

A Canadian "beacon of light" in the early UN

Andrew McNaughton

Ottawa — a winter day in 1946. In his office on Parliament Hill, Prime Minister Mackenzie King cautiously ponders the choice of Canada's first representative to the newly formed UN Atomic Energy Commission. Finally he asks, "What kind of people are other countries sending?" "Diplomats, scientists, politicians," says an advisor. "McNaughton," says King instantly. "All three."

He could have added, "and many more." Born in Moosomin, Saskatchewan, in 1887, Andrew George Latta McNaughton was also soldier, engineer, Cabinet minister, administrator and patriot.

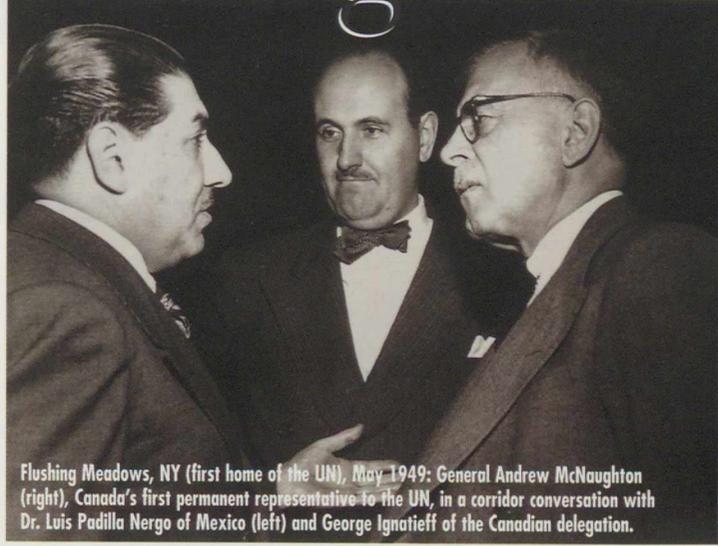
McNaughton the scientist graduated from McGill with a B.Sc. degree in 1910 and an M.Sc. in physics and engineering in 1912. His accomplishments included invention of the cathode-ray direction finder, certified as a direct ancestor of radar by no less than the inventor himself, Robert Watson-Watt. McNaughton later sold the patent for one dollar to the National Research Council of Canada (NRC).

McNaughton the soldier began his career in 1909 when he enlisted in the militia. In World War I, his battlefield service and application of scientific principles to artillery won him rapid advancement to Brigadier-General and also the professional respect of his allied peers, who often sought his advice. After the war, McNaughton joined the permanent forces and was Chief of the General Staff (CGS) until his appointment as President of the NRC in 1935.

In this role, the impact of his innovative approaches spilled over into Canadian social and economic development. Through the fledgling Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), he championed the development of the Vickers Vedette flying boat. Designed from the pontoons up for Canadian conditions, the Vedette became the prime tool in the mapping of northern aviation routes. As CGS, McNaughton also had a direct hand in knitting together a nationwide chain of airports and beacons built largely by unemployed workers housed in army-run relief camps. As well, he was a moving force in the creation of Trans-Canada Airlines, which later became Air Canada.

Returning to the army during World War II after heading the NRC for four years, McNaughton commanded Canada's

armed forces in Europe from 1940 to 1943 as they grew from division to corps to full-fledged army. McNaughton the politician had a brief but eventful career, serving capably as Minister of National Defence but failing in two tries for a seat in the House. There was also McNaughton the patriot. The common theme of every phase of his career was attention to Canadian needs and Canadian interests. In World War II, his stubborn



Flushing Meadows, NY (first home of the UN), May 1949: General Andrew McNaughton (right), Canada's first permanent representative to the UN, in a corridor conversation with Dr. Luis Padilla Nergo of Mexico (left) and George Ignatieff of the Canadian delegation.

insistence that Canada's forces remain together and under Canadian control provoked the hostility of senior British commanders, alienated his own defence minister, and led eventually to his recall. In the last chapter of his career, as Chairman of the Canadian section of the International Joint Commission, McNaughton fought passionately to defend his view of Canadian interests.

In 1946, the achievements of McNaughton the diplomat still lay in the future, but they were to fulfill King's assessment. The passionate patriot turned out also to be an inspired internationalist with a knack for manoeuvring through diplomatic deadlocks and for crafting practical solutions. These traits won Canada's first representative to the UN the respect and trust of foreign delegates and even of hard-boiled reporters who had seen it all. In the corridors of the UN, a reporter observed, "... he presents the Canadian attitude with an earnest persuasiveness and clarity that stand out like a beacon of light in an assembly where diplomatic double-talk is too often practised."

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McNaughton died at Montebello, Quebec, in 1966. ●

General McNaughton presiding over a session of the Security Council during Canada's first term in 1948-49.