

COURT MARTIAL

by
Geoffrey Craven

CRAYCO

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Prologue

In the last decades of the twentieth century project managers developed methods for keeping their jobs, surviving bureaucratic wars, and detecting and preventing threats to their projects. They divided their work into six phases: Enthusiasm, Apprehension, Panic, Search for the Guilty, Punishment of the Innocent, Praise and Honours for Non-Participants. Knowing what to expect made project managers' jobs seem easier; they could say to each other "See – I told you so." Describing the six phases of a multi-million-dollar Canadian naval fighter aircraft acquisition which might have taken place in the 1960s, this book is dedicated to all past, present and future project managers. Though striking, any perceived likenesses between the protagonists and managers involved in real projects then or now is unintentional and entirely coincidental.

The manager of this project made mistakes which resulted in his court martial, a career-limiting event all military officers try to avoid. Among other obstacles put in his path was a 'honeytrap' – security-speak for a young woman who involves herself in the project by exercising her charms (not an uncommon event when big money is at stake). I owe much of the atmosphere and drama of the court martial to my brief experience as Officer of the Court and Friend of the Accused at two courts martial, as president of a Board of Inquiry, and to Albert Camus' description of his mother's funeral in his book *l'Etranger*. While participating in Canadian government

competition processes I benefited greatly from mentoring by three professional government relations consultants, partners in one of Ottawa's first and foremost lobbying companies; and experience working with Canadian subsidiaries of major US and UK aircraft manufacturers who were my clients.

A note of historical interest: the Holy Grail Report to which Commander Prescott refers in Chapter One was a definitive study of fifteen high-performance fighter aircraft the Department of National Defence considered for replacement of the Royal Canadian Navy's F2H3 Banshee aircraft operating in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Holy Grail team found three to be acceptable: Douglas's A4 Skyhawk, North American Aviation's FJ Fury, and Northrop's CF5. Financial considerations precluded the government from buying new aircraft, and the Navy's obsolete Banshees were removed from service in 1962. If another decision had been made, the competition project described herein might have occurred.

I apologize to non-aviators for tedious details of flying in some chapters of this book; I wanted to describe accurately the techniques, atmosphere, sensations, language, risk and adrenalin which characterize high-performance naval aircraft operations at sea and ashore. I have taken some liberties in chronology and in simplifying the organization of the Canadian military and the Ottawa federal bureaucracy; I hope my former colleagues will forgive me.

G. Craven, November 2015

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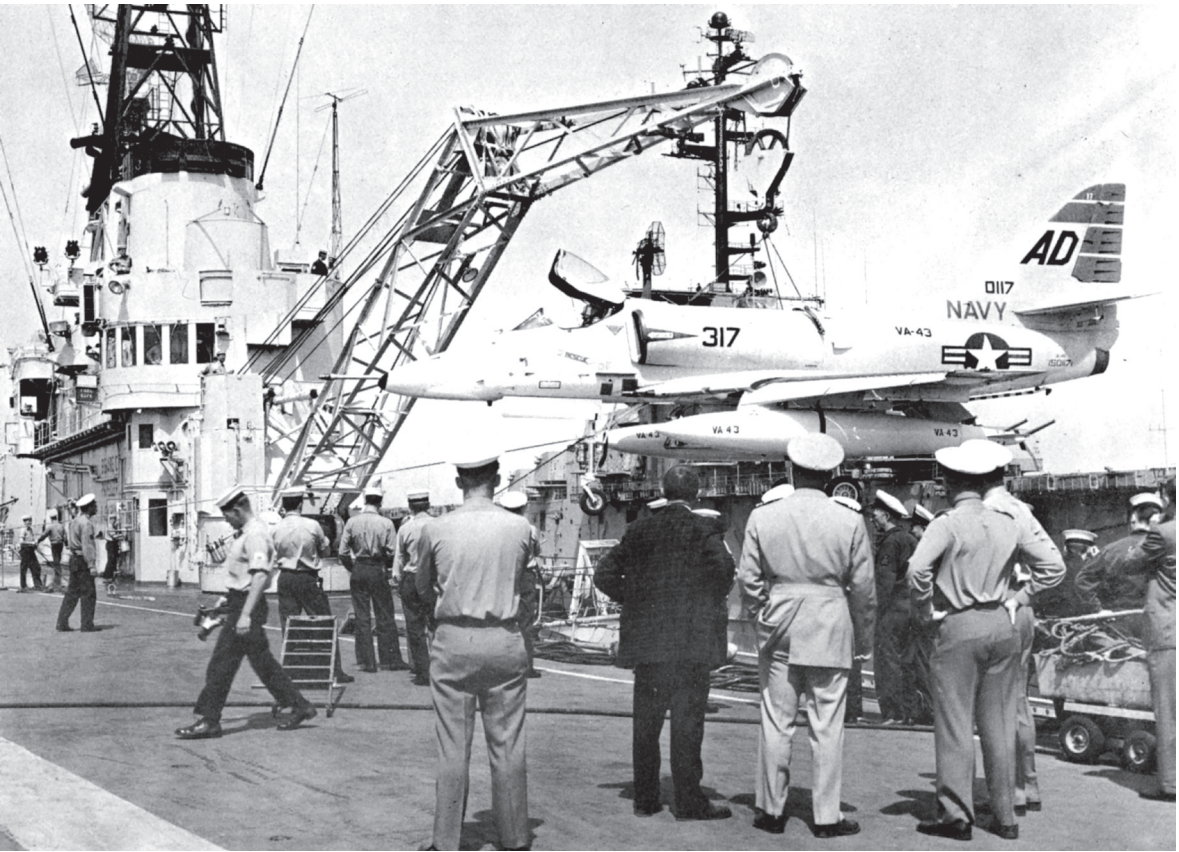
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Douglas A4 being hoisted aboard HMCS Bonaventure by the ship's crane.

PHASE ONE

ENTHUSIASM

CHAPTER ONE

*“There must be a beginning of any great matter,
but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished
yields the true glory.”*

Sir Francis Drake, 1540-1596

On a rainy winter morning in January 1964 Commander Michael Prescott sat at his desk in the Royal Canadian Navy's Pacific headquarters speculating on the reasons why he was being called up to National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa. Christmas and New Year holidays were over last week and postings usually weren't finalized until spring. Anyway, he'd already told his career manager his posting preferences and anything to do with a new job could have been resolved over the telephone. His summons to Ottawa from Victoria had been classed as Urgent which had seemed odd as well, but would help justify a return airline ticket.

Prescott picked up his telephone and dialled 2715, the Chief of Staff's extension.

"Mary, if Captain Davis isn't busy could I have a few minutes with him?"

Mary asked why he wasn't bursting through her door unannounced as usual, then told him to come on upstairs.

Captain Ron Davis, Chief of Staff to the Admiral, sat back in his armchair professing ignorance. "I don't know why you're needed in the head shed, Michael, but you can take advantage of a visit to Ottawa to see the Combat Systems guys, ask them about our new broad-band jammers. Oh, and when you're in Personnel, ask them what priority we have for more combat systems engineers, will you? You'd better take your greatcoat and mukluks, though!"

Davis laughed happily at the thought of Prescott in Ottawa in the middle of winter. "Mary, get us some coffee, please!"

This was highly unsatisfactory. Michael had no intention of appearing before an Air Commodore in Ottawa without knowing why he was being summoned. Impatiently he asked Davis for his agreement to some changes to ship and aircraft operational deployments. After a few more minutes of somewhat desultory conversation he finished his coffee and left Davis' office, grinning at Mary on the way out. "See you later, you gorgeous creature." Mary blushed and looked away from the tall, heavy-set officer. Whenever Commander Prescott spoke to her she had to fan herself afterward.

Back in his office, Michael direct-dialled his friend and Royal Military College classmate Bob Turner, former commanding officer of the destroyer HMCS *Terra Nova*. Last summer, much to his disappointment, Bob had been posted to Ottawa in the Personnel directorate and still complained about his transition from ship-driver to staff officer.

“Jeez, question not the orders of us supermen in the Headquarters, Michael. Who knows, soon you may be one of us! No no, I don’t know, the boss hasn’t told us what he wants to see you about. What’s more he hasn’t told anyone else either so there’s no point going around his or my back to his secretary. Jenny learned to be close-mouthed before the turn of the century. By the way, congratulations on handling the Hawaii exercises so well – not bad for an aviator.”

They exchanged remarks about Bob’s successor and the destroyer *Terra Nova’s* workups which reflected credit mostly on her former commanding officer. After wishing Bob and his wife a happy New Year, Michael hung up the telephone, breathed “Gotcha!” and dialled Bill Pinkus at the boat-shed.

“Commissioned Officer Pinkus please, Commander Prescott speaking. Hello Bill? Listen you old sinner, you owe me one. Jenny Peters – come on, don’t go mushy on me, it’s too early in the morning, and surely she puts her panties on one leg at a time even in Ottawa – Jenny’s boss wants to see me. Only the two of them know why.”

“More’n likely they’re convening your court martial, boss!” Pinkus observed.

“Well, that’s one way to get promoted. Look Bill, seeing as how I’m the greatest leader since Nelson, call Jenny and tell her you want to come and work for me. That should generate something about my visit to Ottawa, maybe when or where I’m being posted. But don’t say anything about me asking. How about it?” Pinkus tried to get out of it but eventually he agreed to call Jenny and find out what was going on.

The results of this intelligence collection strategy were highly satisfactory. Over a beer at the Naden wardroom that evening Bill told Michael that Jenny was still the light of his life, and had let slip the fact that Cabinet had approved the Defence Department’s recommendation to replace the Navy’s

old McDonnell Banshee fighter aircraft. When Bill mentioned Prescott's name to her she had acknowledged his forthcoming visit to Ottawa, but said that even her boss Air Commodore Allford didn't seem to know the reason for the visit; he would be taking Prescott in to see an Assistant Deputy Minister. Jenny had said she didn't know which one and refused to tell Pinkus anything more.

Michael thanked Pinkus and agreed that their score was even. Almost as an afterthought Michael offered him two years in the dockyard headquarters building as Staff Officer Small Craft, which Bill jumped at. Michael would set up Bill's posting when he visited the Personnel directorate in Ottawa. Pinkus happily ordered two more beers.

• • •

Prescott tilted his seat back, enjoying the comforts of business class seating in Air Canada's DC-8 non-stop flight from Vancouver to Ottawa. Having just hung up his blue uniform coat and cap in the crew space, the stewardess brought him a second orange juice with his breakfast, making a mental note to come back and talk to the big naval officer later.

He hadn't had any difficulty convincing the travel clerk at Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt that he was too tall to sit in the regular seats in the rear of the aircraft. His size and naval uniform were usually enough to convince Canadian Forces travel clerks (especially women) that his commercial air ticket should be upgraded to business class.

Travel funds were limited toward the end of the fiscal year and he had been prepared to sweet-talk the clerk. He would have accepted any commercial flight, even a red-eye overnight would have been better than waiting two days for the Royal Canadian Air Force service flight out of Comox and Vancouver. Service flights, he reflected, and grimaced at the thought of

the cardboard box lunch he had avoided. Another alternative would have been to fly one of the Utility Squadron T-33s from Patricia Bay to Ottawa himself, but Michael had already completed his quarterly proficiency flying and he doubted whether the squadron commander would have authorized the flight. As it turned out the young travel clerk had succumbed and upgraded his ticket to business class. Flying commercially, he would arrive in Ottawa tonight for his appointment tomorrow morning with the Director General Officers Careers.

As the DC-8 levelled out at its assigned altitude Michael finished his orange juice and glanced out of the cabin window at the expanse of cloud obscuring the Rockies. Guessing that the weather system would be moving into Alberta, he gave up thoughts of identifying prairie towns from the air. Getting a start on his officers' evaluations would be more worthwhile. After that he'd read the Holy Grail report again, particularly the recommendations. Of fifteen aircraft evaluated, three small fighters met the Royal Canadian Navy's future requirements for air defence in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. He had flown them all; good birds, he thought. The Royal Canadian Air Force was being equipped with Northrop CF5s; US Navy and Marine Corps squadrons flew the Douglas A4C Skyhawk and the North American FJ4 Fury.

Reluctantly Michael reached for his briefcase and focussed his attention on his officers' evaluations: first, Lieutenant-Commander Jack Evans, his senior staff officer and close friend. He would get Jack promoted next fall. Captain Davis would concur with anything he wrote about Jack, having seen him at work during the exercises off Hawaii. Then Jack could expect to command his own destroyer and would continue to be one of Michael's allies. Michael's ball-point pen scribbled glowing descriptions of Jack's performance.

The stewardess took his breakfast tray away without engaging him in conversation. Clearly he had work to do and didn't look as if he would welcome an interruption. Maybe she'd have an opportunity later in the flight. He'd be worth a try, she thought.

• • •

At about the same time as her husband completed his subordinates' evaluations Laura Prescott finished clearing lunch away, deciding not to start the dishwasher until after supper. While she was driving Michael out to the Victoria airport earlier this morning he had told her he wouldn't be back from Ottawa until Saturday evening. The rest of the housework already done, she stretched luxuriously. Today was only Tuesday; four more days with their children back in school again. Well, Mike junior was only in kindergarden but she had more time to herself now, she thought, and Sandy – their au pair girl from Sweden – was very good with them. What would she do this afternoon? She was well prepared for her lecture tomorrow morning and she'd finished marking the rest of her students' Christmas examinations last night.

What about calling Myra Strickland at the University of Victoria? Was Laura ready to change faculties? They didn't need the extra income any more: Michael's salary as a Commander and his continued proficiency flying paid all the bills with some left over. Living rent-free with her father-in-law on Beach Drive helped a lot. She and Michael paid the taxes but his seventy-year-old father wouldn't hear of them paying any rent, and loved having his grandchildren living in the same house.

Laura smiled to herself; her father-in-law liked her cooking, too. Michael's mother had developed cancer several years

ago and had died a year before Michael and Laura were posted to Victoria from the US Naval War College in Rhode Island. Living alone, old David Prescott had insisted that they move in with him; the house would be theirs after he died anyway and they might as well enjoy it now. He wanted to see his grandchildren playing in the big garden. They could learn to play tennis later on, he said, and when his grandson was old enough he'd be on the water with a dinghy to fool around in. Laura had always worried about Mike Junior playing near the sea and continually kept an eye on him when he was outside. Having him in kindergarden was less of a worry.

The house was wonderful, a big old Maclure house in good condition, right on the waterfront beside the golf course. The view from the living room, dining room, and the veranda around them was spectacular – Chatham and Discovery Islands, the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and Mount Baker on clear afternoons. She could see even further from the bedrooms upstairs: southward over Trial Island to the Olympic mountains behind Port Angeles and southwest toward Sooke.

Her own father had told her that the west coast of Canada was like Sweden only not so cold in winter, and the Canadian Rockies were bigger than the Köln mountain range between Sweden and Norway. Papa and her mother still had Swedish accents despite living in Vancouver for the past forty years. The Stenbergs had returned to Stockholm to visit relatives just after World War Two, but had felt themselves outsiders and never went back to Sweden again. Occasionally they came over to Victoria to visit Laura, Michael and their Prescott grandchildren but they would never agree to stay in David Prescott's house, big as it was. Laura smiled again at her parents' independence. Although her father could barely afford it he would rather pay for a motel than stay as a guest in someone else's house.

It had been raining but now the sun streamed through an open kitchen window. Daydreaming won't help my career, Laura thought. She had enjoyed the last two years as assistant professor of American history but there was no future in the arts faculty. No-one ever moved away and people seemed to be immortal in Victoria so promotion at the University was impossible. Laura was somewhat surprised at herself. Michael had enough ambition for both of them – why did she feel she had to have a successful career too? She tucked in a few strands of blonde hair and re-set the rubber bands around her ponytail.

Michael's father limped into the kitchen, his cane tapping. Laura's thoughts of her career and her own parents receded.

"Professor Prescott, all alone," said her father-in-law. "Come downtown with me, I need some things at the drug-store and while I'm driving you can tell me what's so funny. If Michael's not coming back until Saturday you and I can have all sorts of adventures, including a film."

Laura kissed his cheek. David Prescott had all his son's good characteristics and as far as she could tell none of his flaws. They always had fun together and she had some things to do in Oak Bay too. Maybe he'd let her drive his Jaguar, she liked it better than her station wagon. "Okay Pop, but I'll have to be back at three-thirty because Susie gets off school early today. She and Mike Junior want to ride on that little train at Cordova Bay."

David replied "Can I come too?" Laura laughed. "The kids would love to have you on the train with them; when they get too cold and wet we'll buy them hamburgers at the restaurant."

With a satisfactory afternoon schedule established Laura slipped on her Morlands coat and went off to find her purse. David Prescott picked up his car keys and limped out to the garage.