

October 18, 2004

## Chris Saunders gave his life for federal social programs

It will be some time before we know specifically what caused the submarine fire on HMCS Chicoutimi that killed Lieutenant Chris Saunders, 32, father of two young kids.

We can say that Chris Saunders died for his country, but we don't actually believe it. The sad reality is that Ottawa equips our soldiers, sailors and airmen with junk, and they die trying to make it work--under-protected armored vehicles, wrong-colored uniforms, forty-year-old Sea Kings, out of date fighter jets, leaky submarines--the story is forever the same.

At the same time, the feds spend billions every year for whole armies of slackers all over the country to do nothing, and they call it "compassion."

The disabled submarine was purchased second-hand with three others from the Royal Navy in 1998. They have reportedly been plagued by electrical malfunction, leaks and rust.

Not good enough for Britain, but good enough for Chris Saunders.

The Chicoutimi was cruising homeward at 20 knots on its first Canadian voyage, three days out from Scotland. The crippling electrical fire forced her to surface in heavy seas far off the northwest coast of Ireland. Three injured crewmen were evacuated by British helicopters to Ireland the next

day. Saunders died, the other two are recovering.

Meanwhile, the remaining 54 crew were left to sit out a north Atlantic gale, helplessly pitching and rolling in 25-foot waves for four or five days, too disabled to submerge, and with seas too rough to attach a rescue line from a British tug.

I wonder what those crewmen thought as the cruel sea bashed and battered their 200-foot vessel with weather she is supposed to avoid. Apparently their sister submarine, HMCS Corner Brook, had experienced a similar fire. The crew will have known that. I wonder what they thought.

I know what I thought. This is Trudeau's peacenik Canada, which sneers at Uncle Sam while relying on him for defence. Instead of a real navy, we have a pretend navy, in which the main hazard to our ships is that our obsolete helicopters will fall on them.

You might recall that on February 27, 2003, bound for the Persian Gulf war zone, a Sea King was lifting off destroyer HMCS Iroquois, but seconds later crashed back on the deck. Two men were injured, bringing the Sea King casualty count to 111. The Sea King death count, mercifully, remained at ten.

They blamed that one on pilot and mechanical service error--just as when someone is stabbed to

death you can blame it on heart failure. The real cause of our ongoing military embarrassments is the utter contempt of federal governments, especially Liberal ones, since the 1960s for national defence.

For the past four decades Ottawa has largely abandoned its constitutional duty to defend us, while it invaded the provincial sphere with loser entitlement programs like the Canada Pension Plan, employment insurance, the Canada Health Act, welfare funding, and regional job creation.

This whole approach is backwards. In an always-hostile world, a national government should maintain as large and credible a defence deterrent as possible, while local governments keep their own internal social entitlements as small and affordable as is reasonable.

It's a question of balance.

The vain death at sea of Lieutenant Saunders is more sad evidence that ours is woefully out of whack.

- Link Byfield

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