

Hume Wrong:

The Right Stuff, the Right Time

Two Canadians figured prominently in the founding of NATO. The name of one is instantly recognizable today: Lester B. Pearson. Less well-known is Hume H. Wrong, but historians and professionals in diplomacy will have no trouble identifying him.

As negotiations progressed toward the North Atlantic Treaty, the Government of Canada relied on Hume Wrong, then our Ambassador in Washington.

Hume Wrong performed skilfully in the negotiations. He came armed with a fierce conviction that the Treaty should be binding on all its members, particularly the United States and Canada. He expressed a distinctive Canadian position, arguing successfully that the Treaty should allow for non-military co-operation. And when drafting time came, Wrong helped write the text of the treaty, which was signed in Washington on April 4, 1949.

Canada's emergence as a strong voice in the NATO discussions was a signal of the country's growing influence.

In the early 1940s, Canada had been overshadowed by Great Britain (where many still thought of us as a colony) and the United States (with its formidable global clout). To shape Allied strategy during the Second World War, the two big powers worked through "Combined Boards." When it came to major decisions, Canada sat on the sidelines.

Enter Hume Wrong in 1942, then assistant to the Canadian Ambassador in Washington. Canada, he argued, was a major contributor to the Allied cause, supplying military equipment, training, food and personnel. We would hardly continue this level of support without representation on the Boards.

"Wrong pressed vigorously for Canada's place in the sun," wrote historian Jack Granatstein. "This was an unusual negotiating stance for Canada, and its toughness struck responsive chords." Wrong's views eventually prevailed.

On Wrong's tenure as Ambassador to the United States, Pearson wrote, "The good relations between Canada and the United States in a difficult period could be attributed to Hume Wrong's professional skill and wise counsel."

What equipped Hume Wrong to meet the challenges of his day? Persistence and patriotism, perhaps, both of which mark his career. Born in Toronto in 1894, Wrong was educated at the University of Toronto and then at Oxford University. A blind eye meant that he couldn't serve with Canadian armed forces during the First World War. Undeterred, he enlisted with British forces. After the war, Wrong returned to teach history at the University of Toronto.

He joined the Department of External Affairs in 1927. Successive postings to Washington, Geneva (representing Canada at the League of Nations) and London gave him a solid grounding in international affairs and a vision of an expanded role for Canada.

Hume Wrong died in 1954. He is buried in Wakefield, Quebec, in the same cemetery as two friends and fellow Canadian diplomats of his generation: Norman Robertson and Lester B. Pearson. ●—



photo: National Archives of Canada

Canada's Ambassador to the United States, Hume Wrong, signs the North Atlantic Treaty on behalf of Canada in Washington on April 4, 1949.

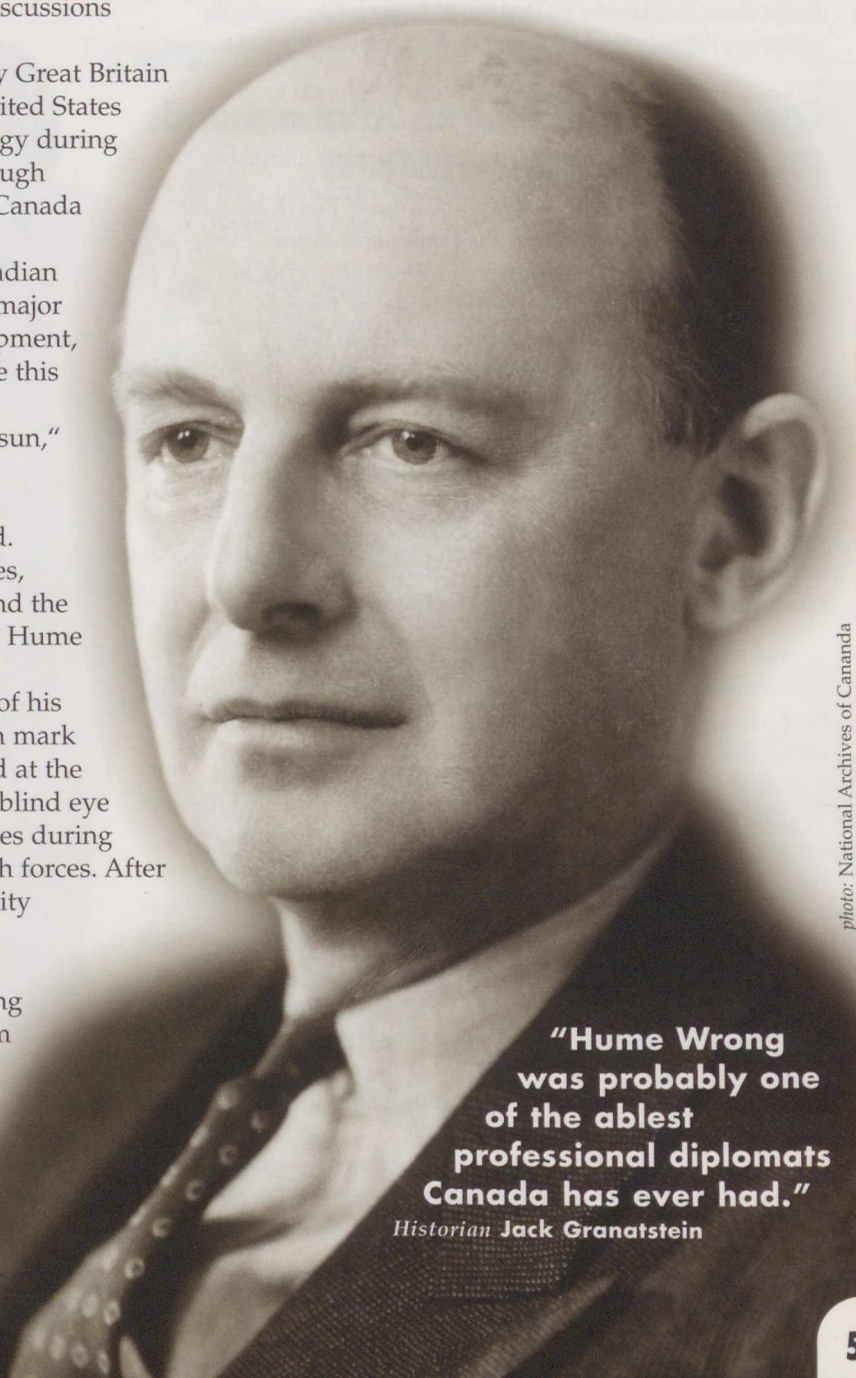


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"Hume Wrong was probably one of the ablest professional diplomats Canada has ever had."

Historian Jack Granatstein