



NEWS

Canadian Naval Technical History Association

On the Trail of the Navy's 'Holy Grail'

By Cdr Pat Barnhouse, RCN (Ret.)

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When the Liberal government took power in 1963, one of their first official actions was to cancel the General Purpose Frigate (GPF) building program that had been approved by the previous Progressive Conservative government. For the next few months the naval HQ operational and technical staffs spent much time seeking to define an alternative shipbuilding program, an endeavour one wag referred to as the 'ship-of-the-month club.'

In the Directorate of Systems Engineering, we were at the centre of things as the various proposed designs were passed around. One day a lieutenant commander from the naval staff (I do not recall who it was) dropped in with an exciting message: "We have decided on the way ahead!" he said. In his hand he held a Xerox copy of a back-of-an-envelope sketch for a proposed 'Repeat *Annapolis* Class' ship, apparently made by admirals Ken Dyer and Bob Welland at a cocktail party the previous afternoon. This was the genesis of the ship that grew to become the DDH-280.

Years later, while checking on details surrounding the origins of the DDH-280 for someone, I asked then retired VAdm Dan Mainguy about the sketch as he had been on the naval staff at the time. He not only confirmed the story, but added that he knew who had the original of the envelope – one LCdr Bruce Torrie, who reportedly hadn't seen it in years. Unfortunately, according to his nephew Robert Bruce Torrie, LCdr Torrie died in 1999, and such a thing as a sketch on an envelope would not have stood out as something to be kept when he was going through his uncle's papers.

So, while this trail appears to have gone cold, there is more to the story. RAdm Welland himself commented on it when the CNTHA interviewed him in 2006, four years before his death:



Photo by Canadian Armed Forces

HMCS *Iroquois* (DDH-280) with her gas-turbine propulsion plant, Sea Sparrow missile point-defence system and 5,000-ton displacement was hardly a repeat of the *Annapolis* class (next page), but the family resemblance is there all the same. While the 2,400-ton *Annapolis* (DDH-265) was placed in reserve in 1996 after 32 years of service, a much-modernized version of *Iroquois* is still in operational service with Canada's Maritime Forces Atlantic 42 years after she was commissioned.

Well you asked about settling the design of the ship and a rumour that went around that it was designed on the back of a cigarette package...absolute crap. We worked our heads off for months: research, everything.

This rather introduces a slight complication. If one of the supposed participants had no memory of doing so, where does that leave us? A back-of-the-envelope sketch clearly existed, but who made it?

Directorate of History and Heritage naval historian Lt(N) Jason Delaney, who worked on volume III of the official history of the RCN, offers some fascinating historical insight surrounding the new ship program:

Yes, Dan Mainguy's interview mentions this, but every program has a back-of-a-cigarette-pack/envelope/napkin "I designed it" story, and this is just one of them. I don't

doubt there was some doodling on scrap paper; however, it is a bit of a leap to say that this is how a multi-million-dollar warship procurement program started. There were lots of plans in the works during this period and this was just one of them presented as an option.

We are talking about an era (Paul Hellyer was Minister of National Defence) when the services were under great scrutiny. In fact, there was a moratorium on all DND contracting throughout 1963 when the GPF was cancelled. The government agreed to a repeat *Annapolis/Nipigon* design and the program 'crept' from there, beginning with the change to gas turbine propulsion. This was done for various reasons, but Hellyer liked the new technology and, operationally, the old *St. Laurent*-type hulls had reached their development limit in terms of maximum speed using a steam plant. Quite simply, they were no longer fast enough for modern fleet work, being too slow for operations with American strike fleets and on the verge of obsolescence when dealing with the speed and agility of

nuclear submarines. In addition, there was a need for a shipboard air defence system following the retirement of the navy's carrier-based F2H3 Banshee fighter-interceptors in 1962. Our ships were vulnerable to air attack. These were all very big problems that the naval leadership was dealing with at the time. Despite Hellyer agreeing to a repeat design, all these other considerations crept into the program, resulting in a very different class of ship.

Those were interesting times indeed. Every ship has its beginnings, but unless by some strange good fortune the elusive sketch should one day miraculously reappear, the story of the actual genesis moment of the DDH-280 tribal-class destroyer (which is still in service) will forever have this fogbound footnote attached to its history.

For more reading on this subject, go to the CNTHA website and download Hal Smith and Shawn Cafferky's article: *Looking Back: How the DDH-280 Began* (MEJ No. 44 – June 1998) at: <http://www.cntha.ca/images/Otherdocs/mej/mej-44.pdf>



Photo by Canadian Armed Forces

HMCS *Annapolis*