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Fifteen Men

*Canada's Prime Ministers
from Macdonald to Trudeau*

by Gordon Donaldson

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Gordon Donaldson was born in Scotland in 1926. After spending four years as a British Intelligence officer hunting down Nazis in post-war Germany, he was a reporter on Fleet Street before coming to Canada in 1954.

Since then, he has spent 12 years with the *Toronto Telegram*, as reporter, columnist and Washington correspondent. Along the way, he won the Bowater Award, the most cherished prize in Canadian journalism. In 1966, he joined the CBC, for whom he has been a roving reporter, a Washington correspondent and producer of TV news documentaries. His coverage of ghetto riots, assassinations, elections and the moon landing has made his face and voice familiar to millions of Canadian viewers. **FIFTEEN MEN** is his first book.

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copies of the bill, signed by its creator, were handed out like icons to the faithful. You could pray to them for justice but they were no use in court. Judge after judge decided that the rights incorporated in the bill — most of which had been guaranteed previously — did not take precedence over existing laws.

Canadians, average and otherwise, turned out as before, though not in the hordes of 1958. The fascination was still there but not the rapport with the leader. When the Prime Minister's caravan reached Edmonton, Southam's correspondent Charles King wrote: "In the same city where the Conservative campaign caught fire in 1958, the Diefenbaker bubble burst Friday night."

Diefenbaker turned on reporter King, accusing him of "diabolical concoctions" and declaring he would never again answer his questions at press conferences. Charles King was through, he said. When he reached Vancouver, hecklers waved placards reading: "We Want Charlie King."

While the "Diefenbubble" popped, the financial crisis blew up back east. The devaluation of the dollar should have brought an immediate surge of funds back into Canada. Instead the drain continued and grew worse; the country was going bankrupt at a rate of \$20 million a day.

Diefenbaker and his ministers maintained that all was well. Four days before the election the Prime Minister told a national television audience: "The truth has been on our side. We have given you the facts. We have bared the record. We have concealed nothing and shaded nothing."

Six days after the election he discovered that "emergent action" was needed instantly in the shape of a billion dollar loan from the U.S. and the International Monetary Fund, austerity cuts in government spending à la Coyne, and taxes to restrict imports. It was hard to believe all this had become necessary in six days. Certainly little of the truth, few of the facts, and only part of the record had been put before the voters. Nevertheless, they showed their loss of faith. Diefen-

baker lost 92 seats, retaining 116. The Liberals climbed from 48 to 98. Social Credit came back from zero to 30 and the New Democratic Party (a revamped CCF) went from 8 to 19. Only the farmers and small-town folk clung to their Chief. They represented thirteen percent of the population.

If the financial crisis had been unearthed a week earlier, the Diefenbaker regime would have ended there and then, brought down by its poor housekeeping. Instead it staggered on, crumbling inside and out, shedding fragments as it went. It fell at last as a result of a long series of blunders that began with the cancellation of an airplane contract on February 29, 1959.

The Avro CF 105 "Arrow" interceptor was the ultimate triumph of the Canadian aircraft industry built up by C. D. Howe during and after World War Two. It was the fastest and most powerful fighter in the world when it first flew in March, 1958. Similar sinister-looking jets are now standard equipment in the American and Canadian air forces but they are all American planes. The Arrow, with its Iroquois engines, was all Canadian. It had taken ten years to build up a team of scientists and engineers capable of creating such a machine. When Diefenbaker killed the Arrow project, the team left Canada taking its know-how with it, and 14,000 aircraft workers lost their jobs.

An industry died and Diefenbaker stamped on its grave by personally demanding that the five Arrows in existence be completely destroyed. These magnificent flying machines, which had cost \$685 million to develop and build, were towed fifteen miles along the Queen Elizabeth Way to Waxman's junk yard, and melted down to nothing. It was the most extravagant display of vandalism in Canadian history.

The government's excuse for cancelling the Arrow was that the plane was becoming too costly — an eventual seven million apiece instead of the expected two million — and that the threat of attack by manned Soviet bombers, which the Arrow was designed to shoot down, had diminished.

Apart from all that, the Arrow was a Liberal plane, and Diefenbaker was piqued by the shameless lobbying of A. V. Roe's president, Crawford Gordon.

Something had to take the place of the Arrow in NORAD, the joint U.S.-Canadian air defence system which Diefenbaker had joined, rather casually, two years before. He announced that Canada would get 56 Bomarc missiles from the U.S. for a mere \$14 million.

This air-breathing descendant of the V1 flying bomb was one of several defence systems which the U.S. had adopted half-heartedly in the hope that they might be of some use and in the certainty that their manufacture kept industry going and men at work. The Bomarc was not a very sophisticated weapon even in 1959. While the Arrows were being stuffed into Waxman's furnace the Bomarc 'A' version was still being tested, not 100 percent successfully, and the nuclear-tipped Bomarc 'B' which Canada was to get had not yet flown. The Pentagon planned to scatter a line of Bomarc sites along the U.S.-Canadian border and over in New England. Two sites inside Canada — at North Bay, Ontario and LaMacaza, Quebec, fitted neatly into the pattern.

The mayor of North Bay, hustling for tourists, thought the Bomarcs would make a splendid attraction as they soared prettily into the sky.

So far, so good. At that time, nobody could accuse Diefenbaker of playing politics with defense. He had taken the politically dangerous step of putting 14,000 men out of work and destroying an industry to fulfil his NORAD commitment. His Defence Minister, the gallant General Pearkes V.C., was convinced, from what the Pentagon had told him, that manned bombers, and thus fighters, were finished. Missiles were the thing. Far from being hidebound by his World War One experience, he had made the jump from horses to rockets without touching down in between. Only later did the Pentagon inform him that there might be some use left for fighters as the Russians still kept their fleet of hundreds of manned

bombers. So Canada did, after all, buy a fleet of interceptor fighters for continental defence — 64 American Voodoo jets. They went into service in the spring of 1962, ready to do the job that the Arrow would have done.

To meet its NATO responsibilities in Europe, the Diefenbaker government agreed to adopt the Lockheed Starfighter and build it under licence in Montreal. Despite its name, it was to be used as a short-range atomic bomber.

So Canada acquired a full-range of U.S. weapons — the Bomarc, the Voodoo, the Starfighter bomber and the Honest John, a tactical ground-to-ground missile. In the fullness of time it was revealed that not one of them worked properly without a U.S. nuclear warhead attached. And Diefenbaker refused to accept the warheads because that meant accepting American troops on Canadian soil to keep an eye on them. He had sold out the Canadian birthright in the form of a Canadian defence industry, but damned if he was going to eat any mess of pottage.

So the 56 Bomarcs stood headless in their launch-bays; the Honest Johns' heads were stuffed with sand to fool the Reds; the Starfighters couldn't bomb. Only the Voodoos could play a role, though not the role NORAD prescribed, by carrying non-nuclear Falcon missiles. And when their call to duty came, they stayed on the ground.

On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy confronted Soviet Premier Khrushchev with the demand that he get his offensive missiles out of Cuba. He threw all the switches that put the U.S. on the alert for all-out war. The one marked NORAD (Canada) didn't work. It took 42 hours for Canada to agree to put its continental air defense units on the same "ready" status as the American units. The Cabinet spent the time arguing. The new Defence Minister Douglas Harkness assumed that Canada was committed by the NORAD agreement. He had already made catering arrangements for the U.S. aircrews who were to move north and use Canadian bases. External Affairs Minister Howard Green argued passionately that if

Canada blindly followed the Americans "we'll be their vassals forever."

Finally the Voodoos were alerted but the U.S. crews did not move north and U.S. nuclear bombers were not allowed to make as many flights as they wished over Canada.

The crisis had two important results. Kennedy moved Diefenbaker up from the category of irritating nuisance to positive danger, requiring to be dealt with. Liberal Leader Pearson reluctantly decided Canada could no longer afford the luxury of nuclear virginity.

Now the facts had to come out. The first installment came from General Lauris Norstad, just two days after he retired from his post as Supreme Commander of NATO and became free to speak out. He told an Ottawa press conference that Canada was not fulfilling its NATO commitments because it refused to accept atomic bombs for the Starfighters.

Diefenbaker tried one more defence ploy. He invited himself to Nassau in the Bahamas where Kennedy and Britain's Harold Macmillan were holding a pointedly two-powers-only conference. (A photograph of the occasion shows the two of them deep in conversation at one end of a table ignoring Diefenbaker who sits by himself, as if superimposed on the print. Still the picture proved that he was there and lent substance to his version of the conference when it was presented to Parliament on his return.)

There had been, he said, "a change in the philosophy of defence," a change in NATO. Canada had been negotiating to have nuclear warheads "made readily available" and Canada's role would be clarified at the NATO Ministers' conference in May. However, Canada's nuclear role had been "placed in doubt" by the Nassau declaration.

It appeared in Ottawa that Diefenbaker was trying to weasel out of accepting nuclear weapons on the excuse that NATO policy was being changed and perhaps they wouldn't be required. It appeared to Washington that he was messing up the NATO alliance and scaring the other allies by accusing

Kennedy and Macmillan of plotting a secret deal. Washington decided the time had come to deal with Diefenbaker. On January 30, 1963, Canadian correspondents in Washington were handed a State Department press release. Short, vicious and shorn of diplomatic frills, it contradicted the Prime Minister six times and all but called him a liar twice. The State Department's Canadian experts had examined word for word the Hansard account of Diefenbaker's report to Parliament on his Nassau encounter. Practically the only part that they didn't contradict was his opinion that God was guiding the West.

The press release was approved by MacGeorge Bundy, the strategist in charge of the "war room" in the White House basement, but was not shown to the President. It was a blatant move to bring down the shaky Diefenbaker government and it worked. Under other circumstances, such Yankee interference might have saved him, but he was already too far gone.

The release stated flatly that Canada was contributing nothing practical to North American defence. Its Bomarc were incapable of carrying a non-nuclear warhead, and its Voodoos were less than fully effective without nuclear weapons. The question of changing Canada's nuclear role had not been raised in the Nassau agreements. And there was never any suggestion that Canada would join the "nuclear club." In Canada, as in other allied countries, nuclear weapons would be kept in U.S. custody.

On the Bomarc, the press release was less than frank. It stated that no non-nuclear warhead had ever been designed for Bomarc 'B'. In fact a non-nuclear system, known unofficially as Bomarc 'X' was designed and developed between the fall of 1959 and the spring of 1960. A Canadian aircraft firm did the electronics work under contract to Boeing and the project reached the stage of "breadboard hardware" — meaning that a pre-prototype model was built. Engineers working on it were convinced that a non-nuclear Bomarc 'B' would work — not as effectively as the nuclear type, but well enough to stop manned bombers. Having established this, Boeing

proposed to develop it further in the hope of further sales to nuclear-shy nations like Canada, but Bomarc fell into disfavor at the Pentagon and all work on them stopped in the spring of 1961.

The Bomarc 'X' was classified *confidential* at the time, so the Pentagon and State Department could deny any knowledge of it. The Canadian defence ministry knew about it and Diefenbaker may have had it in mind when he said Bomarc 'B' was not "fully effective" without a nuclear warhead. (The U.S. version was that it was totally useless.)

Secretary of State Dean Rusk later apologized if the press release had given offense, but maintained that the need for "clarification" arose from a situation not of Washington's making. In other words, sorry but we meant it. Having destroyed Diefenbaker with one press handout, the U.S. administration saw no need to use two. It battened down the hatches and prepared for a storm of anti-American abuse from north of the border.

This never really broke. The Prime Minister recalled his Washington ambassador as a mark of displeasure, but he had too much to handle within his own Cabinet to leave time to tackle the world's biggest power. Seven ministers were conspiring to dump him as leader. The three Opposition parties planned to overthrow him by a vote of no-confidence in the House. Social Credit with its thirty M.P.s would settle for a Tory government, but without Diefenbaker. The Sacred leader, Robert Thompson, feared an anti-American election campaign. With his great gift for the wrong word, he managed to express the inexpressible Canadian feeling towards its neighbor: "The Americans are our friends, whether we like it or not."

The plot to dump the Chief failed, but the no-confidence motion went ahead, backed by the entire Opposition.

In his last speech to the House as Prime Minister, Diefenbaker invoked Macdonald's rejection of attempts to join Canada to the United States. "That idea comes with almost

every generation," he said. "When I hear some saying that the fact that one dares to speak out will endanger Canada's economy, I wonder what the future of this country would be if those who have such fears and those who are of little faith held office in our country. I believe in cooperation (with the U.S.) but not in the absorption of our viewpoint by any other nation."

That night his government was defeated by 142 to 111 — the only administration to fall in the House, apart from Meighen's fly-by-night government of 1926, and the only one to be shot down by a Washington press release.

His Cabinet fell apart and its ministers ran like rabbits. Harkness had already quit on principle over the warheads issue; Trade Minister George Hees and associate Defence Minister Pierre Sevigny left to avoid taking part in an anti-U.S. campaign. Donald Fleming, ex-Finance, now Justice Minister, left for valid personal reasons and Davie Fulton, ex-Justice now Public Works Minister, headed for provincial politics in British Columbia.

The Tories entered the 1963 election as they had entered the 1957 campaign with one man, John Diefenbaker, to decide their fate. Although he was still Prime Minister, he chose to disregard this, and also his record of the past six years. He was once more the loner, the underdog, the martyr to powerful forces. The U.S. magazine *Newsweek* helped him with a critical story and a frontpage picture of a demented-looking Dief. "They make fun of my face," the Chief lamented. "It's the only face I've got."

He threw himself once more on the mercy of the "average Canadian" who, he was sure, knew much better than *they* what was good for the country. The sinister *they* now included the Liberals, the State Department, even the Tory public relations men who had mismanaged his 1962 campaign. The average Canadian gave him a sentimental cheer. For the average Canadian had known failure at some point in his life.

The dark hand of the Yankee appeared twice during the

campaign. First came the story of the Purloined Position Paper, broken by Charles Lynch, chief of Southam News Services, and given an extra fillip by Peter Trueman, Washington correspondent of the *Montreal Star*.

During President Kennedy's 1961 visit to Ottawa when he strained his back and then strained his welcome by suggesting Canada joined the Organization of American States (OAS), his staff left behind a paper entitled "What We Want From the Ottawa Visit." It was found in a wastebasket and Diefenbaker got hold of it. Instead of quietly copying it and then returning it, which would have been standard procedure, he held on to it. Later he threatened the U.S. ambassador that he would use it in the 1962 campaign. The Trueman revelation was that the paper contained marginal notes in Kennedy's bad handwriting that were extremely derogatory to Diefenbaker. The Washington version was that the notes included the phrase: "What shall we tell the SOB about that?" White House officials attempted to explain that the President had actually written "What shall we tell the OAS about that?" but as they didn't have the paper the explanation didn't get much credence. Diefenbaker, who had it, never contradicted the SOB story. Much later a Washington official gave a better answer: "How could the President call him a son-of-a-bitch? We didn't know at the time what a son-of-a-bitch he was."

The second campaign story seemed a godsend to Diefenbaker. On March 29, seven days to polling day, the Pentagon's congressional staff chose, inexplicably, to release some six-weeks-old secret testimony about the Bomarc missile, given by Defence Secretary Robert McNamara before a House of Representatives subcommittee.

Under interrogation by two anti-Bomarc congressmen McNamara had admitted the missile was of very little use. The American Bomarc sites were being kept on because they were cheap to maintain and would at least draw enemy fire. The testimony went on:

Congressman Daniel Flood: "If we scratch Bomarc we have

stuck the Canadians for a whole mess of them and we have another problem on our border."

Congressman Minshall: "All I can say is, these turned out to be very expensive targets."

Secretary McNamara: "They did. I agree with you fully."

Diefenbaker raced off with this juicy bit between his teeth. He accused Pearson, who had changed his mind and now wanted to arm the Bomarcs, of turning Canada into a decoy for Russian missile attacks, a burned sacrifice. Here, he finally strained the credulity of his average Canadian, who did not know about Bomarc 'X'.

It was Diefenbaker who had killed the Arrow and brought in the useless and, it now appeared, dangerous Bomarcs. He should have known that the things didn't work without atomic warheads and that he couldn't get atomic warheads without American sergeants to guard them. It was he who played politics during the Cuban missile crisis. *

The Liberals, obsessed with their gimmicky New Frontierish campaign, never brought the Chief down to earth. They allowed him to blame their guiltless leader for World War Three — "The day the strike takes place, eighteen million people in North America will die in the first two hours, four million of them in Canada. Mr. Pearson shouldn't play politics with four million dead Canadians."

The Liberals very nearly achieved defeat. It eluded them only because the weight of evidence against Diefenbaker was so enormous that the twenty million live Canadians could not ignore it. They dispatched Diefenbaker and gave Pearson a minority win — 129 seats to 95 for the Tories, 14 New Democrats and 24 Social Crediters.

The Chief was dead, long live the Chief. As he left the prime ministership, some of his best years were still ahead of him.