

# THE KAREL DOORMAN SORTIE

*by George Plawski*

The North Sea breeze augmented by the carrier's 18 knots produced a buffeting gale along the deck into which the launch crew leaned with purposeful determination. Caparisoned in our poopy suits we plodded to our assigned machines and clambered clumsily on board.

With everyone strapped in I started the engines, completed the run up and reported "1597 READY!" to Flyco.

"1587 READY!" Bill Nash echoed from the plane behind us.

The light on the carrier's superstructure changed from red to green and the Director, feet rooted astride the catapult shuttle slot, raised his crossed arms.

I knew the chock holders were clear when he marshalled me forward.

I responded to his sharply deliberate signals with bursts of power and taps of brakes and taxied toward him till the main wheels abutted the positioning chocks.

We felt the shuttle slide under the nose wheel and waited for it to be attached by the bridle to our catapult hook; tensioned against the hold back, the nose lifted off the deck into the takeoff attitude.

The Director turned control over to the Flight Deck Officer and scurried away past the right wing tip.

We rechecked the last cockpit items: flaps, trims, hatches, harness, brakes off, cat grip, head rest.

The FDO raised his green flag then circled it over his head.

I pushed the throttles fully forward and meshed the knobs with the cat grip. A shuddering roar drowned everything out. A practised scan of the instruments showed all within limits. YES! I shouted to Dave Muckle on the intercom, peripherally saw him salute the FDO and braced for the rush.

Just another routine cat shot off the Bonaventure, but there was something distinctly different about the launch this 24th day of October, 1963.

In order to flesh in the background leading up to this moment, permit me at this point to push a figurative pause button, admittedly a syntactically awkward device for inserting an exegesis, but it will suit my narrative purposes and eventually permit an elegant return to the story.

The above artificially aborted launch was entirely unexpected, and proved to be the last flight off the ship terminating two weeks of intensive all weather ops with a combined NATO fleet north of Scotland.

The mission with which we were hurriedly entrusted, however, was highly unorthodox, so it wasn't surprising that some of our squadron mates may have found it strange that it should have been Nash and me who were chosen for this unique assignment.

Personally, I suspected a return of the impish demons who accompanied us on leave which Nash and I recently spent together. They resemble the same invisible elves which habitually manipulate the characters in Shakespeare's Comedies whose conventional function is to stage manage the unexpected; being by nature mercurial and fickle, their influence is at best unpredictable.

In our case, they appear to have selected us primarily for their amusement, at least in the beginning, otherwise how can one explain the capricious reversals, whimsical turnarounds and unaccountable twists of

fortune which accompanied our odyssey at every turn?

It all started at the beginning of June, 1963, when the Fates conspired that we were both due for 30 days of leave. Bill and I had known each other since flight training, but we had never become running mates. His reservations may have arisen due to my undeservedly tainted reputation as a past member of the Poirier-Washbrook-Plawski triad.

If this was the case, then prior to teaming up with me, Bill would have been wise to note that both of my erstwhile accomplices had recently abandoned me by taking refuge in wedlock. Be that as it may, since our leaves coincided, why not spend them together we reasoned, and sat down to concoct an itinerary.

As a cadet in the ONTARIO in 1957 Bill had visited Japan, which without hesitation we now adopted as our destination. Pappy McLeod had serious misgivings about signing our leave form.

How do you plan to get there? He inquired. Nothing to it, we assured him; MATS to the west coast, naval transport to NAS Atsugi, and we're in Geisha land.

Good naturedly, Pappy recommended that we submit a more reasonable proposal.

Exhibiting exemplary flexibility, we switched our attention to Europe and our focus soon narrowed down to Sweden. We suddenly found ourselves enraptured by the civilizing aspect of Nordic traditions, specifically illustrated by the Swedish girls' well publicised habit of inviting gentlemen to spend the night, then enjoying breakfast served to them in bed by approving parents in the morning. With Pappy's blessing, we light-heartedly said Sayonara to the setting sun, and bid God Morgon to sunrise.

Our new plan, we decided, would be facilitated by our brothers in arms from Greenwood.

Last winter we had embarked some Maritime Patrol Squadron pilots on day trips in the Bonnie, let them observe our ops and took them up on CLP's. Gushing with gratitude, they presented our squadron with a standing offer to accompany them on their patrols.

We knew that one of their destinations was Bally Kelly, Ireland, which could be a convenient first step to Stockholm; moreover, this might even offer an opportunity to meet up with Bill's girl friend Susan who was at that time holidaying in Spain with a travelling companion.

We phoned the squadron next morning and found them profoundly flattered that we showed such interest in their work. Lamentably, they were unable to oblige with Ireland, but would we be interested in the Azores? They were prepared to offer a flight which was conveniently scheduled to depart at two in the morning; we would be welcome to act as observers during the 18 hour patrol, land at the Lajes airport on the exotic island of Terceira, enjoy a meal and a restful night's sleep in the Officers' Mess, then repeat the benefit with an instructive trip home.

How could it get any better? We accepted with pleasure, commiserated with their disappointment that we would only be taking advantage of their offer one way, talked HU21 into a cross country which dropped us off in Greenwood, then settled into the bar the closing of which at midnight conveniently dovetailed with the start of the briefing.

When it was over we were politely awakened and boarded the Argus to continue our repose. Well into the morning, we became aware of a ripple of excitement as the entire crew crowded to the windows and exchanged binoculars while consulting some manual. Expecting to see the entire Soviet high seas fleet manoeuvring below us, we were somewhat disappointed that a sad looking tramp plodding forlornly through the waves was the sole cause of the alarm. After a while, apparently satisfied with a successful identification, they dispersed back to their stations.

This was repeated several more times, and nothing could demonstrate more vividly the crushing boredom of these patrols.

We wasted no time after landing; a taxi deposited us in the town of Angra, where we applied ourselves to a concentrated study of the local culture. On return to the BOQ I could hear what sounded like a lively party

next door. Never one to pass up a prospective shindig, I looked in and discovered the entire Argus crew engaged in a spirited game of poker. Evidently sensing a patsy, they eagerly provided a chair. Though I possessed some familiarity with the penny and toothpick variety of the game, I had never acquired the requisite skills to play for actual money. It soon turned out that even if I had possessed them, I would have had no need to tap into such resources that evening.

From the very first deal I found myself swept up in a streak which defies natural explanation. It seemed that every hand I was dealt was a winner. This was a night when I was a sure bet to fill an inside straight. In half an hour, the room emptied in disgust leaving me in possession of every dollar, pound, frank, mark, peso, dinar and escudo in circulation – this was a well travelled group - plus two IOU's made good in the morning. When Nash awoke, he found himself in the company of a slightly hung over, but considerably more prosperous companheiro.

That was well and good, but we now needed to find a way to escape from this island. Fortunately, Lajes was a busy staging ground for transport and patrol aircraft, as well as being home base for a squadron of USAF refuelling tankers. We began by approaching anyone with wings and asking where they might be going. A Portuguese Air Force pilot offered a lift to Lisbon, but on sighting his aircraft which was a dead ringer for a prototype of a Ford Trimotor, we politely declined.

That evening, boldly disporting his celebrated directness, Bill accosted a USAF Colonel who was dining in his flight suit. It transpired that Bill had stumbled on to the CO of a KC97 refuelling squadron who was leaving at 1am for some base in North Africa from where, he assured us, we'd have no problem hitching a ride to anywhere in Europe.

Gratefully we settled on board. A couple of hours into the flight, we were invited to the cockpit. The Colonel was an affable Southerner with accent to match. So what's a pair of Canadian Lieutenants doin' cadging rides from Air Force bases? He inquired. We told him about our eventual Swedish destination, but mentioned that first we'd like to try to team up with Bill's girl friend in Spain. His eyes lit up. Why, Madrid has the best goddam O club in the world! The steak and lobster, they practically give it away, and besides, a fabulous Flamenco group was booked in this week.

"Navigator!" he called over our shoulders, "these here Canadian boys want to see their girl friends in Spain. It's been a while since we've been there, so shape a course for Madrid, we'll spend the night, and dinner for the crew is on me".

Presently, with our jaws in our laps, we observed a 30 degree turn to port, and I'll never forget how the coast of Portugal materialized out of the night illumed by the slanted rays of the rising sun. We thanked our benefactor profusely and proceeded to the BOQ.

How do you beat this streak of luck? I mused as we lined up to check in. There was some delay; looking around I spotted a one armed bandit, lonely as a sentry, guarding the entrance door. I idled over, selected an American quarter from my poker winnings and pulled the handle. Three symbols lined up, bells rang and I had to leap aside to avoid an explosive vomit of coinage.

Bill could only roll his eyes as I scampered around on my knees, and I swear I could hear those puckish demons chortling in the background.

Meantime Susan and friend were enjoying their stay in a hotel in Sitges, next to Barcelona, oblivious of our unexpected proximity. Bill phoned and sprang the news. A flurry of arrangements followed; we'd book a flight leaving this evening from Madrid, and the girls would rent a second room. We knew nothing about Susan's friend, but I warned Bill, if she turns out to be a wooper, he'd better plan on a male roommate.

That Iberia flight to Barcelona remains indelibly etched in our memories. The pilot entered a thunderstorm of a ferocity neither of us will ever forget; how that Viscount remained intact is an enduring mystery. The girls were waiting on the tarmac. This was the first time that I'd met Susan, and all I could think of was – Nash, you lucky son of a bitch!

Evidently the Fates agreed, because in retrospect it's easy to reconstruct the deliberate footfalls of their plot.

I was relieved to find that Susan's friend was endowed with a comforting averageness, but she had shapely legs and washed my socks, so we got on quite well. We spent several days touring Barcelona, enjoyed a leisurely drive to Paris, and booked into the Hotel Louvre on the Rue de Rivoli.

We luxuriated in all that this city had to offer for two active days, after which the ladies' holiday expired; Susan's departure left Bill practically inconsolable, until I pointed out to him that this, after the 24th of August, 1944, marked the second liberation of Paris. The city of light was ours!

Marginally mollified, Bill accepted a less structured routine. We immediately changed to more affordable accommodations near the Place Pigalle, and churches and museums vanished from our itinerary.

I was at that time well short of my future infatuation with the Paris of the Belle Époque, of the evolution of the artistic and literary movements which it spawned, and particularly of the pre and post WW1 influx of American and Canadian ex-pats on whose lives and work this city exerted such an enduring influence.

The two of us, however, chose to follow in the more frolicsome footsteps of our forebears without leaving much of a mark behind us, unless one counts my belt without which unaccountably I returned to my room one night. [I refuse to comment on the imprint of the buckle on my face.]

After a few busy days and lively nights, out of sheer exhaustion we took stock of our situation and remembered our original destination.

Sweden now beckoned like a welcome reprieve, so we wasted no time, rented a car and picked a route through Germany. Somewhere off the autobahn during a meal break we met a group of tourists who happened to be returning from Stockholm. Bill immediately approached them and eagerly sought their impressions; was everything as liberal as we'd been led to believe? Were the parents as approving as we'd heard? What did you find out? I asked when he returned to my table.

They didn't have a clue, he answered somewhat dejected. I'm not surprised, I said, what did you expect from a busload of pensioners?

We met more tourists in Hamburg, this time closer to our age. Nice countryside, they offered, but otherwise quite dull.

That was enough to tip the scales; without further ado, we dumped the car at the railway station and bought passage to Blighty.

Fleeting, the knowing smile on the face of the ticket salesman made me think of Puck.

The train ride was horrid; we were obliged to sit on our luggage in the corridor all the way to Oostend. Up for a breath of fresh air on the bow of the ferry to Dover, I found myself conversing with a captivating Belgian, bound for Brighton to learn English in summer school, which sadly started tomorrow. This had a briskly tumescent effect on my pedagogic instincts, and I was delighted that she accepted to bone up on the basics with some preparatory tuition prior to registering for classes.

I am pleased to report that in just three days, my French and her English underwent considerable improvement.

Bill in the meantime was exhibiting signs of restlessness. The British Open was being played at Royal Lytham at St. Anne's which portended to be an amusing diversion, so we settled in nearby Blackpool.

We watched the last two days, [eventually Bob Charles won in a 36 hole playoff with Bill Rogers], but Blackpool, with its attendant Butlin's Holiday Camp, attracted the coarsest level of blue collar vacationers, the most depraved of whom were living in our hotel. The climax came when Bill, attracted by the sounds of revelry down the hall, decided to investigate. On looking through the door, he discovered an intriguing tableau of interconnectivity composed of a writhing arrangement of naked bodies.

On closer inspection, the revellers turned out to be an exclusively male ensemble who enthusiastically invited Bill to participate; this prompted him to compose a pithy phrase which convincingly expressed his disinclination, soon followed by the termination of our contract with the hotel and a hasty return to London.

That proved to have been the inciting moment for our Billy; with eleven days of leave still unused he awakened to a more pressing motivation, purchased a ticket on TCA, flew back to Canada and the rest as they say is history.

Though Bill left me stranded and I missed his company, the Fates substituted a namesake to take his place; in fact two of them. I no longer recall where or how I met the Nash brothers, or why they adopted me into their company. These two spivvey, immaculately dressed cockneys looked like performers from an east London casting of Guys and Dolls, except they were the real thing.

I was told in confidence that they were the leaders of a faction of the city's underworld, and though I never witnessed their gangster activities, their importance, which they enjoyed flaunting, was clearly evident by the way that wherever we went, they never needed to queue or pay a cover charge, and by their lavish tips.

They were in their thirties, and though I occasionally felt like something between a court jester and a pet monkey, I found the world they in which they operated utterly engrossing. This was the time of the Profumo affair and the brothers knew some of the participants. I was supposed to meet Mandy Rice Davies, but the date fell through, possibly because she discovered that my poker winnings were long gone. The favourite dish in Italian restaurants that summer was Christine Catch-a-Tory. One of the brothers arranged a flat for my disposal, furnished with massive Victorian furniture, near Victoria station, which was managed by a young person of ambiguous gender who insisted on bringing breakfast to me in bed, and always somehow knew whether it was to be for one or for two.

I attended some exotic parties and remember one in Belgravia at which I was entrusted somebody's Bentley to drive selected partygoers around town. I particularly recall the evening when one of the brothers escorted me to the elegant nightclub; Winston's, introduced me to the owner and departed. Headlining the show was the transvestite performer, Danny La Rue. This one man show turned out to be a lavish spectacular performed by a consummate artist, who for many years afterwards delighted audiences at the Palladium, The Palace and The Prince of Wales.

After the show, the owner introduced me to Mr. La Rue who joined me at my table. I felt I was in the presence of an incarnation of one of my most cherished heroes, Oscar Wilde. We sat engrossed in conversation as the crowd thinned out, eventually leaving a group of four in this extravagant setting; the owner, Danny, myself, and a waitress with an indeterminate agenda.

I felt most privileged for this opportunity to bask till early morning in the wit and charm of this remarkable man, and though I was highly flattered by his sincere intention of deepening our relationship, I knew that he understood the existential obligation which demanded that the lady at our table be offered an escort home.

Engrossed in this blur of activity, I suddenly awoke to the sobering reality that I only had three more days of leave. Accordingly I hurried to the Air Ministry and was guided to an RAF dispatcher. So you'd like a lift to Canada, you say; well, let's see; there is a Britannia leaving tomorrow to pick up some pongoes – he even knew the expression! - From an army camp called Gagetown. It will be landing in Fredericton. Will that do?

Did I detect that puckish grin again? Very nicely, I assured him. Jolly good, report at ten AM to RAF Lyneham. The box lunch will cost you one pound ten. With great sorrow I bid adieu to this other dimension where I'd existed as a fascinated abductee, and resigned myself to re-inhabit my appointed role.

I arrived at Lyneham and melted into the alien world of uniforms when suddenly I was confronted by a familiar face. Hallaran/Plawski! What in hell are you doing here? We shouted in unison. Hal had been visiting his mother and was going back on the same flight. Sometimes the world can be very small. [But never smaller than some ten years later when I was having an afternoon pint in a little known theatre pub called the Lamb and Flag in tiny Rose Street between Charing Cross Road and Covent Garden. I decided to call Mike Langman, who was at that time working in Holborn for the Air Ministry, and asked the publican if he had a phone. Not on the premises, he said, but there's a booth outside. I collected some change, stepped out and dialled his number. While the phone was ringing, I glanced down the lane. A man with a briefcase was approaching the booth. It was Mike Langman. I pressed button B and my change was refunded.]

We landed in Fredeticton to face the next unchartered stage of the journey; how do we get to Shearwater? Our memories fail us at this juncture, because neither Hal nor I remember who responded to our plea and arrived in a Tracker to pick us up, but someone did. On arrival in Shearwater I discovered that the Fates had been equally busy on this side of the Atlantic, but here to a decisively more meaningful purpose. Albeit secretly, Bill had married Susan!

Flying training started in earnest through August and carried on into September in preparation for exercise Sharp Squall planned for later that month. Dave Muckle was my co pilot, with LS Jim Dodd and AB Paul Legere [?] completing the crew. We flew crew trainers, Marlant patrols and cross country instrument flights, but my log book also shows instrument take offs, bombing sorties and lots of field carrier landing practice.

During those two busy months I had the pleasure to fly with Robin Thoms, Charlie Poirier, Norm Etheridge, Ken Sheedy, Bob Tanton, Pinky Turner, Gus Youngson and Irish O'Rourke. We sailed from Halifax on the 25th of September, seriously delayed by a boiler explosion, and spent the crossing renewing deck qualifications with night and day CLP's for which I was teamed up with Jack Arnott, Al Bingley, Ralph Nelson, Bill Nash, and in atrocious weather, a memorably hairy night with Norm Etheridge.

Prior to boarding, Charlie and I received our postings to VU32, so we knew this was to be our last operational deployment in 880.

When we reached the exercise area north of Scotland, we worked with combined fleets from France, Denmark, Norway, The US, UK and the Netherlands with overall command executed from HMS Tiger, in weather which was generally appalling, [see Snowie's BONNIE chapt. 11].

The Dutch were represented by several destroyers and the carrier Karel Doorman. Those of you who were on board for that trip will undoubtedly recall the evening when a sudden alarming shudder permeated the ship; news from the bridge informed us that we'd had to go full astern to miss a collision with the straying Dutch destroyer OVERIJSEL.

Two hours later we were alerted by another convulsive tremble accompanied by a violent list to port. We now learned that the aforementioned hell bent destroyer had repeated the manoeuvre, but this time came within a hair of being bisected when it disappeared under our bow. In retrospect, in keeping with the law of threes, might these two ominous events have been recognised as a warning that close encounters with the Dutch were not quite exhausted? With a portion of the exercise complete, we anchored in Cromarty Firth near Invergordon and played golf on the famous links at Tain where, on learning we had paid green fees, outraged members of the club insisted we be refunded our money.

I clearly remember one evening when the captain of a Norwegian destroyer assigned a motor craft for our disposal from which, along with some Dutch aircrew, we terrorised a French frigate after a ricestaffel blowout in the Karel Doorman.

We then sailed again for the second part of the exercise, and somewhere along the way embarked two CBC reporters, a gentleman named Cleary whom I took up for a CLP demo, and the redoubtable broadcaster Stanley Burke whose unlimited access to the bar suited him admirably.

I used to host a news and music program on the ship's radio in those days, so I approached Mr. Burke with a request for an interview. Why not, he responded, followed me into the radio room, stretched out on a table and fell dead asleep. This put me into an embarrassing dilemma since Mr. Burke held the status of the Peter Mansbridge of his day, minus the tact, but plus a generous dose of penetrating intimidation.

With much apprehension, I respectfully nudged him awake, and perhaps due to his short snooze, he came up graciously cooperative and gave me a memorable, hour long interview which, by popular demand, I was obliged to replay on numerous occasions.

On the 24th of October, a Thursday, with the exercise complete, we were steaming lazily down the east coast of Scotland toward Rosyth when word went out that a two plane sortie was to be launched that

afternoon and, as I mentioned earlier, Bill Nash and I found ourselves on the schedule. The reason for the launch was attributed to intelligence obtained by the CIC that RN MTB's were lurking in the fjords and planned to execute torpedo attacks on the passing fleet.

Our mission was to provide a defence against this contemptible plot by deploying a rarely used weapon system, operationally known as ACP, [Atomised Cereal Powder], to be provided by the ship's bakery in brown paper bags, which would be dropped by our Naval Aircrewmen out of the back door with a view to foil the attackers with a blinding reincarnation of the famous WW2 Window.

Recognizing this flight as an official lark, I requested our galley cook to provide me with a dozen hard boiled eggs, which during my pre flight inspection I distributed in the nooks and crannies of the under carriage.

The briefing included the usual items such as weather, [ expected VFR ] ships in company, [ the Karel Doorman 5 miles ahead on our port bow, flying stations secured ], the projected time and position for recovery, and known intelligence about the enemy.

The update is now complete; it is time to return to the opening tableau wherein you will recall we immobilized our Tracker with full power on the cat, and froze the FDO with his green flag up. Let me now push the PLAY button to reanimate the launch sequence.

With my left hand on the control column, the elbow buried in the gut, the helmet firm against the head rest, a death grip on the throttles and the right elbow joint over centre, we waited for the rush of acceleration to fling us into the air.

The FDO dropped his flag, the launcher in the Howdah\* pushed the appropriate button, and a second later, as we caged our eyeballs and caught our breath, we were airborne. I had a fleeting image of Nash getting pelted with a flurry of eggs, but now my focus switched to the beckoning grey shape looming ahead to port.

There is no need to explain to any self respecting Navy pilot the meaning of fair game. It was enshrined in our psyche, immortalized in our songs: "They gave me a Seafire to beat up the fleet.....", and was now staring us in the face.

I descended to the wave tops, maintained climb power and aimed for the starboard quarter of the ship. We ate up the distance in no time, and when the carrier towered impossibly above us, I climbed up to bridge level and rolling in 90 degrees of bank pulled hard to starboard mooning the Dutch with a bellicose close up of our belly.

I must admit I was very pleased with myself as we climbed away when the radio came alive: "This is Highground; aircraft that made the pass on the Karel Doorman report your side number!"

Though I felt entitled to kudos, the tone of voice was distinctly unfriendly. I was about to answer when Dave, with what I thought was unseemly haste, beat me to it. Nothing more was said, nevertheless a feeling of unease nibbled at my senses. Was I to be dropped in kaka for something as natural as a beat up? Surely not.

The Banshee and Sea Fury guys used to hang gongs on themselves for far less.

"They gave me a Tracker to beat up the fleet..." did this somehow sound a false note? Did it lower the level of established lore?

For chrissake, they asked for it; I caught the bastards flat footed! ....and I thought we were expected to be aggressive! ....how the hell else did we sink the goddam Bismarck?!

I put these misgivings aside to enjoy the MTB pursuit; just as the Aircrewmen were having fun in their new role with the flour bombs, we received a fresh assignment. Both aircraft were to continue patrol until dark, then proceed to Lossiemouth, eat supper in RNAS Fulmar, then trap on board at 2am.

We landed and found some food in a particularly dark and dreary mess, and then Bill unwittingly added to the gloom with a discouraging view of my prospects. We were already fatigued from what turned out to be a

5.4 hour flight, and were about to launch for another 3.8 night patrol. In spite of the hour, Ben Oxholm was waiting for me on deck to inform me that I had a rendezvous with Captain Timbrell at 8am in his cabin.

I was ushered into his presence in the company of our CO, "Doughy" McLean.

"Off caps!" he ordered.

Captain Timbrell first paced back and forth in silence on the other side of the table, clearly gearing himself up for a serious disquisition. When finally he stopped, he paused for effect with his hands on the back of a chair, then with whitening knuckles, in an icy voice, addressed the enormity of my transgressions. I recall his words verbatim.

"Plawski" he said after consulting a piece of paper on the table, "in one thoughtless moment you have destroyed 10 years of good will between the Royal Dutch Navy and the RCN!" I admit this took my breath away. "Moreover" the Captain continued, "I will not have you return to Canada in my ship. You will pack your bags and transfer to the ALGONQUIN. That will be all."

I might have been tempted to find this a slight over reaction, but who knows, perhaps the Dutch Admiral sent a rocket to the Bonnie and this is the result. "On caps!" prompted Doughy and propelled me out of the cabin. We walked away in silence, my CO kindly choosing not to add to my discomfiture. When Benny found out what happened, he was thoroughly disgusted. In his opinion, which he had no qualms to express, the Captain's verdict was ridiculous. Though Ben failed in the attempt to have me exonerated, I felt very proud to have had the master of the low pass himself go to bat in my defence.

The Dutch squadrons had been invited on board for an RPC, so as soon as we tied up to seaward of the Firth of Forth Bridge, they arrived in force. I was still on board because the Algonquin had not yet entered harbour, but understandably subdued, I kept to one side. Everyone was in a jubilant mood; the formalities of exchanging gifts followed the post prandial addresses. We presented them with the customary squadron badges, to which the Dutch reciprocated with a pair of wooden clogs with their insignia cleverly embossed on top.

The ceremonies appeared to be over when unexpectedly their CO asked, "And who is the pilot who made that pass on our ship yesterday?" Not knowing what to expect, I timidly stepped forward; to my complete surprise I was submitted to a barrage of back slapping and suddenly everyone seemed to want to shake my hand. I was then presented with a special gift, a photo of the Karel Doorman, appropriately enough a close up, with this dedication inscribed on the back: "With the compliments of Commander Air and squadrons H. Neth. M.S. Karel Doorman, Oct. 24th, 1963".

Was this group unaware of the damage I had inflicted on our Navies' mutual good will? I sought a sign of reprieve from Doughy and Captain Timbrell who were present throughout, but eye contact proved elusive.

Before long, when the Dutch found out that I was being flung off the ship, their CO attempted to intervene on my behalf, but his entreaties also fell on deaf ears.

I was later told that my pass was a total surprise. A watch of four stood on the bridge including the ship's captain, who was relaxing in his chair with his jacket off. Alerted by an ungodly roar, they were convinced a Tracker was about to enter the premises. Everyone hit the deck except the CO who was thwarted in the attempt by getting his suspenders entangled with the arm rest.

Their first reaction was to exclaim "Canadian Bastard!", but when they cooled down, they had to acknowledge it was a great bounce. The loss of good will apparently did not originate with the Dutch.

A cabin was found for me in the ALGONQUIN. I was very familiar with this ship since in 1956 I had served seven months in her as a Midshipman. Though none of her previous complement was on board, I was graciously accepted by the wardroom. We spent seven days in harbour, and as I had no duties to perform, I benefited from some very agreeable shore hospitality and only showed up on board for the passage to

Brighton. There we stayed for another week; I moved to London, attended two performances of Beyond the Fringe and came back to the ship only once, to collect an advance on my pay. After a leisurely passage which included a stopover in the Azores, we arrived in Halifax where I took up my previously ordained appointment in VU 32.

There you have the unvarnished truth, free from allocations of credit or blame to invisible manipulators.

Numerous versions of this event had been circulating over the years including one which had me cashiered out of the Navy. In fact I did not leave the Navy till July 1964, exclusively of my own volition.

This decision would prove to suit my interests well, but I am certain that Captain Timbrell weighed the benefit entirely in favour of the Service.

#### POST SCRIPT

A few days after docking in Halifax, as a gesture of gratitude for the hospitality shown me by my erstwhile Algonquin hosts, I threw an RPC on board. It came to an abruptly premature halt around one thirty in the afternoon when we got the news. It was the 22nd of November, 1963.

\*Howdah: a retractable Plexiglass booth to starboard and astern of the catapult which housed the person who, on the signal from the Flight Deck Officer, was responsible for initiating the launch sequence.

