

*One Empire, One Navy: The Creation and Early Years of the Royal Canadian Navy, with
Selected Literature Review*

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When the idea of Canada forming its own navy surfaced in the early part of the twentieth century, there were few dissenting voices. Experiences with American poaching in Canadian waters, a rising sense of nationalism and Canada's place within the Commonwealth, loyalty to the Empire, and, more immediate, the naval arms race with Germany all pointed to the need for Canada to have its own navy. Recognizing the looming German threat, in 1909, Conservative MP Sir George Foster submitted a resolution calling for immediate financial support for the Royal Navy.¹ Liberal Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier accepted this idea in principle but amended it to propose that Canada build its own navy.² The motion passed unanimously as all parties, and most Canadians, supported the idea of Canada having its own naval service. Initially, most agreed that Canada should retain control of its naval forces, but as the naval crisis escalated the fissures started to appear. The Admiralty in London was not enthused about the thought of all the dominions having their own navies, supporting the premise of "one empire, one navy." The Conservative Party under Sir Robert Borden proposed that Canada follow New Zealand and offer interim financial support to the RN and have any Canadian naval force fall automatically under the control of the Admiralty in time of crisis. Of course, radical French-Canadian Liberals in Quebec under Henri Bourassa would not hear of it, and even Borden's own Quebec wing protested any subsidy to the Royal Navy. Laurier remained steadfast that there would be no financial subsidy and that any Canadian navy would be under Canadian government control. In 1910, the Naval Service Act created the Royal Canadian Navy. Unfortunately the dissension created by the debate over the naval bill, and subsequent events, led to a lack of a clear long-term naval policy that would dog the RCN well into the Second World War. Given the effect that this era had on the future of the Royal Canadian Navy, it is surprising how very little scholarly work has appeared on it.

¹Richard A. Preston, *Canada and "Imperial Defense" A Study of the Origins of the British Commonwealth's Defense Organization, 1867-1919* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 389.

²*Ibid.*

Many histories date the creation of the Royal Canadian Navy to the Naval Service Act of 1910. However, the roots of the RCN actually date from the mid-1800s when the Imperial Navy was unable, or unwilling, to prevent American poaching in Canadian fishing grounds. In view of this, the Marine Police, with a force of six schooners was created in 1870. It was disbanded a year later at the signing of the Treaty of Washington, supposedly settling all disputes between Great Britain and the United States. In typical nineteenth century American fashion, the US cancelled the treaty fourteen years later in 1885, and once again, Canada was forced to protect its fishing rights in the absence of action from the mother country. A new agreement was negotiated but failed to be ratified by the United States. The result was that the Fisheries Patrol Service became a permanent force under the Department of Marine and Fisheries.

In the meantime, Germany had arisen as a challenge to the Royal Navy. The country's Kaiser Wilhelm II yearned to be one of the leading figures in Europe and, taking a cue from his English cousins, a modern naval force was just the thing to make everybody sit up and take notice. This was just one more challenge facing the Admiralty in London. Britain still had to worry about its traditional enemies, France and Russia, and now a new giant was awakening in the east - Japan. At the 1902 Imperial Conference held in London and attended by all the Dominion leaders, the Admiralty pointed out the responsibilities of the dominions in protecting the empire. London felt that the best way to do this was through direct subsidies to the Royal Navy and the assignment of military units to Imperial defense.³ Canada's representative, Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier rejected this suggestion but did offer to assume more responsibility

³Graeme R. Tweedie, "The Roots of the Royal Canadian Navy: Sovereignty versus Nationalism, 1812-1910," in Michael L Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W Crickard (eds.), A

in coastal defense which, in itself, would free up those imperial forces then posted in Canada. One suggestion was to convert the Fisheries Patrol Service into a bonafide naval force.

After a couple of false starts, the new FPS appeared in 1904 with two new patrol vessels, the heavily armed CGS *Canada* and the unarmed CGS *Vigilant*. Crews wore naval-style uniforms and underwent naval training. At the same time Admiral Sir John “Jackie” Fisher assumed the position of First Sea Lord of the Admiralty. Fisher was convinced that the most immediate threat to the Empire was in Europe - particularly Germany which was building dreadnought battleships faster than with which the Admiralty felt comfortable. In order to concentrate his assets on the most immediate threat, yet keep adequate forces in other strategic areas - the Mediterranean and Far East - Fisher enacted far-reaching reforms. These included disbanding the Pacific squadron based at Esquimalt, British Columbia, and relocating the Halifax based American squadron back to the UK. The bases at Esquimalt and Halifax were taken over by the Canadian government and manned by members of the Canadian militia.

At the 1907 conference, the Admiralty was still pushing the dominions to provide funds to build Dreadnought-class battleships as their contribution to the defense of the empire. Canada’s representative, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Louis-Philippe Brodeur bristled at the lack of recognition for Canada’s contribution to Imperial defense.⁴ Brodeur pointed out that Canada’s assumption of its own coastal defense and associated commitments, and acceptance of responsibilities for the former Royal Navy bases at Esquimalt and Halifax were a definite and valuable contribution to the defense of the empire. An apology of sorts was subsequently

Nation’s Navy: In Quest of a Canadian Naval Identity,(Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. 98.

advanced by First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Tweedmouth, who also grudgingly conceded the value of local squadrons.⁵ However, this attitude was soon to change.

On March 19, 1909, Britain's government warned that the RN's superiority over the German navy was narrowing and advised that more naval spending was needed. The Conservative Opposition was even more alarmist, claiming that even with an increase in expenditures, the Germany navy would actually outrank the Royal Navy by one modern battleship by 1912⁶. A month later the British government invited representatives from all the dominions to Britain for a conference on dominion relations and the defense of the empire. Upon arrival, the Canadian delegation - which included the Minister of Militia and Defense Sir Frederick Borden, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Luis-Philippe Brodeur, Chief of General Staff Maj-General Sir Percy Lake, and Admiral Charles E Kingsmill, Director of Marine Services - was greeted by a complete turnaround in Admiralty policy. The Admiralty now wanted the dominions to raise not only local squadrons, so grudgingly sanctioned just two years previous, but full-fledged navies complete with battle-cruisers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines.⁷ Not only was London concerned with the threat in Home Waters but also the potential menace presented by Japan who was filling the void left by the decrease in British forces in the Far East. Where once the Admiralty was unwilling to grant the dominions greater autonomy in defense, London now deemed it desirable. Australia, the most threatened by the

⁴Siobhan J. McNaught, "The Rise of Proto-Nationalism: Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Founding of the Naval Service of Canada, 1902-1910," in *ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

new Japanese threat, proceeded immediately with the Admiralty plan; New Zealand, Australia's diminutive neighbour, chose to provide the cost of one Dreadnought for the RN; and Canada agreed to an increase in naval forces of four cruisers and six destroyers.⁸

Immediately upon arrival back in the country, the government of Sir Wilfred Laurier drafted legislation to create a Canadian Naval Service. However, when introduced in January 1910, the Leader of the Opposition Robert Borden objected that the bill failed to provide emergency aid in the event that war broke out before the ships were fully operational. He pressed the government for an interim subsidy to Britain to cover the cost of two dreadnoughts. Borden also complained that the Laurier government's bill did not allow for sufficiently close integration with the RN. Under the government legislation, Canadian forces would only be placed under British control by the Canadian government and only at a time when the government itself determined that the security of Great Britain was actually threatened.⁹ Borden believed that Canadian forces should automatically pass to the Admiralty in the event of a crisis because of the speed at which a crisis could occur. However, Prime Minister Laurier and his ministers held firm and the Naval Service Bill was passed 111 to 70 on May 4, 1910.¹⁰ Canada finally had its navy, for now.

The Act Respecting the Naval Service of Canada created the Department of Naval Service which also took over the Department of Marine and Fisheries all under its former

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 108

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

minister Louis-Philippe Brodeur. The act called for a naval reserve and volunteer reserve, naval college and the acquisition of two obsolescent British cruisers, later named HMCS *Niobe* and HMCS *Rainbow*, for training personnel. Negotiations were also started with British shipbuilding firms to establish facilities in Canada to build the proposed fleet of cruisers and destroyers. However, this promising start soon came to nought as the Laurier Government fell the following year, in part as a result of French Canadian fears that a Canadian navy would eventually be drawn into the various conflicts Britain became embroiled in throughout the world. Ultimately, Laurier's government fell because English Canada felt that the country was not doing enough for empire defense and French Canada felt it was too much. The new Prime Minister Robert Borden failed in his attempt to provide a \$35-million subsidy to Britain for battleship construction, and although he did not revoke the Naval Services Act as promised during the election, he did let the two cruisers obtained from RN to fall into disrepair alongside at Esquimalt and Halifax. When war broke out in August 1914, the Royal Canadian Navy consisted of two derelict cruisers and not even enough personnel to man them.

When Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, so did the entire British Empire, including Canada. Unfortunately, the promise of the 1910 Naval Service Act had not borne fruit, and the Royal Canadian Navy consisted of a run-down cruiser on each coast and 350 officers and men. For a country with the largest coastline in the world, this was a dismal state of affairs. This was not lost on British Columbia Premier Sir Richard McBride, and in a "cloak and dagger" deal worthy of a mystery novel, two submarines were procured from the Electric Boat Company in the United States. Initially named *Paterson* and *McBride*, they were shortly taken over by the RCN and renamed CC1 and CC2. Oddly enough, the presence of these two

submarines on the West Coast was more of a deterrent to German attack than HMCS *Rainbow*.¹¹ However, the old cruiser would still be called upon to defend Canada in hostile waters.

On the first day of the war, the German cruisers *Nurnberg* and *Leipzig* were reported off the coast of Mexico heading north by the Royal Navy sloops HMS *Shearwater* and HMS *Algerine*. The only available warship of any size in close proximity was the weary HMCS *Rainbow* tied up alongside at Esquimalt. *Rainbow* had been in the process of being readied for the seal fishery patrol in the Bering Sea when the crisis escalated in July, but even so, when she departed Esquimalt in the early hours of August 3, 1914, she was short of personnel and was armed with obsolete black powder shells as high explosive shells had not yet arrived from the east coast. Regardless, Commander Walter Hose, RCN, was ordered to intercept the *Nurberg* and *Leipzig* and defend the coast of British Columbia against attack by the German squadron. The communique from Ottawa ended with an admonishment to “remember Nelson and the British Navy.”¹² Fortunately, *Rainbow* never did meet up with the German ships and avoided what would have undoubtedly been a short, violent, and entirely one-sided battle. The old cruiser returned to its base in Esquimalt and spent the remainder of the war patrolling the West Coast, finally being paid off in April 1917.¹³ Meanwhile in Halifax, HMCS *Niobe*'s war was just as eventful, but much shorter.

¹¹Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 41.

¹²Marc Milner, *The North Atlantic Run* (Second Edition, Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 5.

¹³Tony German, *The Sea is at our Gates* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990), p. 39.

At the outbreak of the war, *Niobe* was stirred from her state of near decay in Halifax, and made ready for sea within the space of three weeks. Shorthanded despite trained crewmen being scrounged from every part of the country, she sailed for St. John's, Newfoundland. The Royal Naval Reserve branch in the colony had been in existence since 1900 and provided *Niobe* with 107 trained seamen. For the first time in her Canadian career, *Niobe* had her full complement of 700 officers and men.¹⁴ She subsequently took a troopship to Bermuda in September, and over the next several months, she searched for raiders amongst the icebergs in the Strait of Belle Isle and joined the British cruisers blockading New York to prevent enemy merchant ships from escaping home. However, by midsummer the next year, the ship was worn out. She needed a major overhaul, but her age and infirmity did not warrant the expenditure. The Admiralty offered a replacement, but by then, the RCN could not provide the men. *Niobe* would end her days a rusting hulk, shattered in the Halifax explosion of December 1917.¹⁵ From this point on, Canada's navy consisted of requisitioned auxiliary vessels used for patrols in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and along the shores of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

The interwar period was an era of anti-war sentiment, isolationism, and serious economic difficulties. So much so that in 1933, the Chief of Staff Major-General A.G.L. McNaughton suggested that the Royal Canadian Navy be sacrificed to save the Army and Air Force.¹⁶ Fortunately, this did not occur but the alternate solution posed by Treasury Board would have almost accomplished the same result. The Board proposed to slash Navy appropriations from two

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁵Milner, *Canada's Navy*, p. 59.

¹⁶German, *The Sea is at our Gates*, p. 60.

and a half million dollars to just a half million. The Navy, in turn, embarrassed the Government into reconsidering this option by threatening to pay off the fleet, thus leaving Canada with a navy but no ships.¹⁷ The Royal Canadian Navy narrowly missed extinction but this incident clearly demonstrates the uphill battle to maintain a credible naval force in the years after the Great War. This situation eased somewhat in 1935 when Mackenzie King was returned to power. Over the next four years the Royal Canadian Navy procured four relatively modern destroyers from the Royal Navy, joining the *Saguenay* and *Skeena* commissioned in 1931. This force formed the backbone of the Royal Canadian Navy at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938, with its promise of “peace in our time.” With the possibility of war having been narrowly averted, Ottawa finally announced plans for a fleet capable of defending both the East and West coasts as the government and naval authorities recognized the vulnerability of the Canada’s Pacific and Atlantic coasts. By this time, Japan was engaged in a war of conquest in China and an ally of Germany, and it was assumed that if Germany declared war on the British Empire, Japan would not be far behind. However, the authorities expected surface raiders, not submarines. Regardless, in now familiar fashion, the Government’s support turned out to be “political eyewash,” and the money approved by cabinet did little more than buy the drawings.¹⁸

Considering the RCN’s dismal showing in World War I, and near extinction in the ensuing decades, it is small wonder that there is little written on Canada’s navy pre-World War II. It was that war that saw the RCN expand from a confused collection of thirteen vessels - including a wooden sailing ship - and less than two thousand men, to a force of over four

¹⁷Milner, *North Atlantic Run*, p. 6.

¹⁸German, *The Sea is at our Gates*, p. 65.

hundred warships and over ninety thousand personnel The first real accounting of the pre-Second World War Canadian navy appeared in the first volume of Gilbert Tucker's 1952 work *The Naval Service of Canada*.¹⁹ In his introduction, Gilbert acknowledges that Canada's naval history had received little attention.

In *The Naval Service of Canada*, Gilbert argues that one of the chief stumbling blocks to empire defense was the issue of central control of dominion forces. Naval defense of the empire could not be decided solely - or as Gilbert stresses - not even mainly, on naval strategy and organization.²⁰ He suggests that the determining factor was actually the attitude of the self-governing dominions, including Canada. Each could decide whether it wanted to contribute to the Royal Navy, create its own navy, or do nothing at all.²¹ Canada actually tried to do all three.

As naval historian Marc Milner suggests, Tucker's *The Naval Service of Canada* "seemed to say all that was needed about [the RCN's] colourless period" before the Second World War. Some historians have pointed to errors and/or omissions in *The Naval Service of Canada*. Nigel Brodeur in "LP Brodeur and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy" complains that Tucker attributes statements to Louis-Philippe Brodeur that do not reflect what he actually said at the Imperial Conference of 1909 as he used a source other than the original proceedings of the conference.²² Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty accuse Tucker of not consulting

¹⁹Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada* (2 vols., Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952).

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 78.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Nigel Brodeur, "LP Brodeur and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy," in James A. Boutillier (ed.), *The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1985* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982.), p. 26.

unpublished German sources and only giving “cursory treatment” to the RCN’s efforts to organize an anti-submarine force and convoy system to counter the threat of German U-boats in Canadian waters in 1918.²³ In “Commander E A E Nixon and the Royal College of Canada,” P. Willet Brock charges that Tucker erroneously states that Commander Nixon was the first Commandant of the Royal Naval College of Canada whereas it was actually Commander Edward H. Martin with Nixon as his First Lieutenant.²⁴ Regardless, *The Naval Service of Canada* remained the state of the art for the next three decades. Aside from a few passages in Donald Goodspeed’s *The Armed Forces of Canada, 1867-1967*²⁵ and James Eayrs’s *In Defense of Canada*²⁶, it was not until historian James Boutilier organized a naval history conference at Royal Roads Military College, Victoria, BC, that the topic of the origins and early years of the RCN was exhumed. *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1985*,²⁷ the volume resulting from that conference, contains essays by both scholars and former RCN senior officers. Several examine the circumstances surrounding the formation and fortunes of the Royal Canadian Navy in the years before the Second World War. The first is Nigel Brodeur’s “LP Brodeur and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy.”

²³Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty. *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces & German Sea Raiders 1880-1918* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991.), p. ix.

²⁴P. Willet Brock, “Commander E A E Nixon and the Royal College of Canada,” in Boutilier (ed.), *The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1985*, p. 36.

²⁵Donald Goodspeed (ed.), *The Armed Forces of Canada, 1867-1967* (Ottawa: Directorate of History, Canadian Forces Headquarters, 1967).

²⁶James Eayrs, *In Defense of Canada* (3 vols., Toronto: University of Toronto, 1965.)

²⁷Boutilier (ed), *The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1985*.

Louis Philippe Brodeur was Canada's first Minister of the Naval Service, serving from June 1910 to August 1914. However since 1906, as Minister of Marine and Fisheries - the department amalgamated with the Department of Naval Service in 1910 - Brodeur had been involved in the militarization of the Fisheries Patrol Service and had attended a number of Imperial Conference on Defense. It was he who directed the transformation of the FPS into the Royal Canadian Navy. Rear-Admiral Nigel Brodeur is Minister Brodeur's grandson and as of the date of publication was the Chief of Maritime Doctrine and Operations at the National Defense Headquarters. Brodeur suggests that the Naval Service Act of 1910 really was not the beginning of the Royal Canadian Navy, but "the end of the beginning."²⁸ He contends that the Fisheries Patrol Service under his grandfather was the forerunner of the RCN and that the Naval Act really just made it Canada's official navy. Brodeur points out that the Department of Marine and Fisheries was responsible for far more than just fisheries protection, from beacons, buoys and lighthouses, to the establishment, regulation and maintenance of marine and seamen's hospitals. In 1904, the government increased these responsibilities by making the department responsible for the St. Lawrence ship channel and for exercising sovereignty over the Canadian Arctic. To accomplish these duties, as well as the department's myriad other maritime duties, Brodeur had at his disposal eight armed cruisers, six icebreakers and some eighteen other vessels in excess of eighty feet.²⁹

Using his grandfather's private papers, Admiral Brodeur examines the behind-the-scenes negotiations and difficulties encountered as Minister Brodeur and the Laurier government

²⁸Brodeur, "L.P. Brodeur and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy," p. 14.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

struggled to keep both English and French Canada happy, and ward off British attempts to hijack Canada's fledgling navy. Brodeur examines three contentious issues that, he contends, could have led to the RCN being still-born in 1910 had they been made public - the flag, jurisdiction, and bilingualism.³⁰ He suggests that it was unfortunate that the efforts towards a distinctive ensign, greater autonomy from the Royal Navy, and a partial form of bilingualism did not succeed. He opines that because they did not, the impression was created among French Canadians that the RCN was more British than Canadian, which prevented more national support for the navy. As one would expect, Admiral Brodeur is not able to present a totally objective examination of his grandfather's role in the creation of the RCN. Furthermore, the author's real purpose for writing seems to be to demonstrate what an accomplishment the formation of the RCN was, and to warn Canadians how precarious its existence continues to be.

One of the jewels of the Naval Service Act was the creation of the Royal Naval College of Canada. Previous to this, Canadians interested in becoming naval officers were trained in Britain and became officers in the Royal Navy. With the creation of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Laurier government wanted its officers to be trained at home. Cadets still spent a year with the RN training squadron, but at least their initial training was Canadian. This training was left in the hands of Commander Edward Atcherly Eckersall Nixon RCN, and he and the RNCC are the subject of the next essay in *RCN in Retrospect*. P. Willet Brock was a cadet at RNCC under Nixon from 1917 to 1920 and enjoyed a long career with the Royal Navy until retiring as a Rear Admiral in 1957. Brock's contribution "Commander E A E Nixon and the Royal College of Canada" is more the reminiscence of a former pupil rather than a scholarly examination of the

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 31.

College's short career (1910-1922). All the same, he does contribute some insight into the routine, and curriculum of the college, as well as the personalities in his term. In the absence of an official history, and only the bare essentials in Tucker's work, this essay does give some important detail into the training undertaken by what would be the professional officer corps of the RCN in World War Two.

"The Road to Washington: Canada and Empire Naval Defense 1918-1921" looks at the aftermath of the Great War on the issue of Empire defense. Author Barry Hunt contends that a common Empire-Commonwealth foreign policy was an impossibility from the start. He argues that this was not as a result of the various dominion's quest for status within the Commonwealth, but more so due to the need for closer Empire relations with the United States. By the end of the war, tensions were high between Britain and the United States over such things as blockades and neutrals' rights during wartime, and the American ambition to build a navy "second to none." Canada was instrumental in easing these tensions, finally culminating in the Washington Naval Treaty which set the limits of the worlds largest fleets. Hunt suggests that this treaty actually increased the need for an Empire Fleet, or at least centralization of planning and operational control. Instead, Canada took it as an excuse to reduced its respectable post war force to two destroyers and a few trawlers.

In order to cover what it considered to be its main theater - European waters - the RN had to denude its Pacific Ocean assets, leaving just a token force at Hong Kong. It was this situation which led to the Admiralty's decision to once again press for a "unified, centrally

directed, and highly mobile imperial navy.”³¹ Of course this proposal was nothing new but as future Prime Minister Robert Borden observed after the 1909 Imperial Defense Conference, such co-operation entitled the contributing dominions to a voice in drafting the Empire’s foreign policy. “The Road to Washington” also examines the Jellicoe mission and recommendations as well as the negotiations and various schemes put forward between the end of the war and the early 1920s, concluding with the Washington Naval Limitations Treaty or the Four-Power-Pact in 1922. Hunt’s assessment that Japan won most of the advantages at the Washington conference flies in the face of most histories which suggest that the Japanese viewed the treaty as a “Cadillac, Cadillac, Volkswagen” deal in favour of the US and Britain. Regardless, Hunt is correct in his opinion that the Canadian Government chose to look at the treaty’s provisions not as a means of strengthening Empire defense, but as an excuse to further eviscerate the Royal Canadian Navy.

“The Royal Canadian Navy Between the Wars, 1922-39” is an examination of what have been called “the starvation years” of the Royal Canadian Navy. While the Washington Conference was underway, the Conservative government of Arthur Meighen fell to Liberal William Lyon Mackenzie King. King had little affection for military matters and in the absence of popular support for national defense, the new Prime Minister used the Washington Naval Disarmament Treaty as a pretext for slashing naval expenditure from \$2.5 Million to \$1.5 Million. The Royal Naval College of Canada was closed, and the RCN reduced to 402 officers

³¹Barry D. Hunt, “The Road to Washington: Canada and Empire Naval Defense 1918-1921,” in Boutilier (ed.), *The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1985*, p. 48.

and men as of July 1922. By 1928, the RCN consisted of only three ships on each coast.³² This was a long difficult period for the RCN. Retired Rear-Admiral Hugh Pullen examines these lean years and discusses in great detail what was probably the saving grace of the RCN - the naval reserves. Faced with near extinction, senior officers at Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa realized that something needed to be done to bring the navy into the public domain. The answer was the establishment of the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve and the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. Not only did this measure promote the navy in areas far from the sea such as the Prairies, but also in nationalist Quebec. While the naval reserves did provide the RCN with a cadre of some 397 officers and 2,276 ratings by the start of the Second World War, Pullen's assertion that this constituted "an effective fighting force" is a bit of an overstatement. By the time Canada officially declared war on September 10, 1939, and these forces were mobilized, the country's supply of trained naval personnel was exhausted.

James Knox's essay "An Engineer's Outline of RCN History: Part I"³³ examines the history of the RCN using the chronology of ship acquisition. Most histories examine the events and personalities that created and sustained the RCN before World War II and mention specific ships as they relate to these events and people. Captain Knox examines the RCN through its ships. Knox traces the RCN from the cruisers *Niobe* and *Rainbow*, through World War I. He examines the inter-war years which saw the acquisition of the first made-to-order Canadian destroyers *Saguenay* and *Skeena*, through the tremendous expansion during World War II, and into the immediate post-war period which saw Canada operating its first fleet aircraft carrier and

³²Hugh Francis Pullen, "The Royal Canadian Navy Between the Wars, 1922-39," in *ibid.*, p. 63.

construct its first warship built to North American standards HMCS *Labrador*. As with many histories of the RCN, Knox's review gives little attention to the first couple of decades subsequent to the Naval Service Act and spends most of his effort on the RCN after 1930. Consequently, this essay really does not shed much new light on the foundations of the RCN beyond that which had already been published.

RCN in Retrospect is not an academic tour de force, and in fact many of the essays rely heavily on *The Naval Service of Canada*, which in itself is flawed. Regardless, as the literature is so limited in this area they do add to the RCN's pre-Second World War historiography. Two of the articles, Barry Hunt's "The Road to Washington: Canada and Empire Naval Defense 1918-1921" and Nigel Brodeur's "LP Brodeur and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy," do utilize unpublished sources. However, even more important, *RCN in Retrospect* marks the dawn of a new interest in the RCN. In consequence, as Marc Milner suggests, *RCN in Retrospect* "marked a watershed in RCN historiography."³⁴ This became very evident six years later with the publication of Alec Douglas' *RCN in Transition, 1910-1985*.³⁵

RCN in Transition was the result of the 1985 conference organized by Alec Douglas of the Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defense to mark the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the RCN. Douglas invited mainly academic contributions and the

³³John H.W. Knox, "An Engineer's Outline of RCN History: Part I," in *ibid*.

³⁴Marc Milner, "The Historiography of the Canadian Navy," In Hadley, Huebert and Crickard (eds), *A Nation's Navy*.

³⁵W.A.B. Douglas (ed.), *The RCN in Transition* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

resulting publication contains the first serious scholarship on the early RCN since Tucker. The first of these essays is Paul Kennedy's "Naval Mastery: The Canadian Context."

While dealing with the full history of the RCN to 1985, Kennedy does devote considerable discussion to the pre-World War II period. Then as now, he suggests that Canadian sea power was determined more by external forces than internal. The establishment of the RCN in 1910 is clearly an example of this premise. The establishment of the RCN was a result of the naval arms race between Britain and Germany rather than from any real threat to Canada itself. About the only real menace to Canadian sovereignty was from the United States, and Britain had decided long before that a war with the United States was unwinnable. Canadians perceived no such threat and, while even French Canada could agree to a coastal force to protect the country's interest in her territorial waters, most felt that they lived in a "fireproof house, far from flammable materials."³⁶ By the 1930s, this situation had changed with the rise of Fascist Germany and Italy, and the expansionist adventures of Japan. While the government of Mackenzie King did not seriously consider an attack on Canada by any of these, it did recognize "a self-evident national duty" to come to the aid of the mother country in the event of war. As a result, especially after the Munich Crisis, Canada built up its destroyer force to squadron strength, increased defense estimates, and agreed to be a haven for British war production and the location of the British Air Training Program.

Kennedy argues that naval mastery cannot be properly understood solely on naval operations. He contends that one must recognize the geographical, economic-technical and socio-political context within which navies operate. He argues that although Canada was born

out of sea power, it was the least threatened of all the other dominions. So why did it need a navy? Kennedy states that up to the Second World War, if Canada needed to participate in the defense of the Empire, its resources would probably be better spent on munitions production and the armed forces, not the navy. Kennedy seems to ignore the reality of the RCN during World War I. While it did not operate with the Royal Navy, by providing protection in home waters - especially when U-boats made their forays in 1918 - it released British forces that would otherwise have had to be deployed. As it was, Britain could not spare these assets and the RCN dealt with the threat adequately, if not spectacularly. Kennedy agrees that Canada took a major role in the mastery of the seas during World War II. But, he says, this was not in active defense of Canada but as a result of external pressure. One can argue this point, as originally Prime Minister Mackenzie King was very reluctant to release Canada's destroyer fleet for duty outside Canadian waters. It was only the personal intervention of Winston Churchill that convinced King that Canada's first line of defense was the English Channel. Furthermore, as Marc Milner has argued, there was more to the establishment of the Newfoundland Escort Force during World War II than just preservation of the trans-Atlantic lines of communication.³⁷

When the RCN was created, the Royal Navy was the greatest navy in the world, albeit that its margin of superiority was narrowing. Why then would Canada chose to form its own navy? This is the question Barry Gough asks in "The End of Pax Britannica and the Origins of

³⁶Paul Kennedy, "Naval Mastery: The Canadian Context," in WAB Douglas, (ed), *The RCN in Transition*.

³⁷Milner, *Canada's Navy*, p. 93.

the Royal Canadian Navy: Shifting Strategic Demands of an Empire at Sea.”³⁸ Gough suggests that it was more than just a desire for autonomy that was behind the creation of the RCN but also an acceptance of new obligations in international affairs. He argues that the Naval Service Act was a significant step in the country’s quest for status within the Empire and was not so much a search for independence from Britain but an act of co-operation with the Admiralty on Canada’s own terms. Gough concludes that the end of Pax Britannica and the origins of the RCN result from the same circumstance. Canada, like all the dominions, was part and parcel of the military and naval reorganization that closed the era when “Britannia rule[d] the waves.” The new international reality should have forced Canada to accept more responsibility for its own defense but successive governments could not develop a naval policy that was acceptable to all parties.

Roger Sarty looks at the RCN’s World War I experience in “Hard Luck Flotilla: The RCN’s Atlantic Coast Patrol, 1914-18.” Even though British and Canadian naval officers had pressed the Canadian government in the years before the Great War to establish an appropriate naval organization on the east coast, when three large U-boats made their inroads into Canadian waters in 1918, there was very little the RCN could do. Sarty lays the blame solidly at the feet of Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and comments on the irony that even while he was insisting on national control over the Canadian army in Europe, the safety of Canada’s own waters were dependant on whatever meagre resources Britain and the United States could provide. Regardless, this motley collection of trawlers, submarine chasers and torpedo boats provided escort to the many convoys organized to counter this threat. And even though the few encounters

³⁸Barry Morton Gough,. “The End of Pax Britannica and the Origins of the Royal Canadian Navy: Shifting Strategic Demands of an Empire at Sea,” in Douglas (ed.), *The RCN in Transition*, p. 90.

that the RCN ships did have with the enemy were less than satisfactory, submarine casualties were kept to a minimum. Sarty contends that the RCN's contribution to the success of the war effort should not be based solely on the success of these local convoys but also on the fact that, in spite of the RCN's unpreparedness, the Admiralty did not have to divert any major anti-submarine warships from the crucial waters around the UK to protect Canada's east coast. This does not really seem to be a valid argument. The RN did not have the resources to spare in the first place, but even more importantly, not being as big a liability as expected does not translate into winning a war.

Unlike those essays on the prewar RCN that appeared in *RCN in Retrospect* six years before, these three essays, like almost all of those in *RCN in Transition* were written by professional historians. This indicates just how far the study of Canadian naval history had advanced in the few short years between the two publications. More professional research was being undertaken on the RCN and even the early days were being given adequate consideration. This study would continue, culminating in the most comprehensive history of the early RCN since *The Naval Service of Canada*. In 1991, Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty produced *Tin Pots & Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces & German Sea Raiders 1880-1918*.³⁹

In their preface to *Tin Pots & Pirate Ships* Hadley and Sarty confess that the book was really the result of their research into the RCN's Second World War operations. However, they found that to truly understand the RCN during this period, one needed to examine the RCN during World War I. Ironically, the theme that permeates this narrative is one of *deja vu*. The same difficulties that plagued the RCN during the Battle of the Atlantic were present during the

³⁹Hadley and Sarty, *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships*.

Great War, and for the same reasons. When the World War I started the RCN, despite the promises of the Naval Service Act, consisted of two derelict cruisers and 350 men. The years subsequent to the Act had been filled with political vacillation and back-tracking with the end result that Canada had no defenses for its own territorial waters. When a lone U-boat sank six ships off Massachusetts in October 1916, initiating a U-boat scare, the RCN had to scramble to come up with enough resources to provide protection for local shipping. While this prompted the government to undertake a building program, few of these vessels were in commission when U-boats did strike in 1918. Then, as during World War II, there were complaints and recriminations over how little the navy was doing to protect Canada's coasts and absolutely no recognition for what they had accomplished despite the lack of support and resource from the Canadian government.

One would have thought that the Canadian government would have learned its lessons from the First World War. Canada needed a navy, and the navy needed to be supported in peacetime to be able to defend the country in wartime. Regardless, when Canada declared war on Germany in September 1939, the RCN was in only marginally better shape than it had been 25 years previous.

Hadley and Sarty make this very clear in this, the first in depth and truly critical examination of the Royal Canadian Navy from its inception to the end of World War I. Unlike Tucker's work, the authors, one of whom is fluent in German, make use of unpublished German sources to both illustrate the Kaiser's infatuation with seapower and also to explore Germany's designs on North America which included a survey of Canadian coastal defenses. Although the Kaiser was an adherent to the Mahan theory of sea supremacy, the German naval staff

appreciated the benefit of “cruiser warfare” by which fast, heavily armed warships would interdict maritime trade and harass enemy shore installations. With the Canadian government’s preoccupation with economy before the war, and the provisioning of the Canadian Corps during the war, Canada’s maritime defenses were totally inadequate. Unfortunately, the same would be true a quarter century later. Some of the reasons for this are addressed in the next collection of essays to appear on Canadian naval history.

*A Nation’s Navy: In Quest of a Canadian Naval Identity*⁴⁰ was the result of the 1993 Fleet Historical Conference held in October of that year. Published in 1996, it contains a number of articles on the pre-Second World War RCN, starting with William Glover’s “The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy?” Glover is one of the new breed of Canadian naval officer. Where once an officer’s training consisted of two or three years at the Royal Military College at Kingston, Ontario or the Royal Roads Military College in Vancouver, and then sea time, the modern officer is now both a seaman and scholar, many holding graduate degrees. Glover is one of these, having degrees in both History from Queen’s University and War Studies from King’s College, University of London. At the time of publication he was with the Directorate of History after a five year posting teaching History and Political Science at Royal Roads Military College.

In “The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy?” Glover suggests that the problems of national policy and national identity are inextricably linked and have been so since the creation of the RCN. He contends that the practical need for a navy was clouded right from the beginning by partisan politics over Canada’s relationship with Britain. The Laurier government wanted to evolve the Fisheries Patrol Service into a force to protect Canada’s shores,

⁴⁰Hadley, Huebert and Crickard, (eds.), *A Nation’s Navy*.

thus relieving the Royal Navy of that responsibility, while the Conservative opposition was looking at integrating any force Canada developed into the Royal Navy. This, of course, struck a discord with French Canadians who recognized the need for coastal defense but were against any sort of British control. Glover contends that after he became Prime Minister, Robert Borden realized that Canada's naval development could have "proceeded smoothly and with little or none of the excitement or criticism" had it been introduced ten years before.⁴¹ This sentiment is a far cry from Borden's view during the 1910 naval debate where he was firming behind imperial control of the RCN. However, in an ironic turn of events, Borden did accomplish his goals of 1910.

By starving the nascent RCN of funds, Borden instigated the formation of naval reserve units. As Glover points out, this was a two edged sword. While the reserve units promoted the Royal Canadian Navy in the public domain, especially in areas such as the Prairies and Quebec, it also meant that the regular force was trained in Britain. With these close ties to the Royal Navy - all of the senior officers at NSHQ in Ottawa during World War II had served with the RN - it is no wonder that the Canadian navy was seen as more British than Canadian, and made the quest for autonomy that much more difficult. In his essay, Glover examines this situation and how it molded the RCN well into the post World War II era, and spawned the chasm that was evident between the permanent force officers in Ottawa and the men at sea. Glover writes that this colonial/imperial relationship survived within naval circles long after it had disappeared from the national scene. This became evident in 1949 when mutinies occurred on two Canadian naval vessels. Glover concludes that because naval policy was developed in a vacuum without due

⁴¹Sir Robert Borden as quoted in William Gough, "The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal

consideration to the “national political life” of Canada, the RCN really was a colonial rather than Canadian navy.

While Glover’s point is well taken, and was certainly evident at Naval Service Headquarters during the Second World War, it is also true that many senior officers such as DeWolf, Brodeur, Prentice, and Murray continually fought for Canadian naval autonomy throughout the war. Indeed, it is difficult to think that the RCN, made up almost entirely of reserves in both the First and Second World Wars, could be seen as anything other than uniquely Canadian. Furthermore, given the condescension heaped upon Canadian naval officers during the Second World War, it is unlikely that any colonial attitude could have remained within the RCN.

Nationalism is also the topic of Graeme Tweedie’s “The Roots of the Royal Canadian Navy: Sovereignty versus Nationalism, 1812-1910.” Tweedie contends that to really understand the controversy surrounding the establishment of the RCN in 1910, one needs to understand Canada’s traditional concerns over maritime sovereignty. To accomplish this, Graeme looks at both the local concerns of the Maritime Provinces as well as Canada’s growing obligation to contribute to imperial defense. The RCN was the stepchild of the Fisheries Patrol Service which in turn was born out of the need to protect the east coast fishery from American interlopers. Initially this was the responsibility of the provinces, as Britain seemed unwilling to enforce the various Anglo-American fishery treaties. However, with Confederation, this responsibility became a federal affair and the FPS was created. The Department of Fisheries and Marine was formed under Peter Mitchel in 1869 and from then until the Naval Service Act, the department was responsible for all maritime matters including fisheries patrol.

Canadian Navy?” in *ibid.*, p. 74.

Tweedie then looks at Canada's international maritime commitments, reviewing the debate of the 1880s over a naval force on the Great Lakes to defend against an American invasion and the naval race of the early twentieth century. He argues that the Fisheries Patrol Service was such an obvious element of sovereignty that there was no argument over its formation and maintenance. The RCN, however, only promised entanglement in overseas disputes that most Canadians thought were no concerns of theirs. With the only direct threat being the United States, and that diminishing every year, it was hard to argue the need for a navy to nationalist elements, especially in Quebec. Tweedie contends that this division was why the RCN was almost scuttled right from the beginning whereas the FPS continued to grow unencumbered through the previous half century. Siobahn McNaught holds something of a different view in "The Rise of Proto-nationalism: Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Founding of the Naval Service of Canada, 1902-1910."

McNaught contends that there were conflicting sentiments at work in Canada during the first part of the last century. One was a strong loyalty towards the "Mother Country" while the other was a growing sense of Canadian nationalism and the wish to exert its influence in both external and defense policies. McNaught reviews the political developments from the time that the Canadian government expressed its wish to form its own navy at the Colonial Conference of 1902, to the passage of the Naval Service Act and the founding of the Royal Canadian Navy eight years later. She suggests that the chief impediment to Canada's own navy was the conflict of national sentiment mentioned previously. Whereas all parties recognized and welcomed some form of navy, the size and employment of that navy was the problem. Loyalty to Britain ordained that any navy would be a part of the Royal Navy in the event of a crisis. This was too much for

nationalists, especially those in Quebec, who felt that Canada's navy should protect Canadian territory, not be sent to far-flung waters on Britain's business while the dominion was left open. Assurances that the RN could quickly send a force to protect Canada's shore did not allay fears that, given the choice between defending Canada and defending itself, Britain would choose to keep its forces close to home. McNaught nevertheless points out that although Canada's fighting fleet was insignificant, by the beginning of World War I, the RCN controlled a large portion of the country's maritime resources including a coastal radio system, a naval bases on each coast and the fisheries protection and hydrographic fleets. Consequently, despite the recriminations and criticisms post war, during the First World War the RCN was able to both assist the Royal Navy in the protection of the Empire and offer protection to Canada's maritime interests at the same time. McNaught concludes by maintaining that, rather than being divisive factor in the nation's history, the Naval Service Act was actually "an effective embodiment of both loyalty to the Empire and aspirations of nationhood." This is something of a bold statement to make considering that it was the debate over this bill that brought down the Laurier government and almost proved to be Robert Borden's undoing. As it turned out, further expansion of the Fisheries Protection Service, Laurier's original intention, would have been more productive and less divisive for the country.

Barry Gough and Roger Sarty combine forces to examine the defense of Atlantic Canada in "Sailors and Soldiers: The Royal Navy, the Canadian Forces, and the Defense of Atlantic Canada, 1890-1918." Doctors Gough and Sarty argue that during the first part of the last century the Royal Canadian Navy "found its identity" by working in close co-operation with the Canadian army protecting the ports and shores of Atlantic Canada. They suggest that the scale of

this task, and the co-dependence developed as a result, has not been properly understood and nor has its contribution to the Royal Navy's strategic responsibilities for the security of the northwest Atlantic. However, they maintain, this very co-operation produced tensions which in the end strengthened the country's resolve to develop its own self-sufficient maritime forces.

Gough and Sarty assert that Halifax with its magnificent harbour, naval base and fortress was the pivot upon which Britain's Atlantic strategy revolved. It became the key to both Britain's strategic position in North America and Canada's security. This became more than evident during World War I, when Canada was, for the first time in almost a century, directly threatened by hostile forces in the form of Germany's new weapon - the U-boat. Not only had this threat developed rapidly, but it also entangled Canada in the delicate question of sovereignty with respect to Britain and its neighbour to the south, the United States. As a result, Gough and Sarty conclude, Canadian defense planning had to examine the possibility that Canada might find itself standing alone alongside either the US or Britain in a conflict whereby one or the other remained neutral. As a result, the Canadian Naval Staff developed clear lines of authority with the Admiralty in Canada's sea frontier. The result was that when war again plunged the world into conflict, Canada immediately instigated a massive shipbuilding program to produce the large number of coastal escort craft the Naval Staff considered necessary to protect Canadian waters. The fact that these vessels would actually be used to defend Britain's vital sea lines of communication across the Atlantic, no one could have foreseen. Roger Sarty takes a more comprehensive look at Canada's maritime defense in his 1996 study *The Maritime Defense of Canada*.

In 1909, in the face of British alarm at the naval arms race with Germany, the two main federal parties in Canada agreed that the country should pursue the creation of its own naval force. Unfortunately, neither could agree as to what form that force should take and under whose control it would be in time of crisis. The bitter debate that followed precipitated the downfall of the Liberal government of Sir Wilfred Laurier and saw Conservative Sir Robert Borden ascend to the Prime Minister's chair in the House of Commons. In *The Maritime Defense of Canada*, Roger Sarty contends that Borden, rather than being the divisive force in the debate, actually tried to rebuild that consensus by reviving earlier Liberal incentives that his party had supported during the Laurier period. In addition, Sarty argues that the political controversies of that period have overshadowed the actual accomplishment of the Royal Canadian Navy in creating a coastal defense scheme. He also writes that the RCN's contribution to the development of Canadian sovereignty has also been neglected. The experiences of the First World War inspired successful efforts to define Canada's naval needs in purely practical terms. In *The Maritime Defense of Canada*, he tries to rectify these misconception and omissions.

The most recent scholarship on the early years of the RCN can be found in Marc Milner's *Canada's Navy: The First Century*. Published in 1999, *Canada's Navy* can be seen as the high water mark for naval scholarship on the Royal Canadian Navy. This is not to suggest that everything is downhill from here. To the contrary, there is so much more to be written on the RCN. As Milner asserts in his preface, very little has been done on the social history of the RCN, and few biographies have appeared on the many people who influenced the RCN throughout the last century. *Canada's Navy*, however, is the culmination of most of what has been written on the RCN since Tucker's *Naval Service of Canada*. What gaps there are, Milner has tried to fill

through interviews archived at the Directorate of History and Heritage, National Defense Headquarters.

Marc Milner is arguably one of the most important naval historians in Canada. His 1985 *North Atlantic Run* was the first scholarly monograph on the Royal Canadian Navy since Tucker's *The Naval Service of Canada* some thirty-odd years before. He has written and lectured extensively on the Royal Canadian Navy and is recognized internationally for his work. However, his area of expertise is the Battle of the Atlantic during World War II, and consequently *Canada's Navy* produces no new scholarship on the pre World War II Royal Canadian Navy. For the section on the early years of the RCN he relies heavily on most of the material examined in this paper, especially Tuckers's work and Hadley and Sarty's *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships*. Regardless, his purpose was not to unearth any new material on the early RCN, merely to write a concise history of the RCN from its birth in 1910 to the present day. Consequently, other than a synthesis of what has already been written by such scholars as Hadley, Sarty, Gough, and others, *Canada's Navy* does not contribute anything new to the study of the early years of Canada's navy.

Of course, no study of the early Royal Canadian Navy can be complete without some knowledge of the two most prominent men involved with the creation of the RCN - Sir Wilfred Laurier and Sir Robert Borden. It was Laurier as Prime Minister who mid-wived the Fishery Patrol Service into the Royal Canadian Navy by way of the Naval Service Act of 1910. And it was the polarization of the debate that eventually brought his government down and pitted Imperialist against Nationalist, ultimately leaving the country with no real navy to speak of when war came in 1914. There have been several biographies written about Laurier, and one is no

better the other but two which do offer insight into the man who became Canada's first French Canadian Prime Minister are Barbara Robertson's *Sir Wilfred Laurier: The Great Conciliator*⁴² and Laurier L LaPierre's *Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Romance of Canada*.⁴³

Robertson argues that to truly understand Laurier's time, one has to appreciate two factors - the British tradition within Canada and the fear of American imperialism. It should be remembered that it was the former that challenged Laurier's plans for a Canadian navy and the latter that was the impetus for the formation of the Fisheries Patrol Service from which the RCN sprang. Robertson traces Laurier's life from his birth in 1841, through his fifteen year political career to his death in February 1919. Laurier LaPierre takes a somewhat different look at Laurier. In his preface to *Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Romance of Canada*, LaPierre recognizes the number of works available on Laurier and contends that his takes a different view as he looks at Laurier's personal life rather than purely his political life. LaPierre asserts that even though Laurier was from Quebec and had a strong belief in Canada as a nation, he also believed in Canada's connection to Britain. Consequently, his Naval Service Act was not only an attempt to assert Canada's independence from the Motherland, but also a recognition of the country's obligation to the Empire in times of crisis.

Robertson's study is much more objective than LaPierre's. LaPierre's introduction makes it clear on which side of the fence the author sits. While he does contend that his work examines

⁴²Barbara Robertson, *Sir Wilfred Laurier: The Great Conciliator* (2nd ed., Kingston: Quarry Press, 1991).

⁴³Laurier L. LaPierre, *Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Romance of Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1996).

Laurier's personal life rather than political, it is still evident that he has great admiration for the man and this tends to colour the text. Regardless, *Sir Wilfred Laurier and the Romance of Canada* gives the student some understanding of the personalities involved in the debate.

Sir Robert Borden sat on the other side of the debate. While recognizing Canada's need for a navy, Borden thought it should be developed as part of the Royal Navy. While this expressed the imperialist view, it did not take into account the nationalists' fears that such a force would embroil Canada in Britain's frequent brush fires. Nevertheless, the controversy over jurisdiction led Borden to the Prime Minister's office and the near extinction of Canada's fledgling navy. He was to rue his remonstrations only a few years later when Canada was at war and all that protected the country's vast coastline were two derelict cruisers. Two works which examine Borden's life and tenure as Prime Minister of Canada are *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*⁴⁴ by Robert Brown and *The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden*⁴⁵ by Harold Wilson.

Volume I of Brown's biography on Borden follows him from his birth in 1854 up to the eve of World War I. In his preface, Brown contends that the greatest part of Borden's career is during these years. Certainly as Canada's wartime Prime Minister and the initiator of the conscription crisis of 1918, the war years and the period up to his death in 1937 are probably his most infamous years. Regardless, as pertains the creation and near stillbirth of the RCN, the first part of the century up to the beginning of the Great War are the most important. Acknowledging

⁴⁴Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography* (2 vols., Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975)

⁴⁵Harold A. Wilson, *The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden* (Gainsville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1966).

Borden's memoirs and *Letters to Limbo*,⁴⁶ Brown contends that his is the first attempt to reconstruct Borden's life from Borden's own papers and from other unpublished sources. Brown argues that Borden did not really have any political ambitions in the early years but was, instead was "wholly devoted" to being a lawyer.

All the same, Borden's professional interests were closely tied to the Conservative Party of Canada even though he did not have any reputation as a party man.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he eventually found himself the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons and in this position his was the voice of imperialist sentiment in the debate over the Naval Service Act. Brown writes that Borden was actually ambivalent on imperial issues. He felt that it was an evolving relationship commensurate with Canada's growth as a nation.⁴⁸ This vagueness did nothing to quell the tensions between factions in his own party to the point that he offered his resignation in the face of a revolt by some of his colleagues. In the end the malcontents backed down and Borden remained in control of the Conservatives.

In *The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden*, Harold Wilson attempts to demonstrate the relationship between Borden's view of Canada's place in the Empire and the important changes to the Empire in the period between 1911 and 1920. This period, of course, encompasses the debate over the Canadian navy as well as the war years and aftermath. The burning question during the debate was not so much Canada's having a navy, but more so, imperial control over

⁴⁶Robert Laird Borden, *Letters to Limbo*, Henry Borden (ed.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

⁴⁷Brown, *Robert Laird Borden*, p. 31.

that navy. Wilson observes that Borden felt that central control of dominion forces was the price of a seat at the table when it came to the British Empire's foreign policy.⁴⁹ To this end, he proposed his own naval bill, which included a \$35 million contribution to Britain's naval buildup as well as \$20 million for the Canadian Navy.⁵⁰ As it was, the bill was defeated in the Liberal-dominated Senate, and neither the Royal Navy nor the Royal Canadian Navy saw a cent from it. Wilson argues that Borden failed in his quest for a naval policy for two reasons. The first was that he did not appreciate that nationalist sentiment was destined to increase as time went on thus causing imperialist sentiment to lessen, and second, Borden failed to realize the serious obstacles that stood in the way of creating a functioning centralized imperial defense structure.⁵¹ While this is true, one area that Wilson does not explore is that of partisan politics. Neither Borden nor Laurier were able to step above politics for the sake of a Canadian navy. While each felt that Canada should have its own naval force, neither could compromise enough to develop one that answered both imperatives. As a result, when the time came, Canada's territorial waters were left near defenseless.

The aforementioned is a survey of almost all that has been written on the early years of the Royal Canadian Navy to date. While articles have appeared in many magazines and journals on the subject, they are for the most part, written on the same subjects and by the same scholars included in this survey. Doctors Milner and Sarty are regular contributors. Milner recently

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁹Wilson, *The Imperial Policy of Sir Robert Borden*, p.10.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

authored a four part series on the early years of the RCN which appeared in *Legion Magazine*⁵² and Roger Sarty relates an incident in *Canadian Military History* that occurred in 1915 which led to a greater co-operation between the RCN and the militia in the matter of harbour defenses at Halifax.⁵³ Two other articles of interest to the naval historian are “In Defense of Home Waters: Doctrine and Training in the Canadian Navy During the 1930s”⁵⁴ by Michael Whitby and “Kingsmill’s Cruisers: The Cruiser Tradition in the Early Royal Canadian Navy,”⁵⁵ by Kenneth P. Hansen.

In “In Defense of Home Waters” Whitby argues that as far as training went, the RCN was well prepared for war by the time the Second World War started. Unfortunately, it was not the right kind of training for the war that was eventually fought. Naval wisdom at the time was that any war at sea would consist of a Jutland style clash of battle fleets with the victor attaining sea supremacy having destroyed or severely crippling the enemy fleet. As a result, Canada’s navy, consisting solely of destroyers, trained with the Royal Navy as part of its battle fleet. All the same, NSHQ did anticipate that in the event of war, Canada’s coasts were vulnerable and, as

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵²“It Began with Fish and Ships,” *Legion Magazine* (January/February 2004); “A Sea of Politics,” *Legion Magazine* (March/April 2004); “Rainbow Warrior,” *Legion Magazine* (May/June 2004); and “Saved by a Few Good Men,” *Legion Magazine* (June/July 2004).

⁵³“Roger Sarty, “The Incident on Lucknow Street: Defenders and the Defended in Halifax, 1915,” *Canadian Military History*, X, No. 2 (Spring 2001).

⁵⁴Michael Whitby, “In Defense of Home Waters: Doctrine and Training in the Canadian Navy During the 1930s,” *The Mariner’s Mirror*, LXXVII, No. 2 (May 1991), pp.167-177.

demonstrated by the events of World War I, help could not be expected from the Royal Navy in case of attack.. Consequently, the RCN also exercised tactics for the defense of the East and West coasts. Unfortunately, these exercises presupposed that any attacks on the coasts would be perpetrated by surface raiders - cruisers or AMCs (Armed Merchant Cruisers) - not submarines. This threat had been nullified, it was believed, by ASDIC⁵⁶ even though the RCN had only four asdic equip warships and only two officers who had received asdic training, in the early 1920s. Whereas anti submarine practices were included in most exercises, they consisted of little more than dropping depth-charges on a stationary surface target, not detecting and attacking a submerged submarine. As a result, when thrown into the escort/anti-submarine role, the Royal Canadian Navy was unprepared. Whitby points out that critics continually point to this lack of training and doctrine as the reason for the RCN's difficulties during the Battle of the Atlantic. On the other hand, he suggests that these criticisms are written after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. He suggests that no one could have predicted the role that the RCN would play in maintaining the trans-Atlantic lines of communication. One wonders, however, if this is exactly true. Certainly, even with the supposed effectiveness of asdic, prudence would have suggested

⁵⁵Kenneth Hansen, "Kingsmill's Cruisers: The Cruiser Tradition in the Early Royal Canadian Navy," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, XIII, No. 1 (January 2003), pp 37-52.

⁵⁶A device which could detect a submerged submarine. Now known as SONAR.

more training and trained personnel in the area of anti-submarine warfare. Even as screens for a battle fleet, Canadian destroyers would be responsible for protecting the fleet from U-boats.⁵⁷

In his article “Kingsmill’s Cruisers” Kenneth Hansen, argues that not only was Canadian doctrine for the defense of Canadian waters flawed, so was the choice of warships. He suggests that not only were cruisers better suited than destroyers for coastal and trade protection, but that the RCN actually has a cruiser tradition right up to the present. The Fisheries Patrol Service consisted of a number of small cruisers, Canada’s first two naval vessels were former Royal Navy cruisers, and Canada operated the cruiser HMCS *Uganda* during the later part of World War II. In fact, other than their endurance, the RCN’s wartime Tribal-class destroyers had many of the characteristics of a small cruiser. Hansen suggests that politicians and historians have “an almost emotional reaction” to the suggestion that large warships be a part of the RCN. And yet, he argues, certain cruiser characteristics have been shown to be essential to the country’s naval requirements. Whereas critics dismiss such attributes as armament, armour, and speed as not necessary to Canada’s coastal and trade protection role, they neglect to examine other cruiser features - endurance, seakeeping and staff accommodations - which are, in the Canadian context, the warships other important traits. All one had to do is look at the Canadian experience during World War II where short endurance destroyers were forced to leave an endangered convoy at a vital moment due to lack of fuel. Again, it seems that politics and lack of foresight played a more

⁵⁷During World War I, the *U-9* sank three RN armored cruisers by torpedo in the space of one hour with the loss of sixty-two officers and 1397 men. See V.E. Tarrant, *The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), p. 10.

important role in naval planning in the first part of the century than doctrine and the right type of ships.

The creation of the Royal Canadian Navy was steeped in controversy from the beginning. The Liberals under Sir Wilfred Laurier proposed a navy powerful enough to operate with the Royal Navy but firmly under the control of the Canadian Government. The Conservative opposition led by Sir Robert Borden, while agreeing with the principle and proposed composition of Canada's navy, held firm that it should operate under Admiralty jurisdiction. Neither proposition appeased nationalist elements in Quebec which felt Canada's navy should be coastal in nature and not be subject to the whims of Great Britain. The result was that while the Royal Canadian Navy was formed in 1910 by the Naval Service Act, a clear Canadian naval policy was never articulated. When war came to Canadian shores in the Fall of 1918, and Canada's maritime trade directly threatened, the RCN did not have the wherewithal to defend it. Post war sentiment and economic restrictions placed the RCN in limbo until once again the threat of war loomed on the horizon.

Despite the importance of this era on the RCN's performance in the Second World War, most scholarly attention has been paid to the latter period. This is unfortunate because, as Hadley and Sarty observe in *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships*, one needs to examine this period to understand the experiences of the Second World War and beyond. While more scholarly examination has appeared over the past decade, it still does not equal that of the World War II period. It is some

indication of the paucity of early Royal Canadian Navy history that the main source referenced in most studies on the period is in excess of ten years old.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Hadley and Sarty, *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships*. The other source often cited is Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, published in 1952.

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