the next few days and have the submission to Cabinet go forward as soon as possible thereafter.

Furthermore, with the Royal visit scheduled for the end of the month, there was no longer any possibility that the Queen might be able to present the Ensign to the military, as had been hoped.³⁹

DEFT HANDLING IN CABINET

With the draft memorandum to Cabinet duly revised, it was signed by the Minister on 5 July 1967—ironically enough, while the Queen was still in the country.⁴⁰ Perhaps to refresh their memories, the document begins by reminding the Cabinet where matters stood the last time they had discussed an ensign, more than two and a half years previously.⁴¹

³⁹ “Queen in Canada, 1967,” The Royal Watcher, 1 July 2017, <https://royalwatcherblog.com/2017/07/01/queen-in-canada-1967/>.

⁴⁰ “Queen in Canada, 1967.”

⁴¹ Paul T. Hellyer, Memorandum to the Cabinet, Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces, 5 July 1967, P 1810-11 TD 7163 (DC), DHH.

Introduction

1. Cabinet, at its meeting on 23 December 1964, when approving the new Canadian Flag, also

“agreed that the Minister of National Defence would submit to the Prime Minister designs for an ensign for the Armed Services, to be patterned on the new Canadian flag and that the question whether a special ensign for the services would be desirable should be considered further thereafter;”

[...]

Discussion

[...]

4. A distinctive ensign has traditionally been used to provide identity; but even more important, it is a symbol of unity, and loyalty, and it materially contributes to the development of pride in the Service.
5. A design has now been selected for a Canadian Armed Forces Ensign, (a prototype will be presented for viewing). The proposed Ensign is a white flag, of the proportions two by length and one by width, containing in its canton the National Flag of Canada and, centred on the fly, the badge of the Canadian Armed Forces. It would be the official military flag of Canada; inferior to the National Flag but, since it incorporates the National Flag, it would provide National as well as military identification. It would be flown at all defence establishments, bases and units in Canada and overseas.

[...]

Recommendations

11. It is recommended that:
 - a. Authority be granted for the adoption of the proposed Ensign as the official military flag of the Canadian Forces.

Despite the inclusion of paragraph 1, and the effort made here to elucidate the members of Cabinet on the desirability of an ensign, some of the Minister's colleagues were still not persuaded.

CABINET, 16 AUGUST 1967

As previously noted, the recorded deliberations in the series of Cabinet Conclusions are condensed, and in this particular instance, what was said in the discussion paragraph seems out of sequence relative to the rest.⁴²

The Minister of National Defence introduced a memorandum (Cab. Doc. 414/67 of July 5th) proposing the adoption of an official Ensign for the Canadian Forces, a Naval Jack, and modification of the Ensign to provide a family of identifying flags and pennants for Commanders, Senior Officers and officials of the Canadian Armed Forces. Replicas of the proposed Ensign and Naval Jack were displayed before Ministers.

[...]

The Minister of National Defence said that, while he preferred the Naval Jack which 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. He therefore proposed that the Cabinet at present only approve the proposed Ensign as the official military flag of the Canadian Forces, leaving in abeyance also the question of special flags for Commanders and senior officers.

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

⁴² Distinctive Flags For The Canadian Armed Forces, Cabinet Conclusions, 16 August 1967, 7-8, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6323, LAC, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=29491>.

The 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.

What is striking about this exchange is that, in the face of opposition to all three flag initiatives—the proposed ship's commissioning pennant had been quietly dropped—Hellyer was willing to leave “in abeyance” the Jack and the distinguishing flags and pennants, but when it came to the Ensign, he stood firm. While it is not recorded who it was that pointed out that “the Cabinet had earlier agreed that an Ensign for the Armed Services would be adopted,” it was almost certainly Hellyer. Moreover, if accurately transcribed, the statement was not exactly true. The excessive abridgment of the record makes it impossible to know precisely what was said, but any of the Ministers present who were able to remember what they had decided in 1964—or, more plausibly, had simply read the first paragraph of the memorandum distributed to them—could have told him that they had, in fact, agreed to no such thing, with the question “whether a special ensign for the services would be desirable” still very much in their court.

It is impossible to know whether anyone present that day saw through the Minister's obfuscation, and it may not have mattered in any case. Hellyer was riding high after his victory with Bill C-243, and he was widely perceived as a front-runner to succeed Pearson as leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.⁴³ It would not do to end up in the bad books of a future prime minister over so trivial a file, and so, reluctantly or not, the Cabinet gave Hellyer his Ensign. As for the remaining two “Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces,” Paul Hellyer decamped to the Department of Transport the

⁴³ “Paul Hellyer,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*; Jean V. Allard, *The Memoirs of General Jean V. Allard* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 247.

following month, leaving them to be dealt with by his successor, the Honourable Léo Cadieux.

GAZETTING THE ENSIGN

By statute,⁴⁴ approval of the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign was to be published in the *Canada Gazette*, the federal government's official newspaper for "new statutes, new and proposed regulations, administrative board decisions and public notices."⁴⁵ Steps to make this happen had begun in October 1967,⁴⁶ but a number of months of inactivity followed. Perhaps no one expected the new Minister to take up this relatively minor file right away, but as the weeks dragged on and proclamation of the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act approached, senior personnel at CFHQ began to fret over the Naval Jack and the distinguishing flags and pennants for senior officers, neither of which had yet been brought before Cabinet. It was not until 18 January 1968 that a memorandum to Cabinet on these last two components of "Distinctive Flags" was signed by Cadieux,⁴⁷ with Cabinet approval finally obtained at their meeting of 1 February 1968, the very day that the unified Canadian Armed Forces came into being.⁴⁸

In the meantime, it is unclear why the Director of Ceremonial, N. A. Buckingham, chose to hold off on gazetting the Ensign. The Minister's tardiness with the rest of the file ought to have been no impediment, and the relevant portion of the *Gazette*, Part I, was published each week. Whatever his reasons, it was not until 1 February 1968, once the Jack, too, had been approved, that he gave handwritten instructions to "go ahead now with entries in Canada

⁴⁴ Requisition for Insertions in the Canada Gazette, no. 15 on 13 April 1968, prepared by N. A. Buckingham and original signed by R. J. Sutherland, no date [but on or after 1 February 1968], no file number but included in P 1145-18, DHH.

⁴⁵ Government of Canada, "Canada Gazette," last modified 23 June 2023, <https://www.gazette.gc.ca/accueil-home-eng.html>.

⁴⁶ Department of National Defence Minute Sheet, 17 October 1967, no file number but included in P 1145-18, DHH.

⁴⁷ Minister of National Defence, Memorandum to the Cabinet, Distinctive Flags for the Canadian Armed Forces, 18 January 1968, P 1145-18 TD 8018 (DGPS), DHH.

⁴⁸ Distinctive Flags For The Canadian Armed Forces, Cabinet Conclusions, 1 February 1968, 8, RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6338, LAC, <http://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cabcon&IdNumber=3752>.

Gazette” for both flags.⁴⁹ The entry for the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign appearing in the *Canada Gazette* on 13 April 1968 is shown in Figure 3.

POSTSCRIPT: HAS THE CAF ENSIGN BEEN A SUCCESS?

Paul Hellyer intended only one ensign for the Canadian Armed Forces, which remains as true today as it was in April 1968. On the other hand, General Allard’s hope that the CAF Ensign would foster pride in the single service does not appear to have been fulfilled. Objects of “environmental” loyalty to sea, land and air all returned to the military’s flagpoles in the 1980s. The air element led the way with the introduction of the Canadian Forces Air Command Flag in 1983.⁵⁰ In 1985, the Canadian Armed Forces Naval Jack, which had previously been restricted to shipboard use, was allowed to fly on land as the Canadian Naval Jack and Maritime Command Flag.⁵¹ Even the land element followed suit with the Mobile Command Flag in 1990.⁵² That being said, a command flag will not normally be flown outdoors or displayed indoors without the National Flag and the CAF Ensign in positions of precedence ahead of it, visually expressing what is perhaps a suitable balance in the Canadian Armed Forces today between national, service and command loyalties.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

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.

⁴⁹ Department of National Defence Minute Sheet, 1 February 1968, no file number but included in P 1145-18, DHH.

⁵⁰ *Canada Gazette – Part I*, vol. 117, no. 45, 5 Nov 1983, 9895, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=10479>.

⁵¹ P.C. 1985-1487, 2 May 1985, P 1145-18, DHH.

⁵² Maj. E. Morris, DC 5 to distribution list including EA/ADM (Per), FMC Flag Development, 31 Aug 1990, para. 3, P 1145-0057 TD 90243 (DC5), DHH.

APRIL 13, 1968—13 AVRIL 1968

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DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ottawa 4, Ontario, April 13, 1968.

THE Minister of National Defence has announced that, on the 16th day of August, 1967, the Canadian Government approved a new Canadian Armed Forces Ensign. The description is 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, the Emblem of the Canadian Armed Forces".

15-1

MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE NATIONALE

Ottawa 4 (Ontario), le 13 avril 1968.

LE ministre de la Défense nationale a annoncé que, le 16 août 1967, le gouvernement du Canada a approuvé un nouveau drapeau des Forces armées canadiennes. En voici la description:

«Un drapeau blanc, deux fois plus long que large, contenant dans son canton le drapeau national du Canada et, au centre du battant, l'emblème des Forces armées canadiennes».

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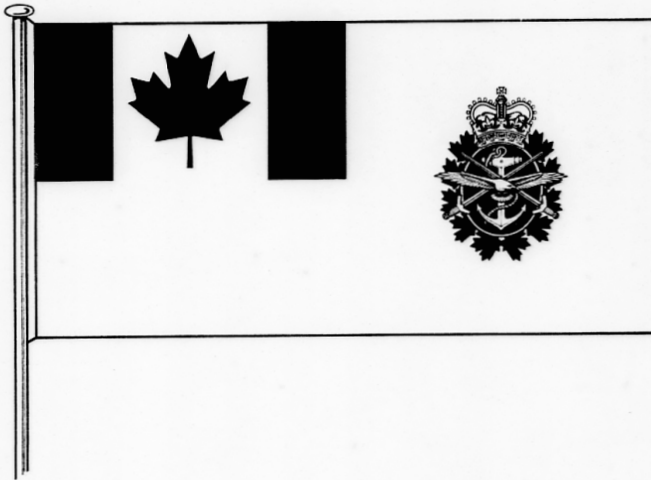


Figure 3. *Canada Gazette* entry for 13 April 1968 announcing the approval on 16 August 1967 of the Canadian Armed Forces Ensign. [*Canada Gazette* - Part I, Vol. 102, no. 15, 13 April 1968, 891, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=cangaz&IdNumber=11930>]