

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Sajjan should resign

The latest photo-shopped picture making the rounds these days shows our beleaguered Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan sitting in a chair next to Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt at their May 1943 meeting to plan the fabled D-Day invasion.

It's yet another example of the adage that there's nothing worse for a politician than to have people laughing at you rather than with you, which is exactly what has happened to Sajjan since he was caught out repeating some massive whoppers about his role in the 2006 Operation Medusa in Afghanistan.

More's the pity.

Because unlike many political appointments, Sajjan's appointment by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was widely applauded, not just by Liberals, but by the opposition parties and the general public as well.

Here, finally, was a man who had earned his chops in battle ? and there is still no doubt he was exceptionally brave and helpful ? and could be expected at long last to bring some clout into cabinet when it came to beefing up our long-neglected (by all parties) military.

But, as often happens even to the best of them, his capital ?E? ego got in the way of his common sense, and instead of resting on his well-deserved laurels during that battle and others, Sajjan decided to up the ante and declare himself the ?architect? of the entire operation.

Turns out he also fibbed to the public when he said in the Commons that our allies were not upset at all when the Liberals withdrew our CF-18 fighters from Iraq. They were upset, actually. But he lied to protect his boss.

Even that untruth, however, is more easily explainable ? since partisans do this sort of thing routinely to make their party look good ? than Sajjan's recent speech in India where, as first reported by the National Post's Matthew Fisher, he said flatly, ?On my first deployment to Kandahar in 2006, I was the architect of Operation Medusa, where we removed 1,500 Taliban fighters off the battlefield . . . and I was proudly on the main assault.?

He wasn't.

To be sure, he played a significant role, for which he deserved ? and received ? considerable credit from his fellow warriors. So why not leave it at that and carry on?

Well, he's never explained why he let his own vanity overrule his good sense, but he has been forced to apologize publicly numerous times and Trudeau has steadfastly stood behind his minister, arguing that Sajjan has apologized for his ?mistake? and it's time to move on.

Not exactly. For one thing, it wasn't a ?mistake.? Turns out he had made the same bloated claim earlier and, according to Sajjan's spokeswoman Jordan Owens, the minister had personally inserted ?the line about Medusa? into his text. This was no slip of the tongue, folks. This was a deliberate aggrandizement of his role and himself.

In a recent letter to the Toronto Star on the matter, CPO1(Ret'd) Jacques Lemieux of Windsor, N.S. wrote he was ?totally shocked and disgusted . . . (Sajjan) has let down all serving members of our Canadian Forces and . . . the prime minister backs him up. Mr. Trudeau calls these lies ?mistakes.' Lying is not a mistake. It's a wilful act.?

Worse. When it comes to military matters ? as opposed to normal politics ? there is a great deal of honor involved. And taking credit for the work of others is what is contemptuously known as ?stolen valor,? a terrible condemnation of any soldier, let alone the serving minister of defence.

The normal military honor code demands that Sajjan should immediately give up his car and driver and ministerial privileges and do the right thing, i.e. resign.

But he's not doing that. And that's just fine with Trudeau.

How can the Liberals possibly expect the military to have any respect for or faith in a minister who has deliberately lied about his role in the field for no other purpose than to make himself look better?

Sure, the Liberals are now talking about spending a lot more on the military ? and, by the way, Donald Trump is right to point out that we haven't been carrying our weight in NATO military expenses for decades, under both Tory and Liberal prime ministers.

Sometimes, after-the-fact apologies just don't cut it. This is one of those times. And it's very sad that the lure of political prestige has blackened an otherwise sterling military reputation.

