

## CHAPTER TWENTY -- REFLECTIONS

It's now over ten years since I left my last ship, PRESERVER. Since then I have had plenty of time to reflect on my thirty-four years at sea.

In writing this, I have avoided long discussions about operations at sea, unless the particular anecdote I was recounting needed some qualifying information. However, as one reads this, it could give one the impression, that over the years, I have used ships and submarines to get me from one party or reception to the next. That is not quite true -- it's just that there is nothing more boring than reading a great deal of technical detail about a subject which is only interesting to the teller of the story.

I suppose it's only natural that the first question one might ask is whether I have had any regrets about going to sea? The simple answer is -- no. However, as my life at sea was totally intertwined with my personal life, the answer to what seems a simple question is a complex one. It is filled with a series of, "if this hadn't happened," and, "because this happened," etc. I certainly regret some of the decisions I made, and the actions I took, in the course of my life -- but whether I ever regret going to sea -- never.

When I am asked whether I miss it, and whether I would like to be back at sea, I can only say that I miss what was then -- not what is now. I couldn't go back to sea now, expecting things to be as they were, because, even since I last went to sea, vast changes in technology have taken place. I would be out of place there now.

On the other hand, I recently spent some time on board one of the navy's new frigates. While the technology was far beyond me, the people were the same. They thought and acted like sailors. Being with those people was just like old times -- and I missed it.

I suppose, professionally speaking, my biggest regret is that I did not reach the rank of Admiral. That is not a facetious statement from someone who always dreamed of being an Admiral from the time he was a young sailor. When I joined the Canadian Navy, I never thought about progressing beyond the rank of Lieutenant Commander -- and that was only if they didn't release me at the end of my original three-year short service commission.

Promotion to a more senior rank had never been a consideration, even in my wildest dreams. After all, look what my Career Manager had told me in his letter to me some years before, **"In view of the fact that you are now thirty-three years of age, and that you have**

*only recently qualified in submarines, it is possible that you might advance to the position of Executive Officer of a submarine. A career in submarines beyond that point is extremely doubtful".*

It was only during my last five years in the navy that I even gave it a fleeting thought. However, in my heart, I knew that I could never make it to Admiral, simply because I was going to run out of time, before I had to retire at the compulsory retirement age of fifty-five.

Considering the way my career progressed over the twenty-five years I served in the RCN, I am not being immodest when I say that if I had joined the Royal Canadian Navy at eighteen or nineteen years of age, and spent thirty-five years in the navy, I would almost certainly have made it to Admiral. Joining the navy at twenty-eight years of age, and reaching the rank of Captain in twenty years was an achievement that I accept as a reasonable compromise. In short, because of having two careers, both of which I enjoyed, I just didn't have enough time left to make Admiral before I had to retire.

I had been extremely fortunate, in that nearly all my postings, from my first command onwards, were to high visibility positions. Some people tend to serve for many years in staff positions ashore, which, through no fault of their own, does not allow them the exposure to the high profile positions. On the other hand, some people can get promoted that way, because they are good staff officers, and any negative aspect of their job does not get the publicity that a collision at sea would receive. In the high profile positions, ie, command, everything you do is noticed, whether it's good or bad. However, I wouldn't have had it any other way.

In my personal life I think the biggest regret was that, because we lived in Canada when the children were growing up, they missed the special relationship that normally exists between children and their grandparents. I experienced this in my life so I am aware of the impact this has. This was particularly hard in our case, because our two girls were Shirley's parents only grandchildren. They would only see each other every few years, and as such they didn't see the children changing as they were growing up. They just saw the resultant change, but not the changing process.

I must also add a few words about sailor's wives; and it doesn't matter if it's a junior seaman's wife, or a Commanding Officer's wife. They are left at home to carry out the tasks that would normally be carried out by both husband and wife. They do the shopping, the cleaning, the taking kids to school, getting the car fixed, cutting the grass, clearing the snow. I could go on, but the average wife not married to a sailor does not realise how much more is imposed on a sailor's wife - and I use the word "imposed" intentionally.

To a lesser extent I also missed seeing our children growing up, by my many absences away from home. I saw them and loved being with them when I was home. However, I always had the good parts. I didn't have them twenty-four hours a day on the days when things weren't going right.

As I said, I wouldn't have missed my first career in the Merchant Navy for anything. I have very fond memories of those times. I was there at what I believe was the right time. The pride of the world's finest shipping companies were sailing the seas. I will never forget seeing the great liners, either at sea, or alongside in Liverpool, Glasgow, New York or London. All the famous shipping companies -- Blue Funnel, Elder Dempster, Royal Mail, Bibby, Union Castle, and many more. They're all gone now -- although Harrison's have survived. But I was there in their heyday.

The same with the world's greatest shipyards, which in those days were mainly in Britain -- Cammell Laird's in Birkenhead, John Brown's on Clydebank, Harland and Wolff's in Belfast, and many others. I had seen them all when they were in full production.

I have served with four different navies. The Merchant Navy, the Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy and the United States Navy. I enjoyed them all. I have often been asked which of my "lives" I enjoyed most. The answer to that query is the same one I give when asked whether I enjoyed life in submarines, more than my very comfortable life in PRESERVER. Each was different. There were some high points and some low points in each, but I could never say I enjoyed one more than the other. They were all enjoyable.

The book, "One of our Submarines," which I read when I was a cadet in 1952, was the biggest single factor that led me to submarines. There is no doubt that I found my niche there many years later, culminating in two submarine commands and command of the Canadian Submarine Force. I often think about the letter I received from my Career Manager in 1965, saying that because of my age I might get as far as Executive Officer of a submarine, but that any future in submarines beyond that position was very doubtful.

I have always liked an orderly life, therefore the military life suited me. While that life was structured and there were certain parameters in which one operated, there was still room for individuality. I don't like sloppiness -- whether it's in dress or performance. Professionalism was my creed. Anything less in me, or anyone else was unacceptable. I have always wanted to do things "right" -- and have them done right. Punctuality has always been important to me. For instance, when I called a meeting for two o'clock, I didn't expect people to appear at two minutes past the hour.

I believe that life in general must be disciplined. Not only

in a military life, but in family life as well. I don't mean a rigid discipline -- but without some form of discipline, whether it's imposed discipline or self-discipline, society breaks down. The best example of this is when a city has a strike by the police force.

There are those in society who see this as their opportunity to create havoc and anarchy.

In the military, discipline is essential. The mark of a good leader is his or her ability to have their subordinates carry out their orders with a willing obedience. I think one of the reasons I enjoyed life in submarines so much, was that imposed discipline was less visible than in other arms of the military. The norm was self-discipline, due to the requirement for everybody to work together, regardless of rank. There was no doubt that the hierarchical system was in place, and everybody knew who was in charge of whom. However, there was only one common aim -- to ensure submarine safety, and to make that submarine the most efficient unit in the fleet. The term, esprit de corps, still exists in submarines.

A Commanding Officer's powers are beyond the scope of most other judicial systems. He is judge and jury -- and therefore he must be very careful to ensure that the punishment fits the crime. He is also in the unique position of having the person who is appearing in front of him on a charge, actually working for him. He can award everything from a "Caution," which is a slap on the wrist, to two years in jail, depending on the severity of the crime. All severe punishments awarded are reviewed by the Judge Advocate, and if the punishment does not fit the crime, the Commanding Officer will receive a letter from his Admiral, asking for an explanation. I believe that the system, with all its problems, works well. I cannot see how it could work any other way in a ship.

People are your biggest asset. They must be treated fairly and with consistency. If you are inconsistent, or indecisive with people, they do not know where they stand, and you create doubts in their minds about your intentions. You will get more respect from people, even if you are issuing unpopular orders, if you are consistent. One of my pet peeves has always been when the person who is issuing an unpopular order, says, "The Captain said . . . ," or "the XO said . . . ." I have always felt that is a gutless way of issuing orders, to blame someone else for something unpopular -- but it happens.

Life is too short to harbour grudges. If one has a problem with someone, it should be aired and resolved. The resolution does not necessarily mean that either of you has to change your mind. It may even mean you just agree to disagree -- but life should then go on. Differences of opinion should never sour a relationship or friendship, because I believe that as you are only on this earth for such a short time, you should leave it without hate or rancour in your heart. That may be very simplistic, but it's my philosophy.

Training for war. One of the most expensive aspects of maintaining a military is training. All training in the military is geared towards being prepared to fight a war, or some other confrontational situation. The idea behind such training is to ensure that you are ready to wage war -- but with the hope that you will not be required to put that training to use for the real thing.

However, while what I am about to say is controversial, I believe it to be true in many cases.

A professional soldier, sailor or airman wants to practice his profession -- just the same as any other professional. However, it is one of the only professions where the aim is not to practice it. In peacetime, he can do it to a limited degree by taking part in exercises. For instance, in a submarine, you indicate that you have simulated an attack on a ship by firing a green flare. But it is a peacetime exercise, and unlike a doctor who actually operates on someone, the results are simulated, or estimated. The thrill of the real thing is missing.

We all know that war is so futile, and brings killing, pain and suffering to so many innocent people. In the west we train our people in the hope that we will never have to go to war. Yet you have only to see and hear the enthusiasm which returning pilots show after a sortie, in something like the Gulf War, to realize that they had just completed something that they had been trained to do -- and it was real.

In most cases they admit a certain amount of fear that they could become targets themselves. But that is what they had trained for, and at last they were putting their training into practice. Whether they admit it or not, and most will not -- but the majority of professional warriors would like to practice their craft in some form of conflict.

As I said, a controversial statement -- but one which I believe to be true. It can probably be summed up by saying that a person in the profession of arms does not want war -- but if there is one, he would like to be part of it. It's what I call the dichotomy of being a professional soldier, sailor or airman.

In the inner workings of my mind I have never thought of myself as being a true Canadian. Although I have lived in Canada for thirty-three years, my culture is too deep-rooted in the way I was brought up, with my British and Irish backgrounds -- and that can never change. To do so would be to deny my past. I have enjoyed living in Canada, and it has brought me many material things that I might never have had if I had stayed in Britain.

I am loyal to Canada, and I like living in Canada (except the

winters). Usually I will support Canadian views. However, I cannot abide nationalistic Canadians, whose thinking is so narrow that they believe that everything about Canada is good. Loyalty to one's country is admirable -- but nationalism can be unhealthy, because one either closes one's eyes to deficiencies, or worse still, thinks there are none. Perhaps because I have spent so much time travelling the world, and living in many places, I prefer to think of myself as an internationalist, who can see the best and worst of places like Britain, Canada and the United States, and the people who live there -- and accepts those traits, warts and all.

Everything I have written in this account of my life at sea has been my own personal opinion. I have given my views on many subjects, over many years of experience. What I have not done is to tell you what other people think, or thought of me, so I felt that I should be fair to other people's opinions. Usually, it is difficult to obtain an objective assessment of how other people see you, but it is possible.

Since leaving the navy, I was required for business purposes, to take two psychological profile tests. I found the results interesting. In the first one I was assessed as a "Benevolent Autocrat." With that report I didn't have any details -- just the assessment. The other report, which I "acquired" unofficially is included in its entirety:

*"Working at a faster-than average pace (and always by the book) he is attentive to details, and both quick and accurate in handling them. He is, however, too impatient to enjoy working with details as repetitive routine, or as his primary responsibility.*

*Anxious to be sure that things are done exactly right (he worries a good deal about that) he will follow up closely and carefully if his work requires that he delegate details to others -- and when it is necessary for him to be critical, he will try to do that in a constructive, pleasant manner. His sense of urgency and his sense of duty combine, to make him actively concerned about the timeliness as well as the correctness of any work for which he is held responsible.*

*A fluent persuasive talker, he is a very effective communicator -- able to stimulate and motivate others while being aware of, and responsive to, their needs and concerns. His warm personality and friendly, interested attitude, make him approachable. He gets along easily with a wide variety of people.*

*In general, this is a cautious and careful individual, respectful of authority and tradition. A specialist who avoids risk and uncertainty, by taking care to do things "by the book," working within a formal organisational structure."*

Of interest here were the additional comments appended to the report in long hand, as follows, "*Others may see him as being aggressive and introverted. He may be less of a people person than this report would indicate.*" Surely not!

My last position in the Navy was as a diplomat - yes, me! I was appointed to the Canadian Embassy in Oslo, Norway, as the Canadian Forces Defence Attache to Norway, Denmark and Sweden. It was a different experience from being at sea, but nevertheless very enjoyable. But that's another story. However, through it all I just see myself as a simple sailor who thoroughly enjoyed doing what he was doing.