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MASTERS OF DEFENCE STUDIES

**Leadmark to Confederation
The Second World War Militarization of Newfoundland**

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the Second World War, Great Britain stood on the brink of economic collapse. She had emptied her treasury to protect her Empire during a war in which, for nearly two years, she had stood alone against the Axis. The United States of America had emerged as a world leader with a new global influence. Canada, flush with victory and promise, strode enthusiastically onto the world stage as a strong middle power. All three converged to have defence and political stakes in the small colony of Newfoundland, herself on the brink of restored self-government.

Instead of choosing to regain a democratic government, Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada. Canada, despite decades of trepidation, welcomed the colony warmly. The diplomatic and political struggle that took place to effect this union was legion. Political, social, and economic factors shaped the results of the referendum but were by no means the only influences. One area that has received very little attention was the effect that the American militarization of Newfoundland during the Second World War had on Canada and her willingness to allow the union. This paper will explore the historical relations that Great Britain, Canada, and the United States in turn had with Newfoundland. From the earliest days of the fishery and British governance, through the trade negotiations and economic disputes with both Canada and the United States during the 19th Century and culminating in the armed presence of all three in the colony during the Second World War. Further, it will be shown that the reluctance of Great Britain to assume more financial responsibility, and the fear of Canada that Newfoundland would

slip into American control, was a key deciding factor in the political maneuvering that led to the transition from colony to province.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Just before midnight on March 31st 1949, the Act of Newfoundland came into effect making Newfoundland and Labrador Canada's tenth province. (Figure 1.1) The initial proposed date for union was April 1st, to coincide with the start of the fiscal year, but was changed after protests by Joseph 'Joey' Smallwood and others. As Smallwood put it, "I didn't want to spend the rest of my life listening to taunts that Confederation had come on All Fools' Day."¹ Smallwood, a pork farmer, radio personality and fiery speaker from Newfoundland had emerged over the course of several years as the leader of the Confederation faction. Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada was a story of cajoling and negotiations, fervent speeches and impassioned appeals that resulted in a referendum the legacy of which has filled numerous volumes; a referendum that was remarkable for the bare margin by which Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada.

The union of Canada and Newfoundland realized a dream for many. For pro-confederates, it brought to a geographical close the Dominion of Canada from sea to sea. Newfoundland's storied and often tragic past had laid the foundations for this joining with Canada. The financial, economic, and political factors that define any examination of Confederation are often times overlooked with the results of the vote being reduced to the desires of the population for a better life. The undercurrents of this whole affair have typically been placed in the context of a new and emerging post-war world. This explanation gives the limited impression that Newfoundland joined Canada at an opportune time. To have rejected confederation would have meant an uncertain and

¹Joseph R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada: The Memoirs of the Honourable Joseph R. Smallwood* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), 319.

generally-accepted darker future. Anti-confederates suggested that Newfoundland tossed aside a chance for a viable and bright future as a self-governing and independent country. One factor that has received little examination from both pro and anti-confederation camps was the impact that American militarization of the island during the Second World War had on this defining political event.



Figure 1.1 – Newfoundland and Labrador

Source: geology.com, available from geology.com/.../Newfoundland-and-labrador.shtml

Historically, military involvement in Newfoundland was typically thrust upon it rather than evolving as an extension of local government. The history of Newfoundland was characterized by colonialism and accordingly, military power was exercised by Great Britain in keeping with her own interests rather than local concerns. Newfoundland itself never had a standing military of any consequence and domestically, it was relegated to constabulary duties. The Newfoundland militia was never large or powerful enough to have been used as a tool by political masters. Conversely, the military presence of the United States and Canada in Newfoundland during the Second World War influenced confederation politically in a way that Smallwood never could have had the war not happened; a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. Since Newfoundland had no military of its own – its sons and daughters fought in both British and Canadian forces throughout the 20th Century – the military that influenced the colony's political future was not its own. During the Second World War and in the defining years leading up to confederation, the island's political fate lay as much in the hands and wallets of Ottawa, Washington, and Westminster, as in St. John's.

The war itself brought not only the presence of the militaries of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom and the relative prosperity of both development and markets for Newfoundland products, but also the fact that thousands of Newfoundlanders fought overseas and had experienced a life beyond their relatively isolated existence.² Earning wages and becoming more 'worldly' meant that the social and economic stagnation that Newfoundlanders had suffered through and endured in the 1920s and 1930s could not continue. Historian Richard Gwyn notes that:

²John N. Cardoulis, *A Friendly Invasion: The American Military in Newfoundland 1940-1990* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1990), 15.

Her standards were roughly comparable to those of rural Portugal. [Europe's glaring exception to modernity] During the war, however, Newfoundlanders had discovered from the free-spending Canadian, American, and British servicemen how the other 99.9% of the Anglo-Saxon world lived, and had themselves been discovered by the outside world.³

Newfoundlanders were exposed to commodities and practices both on their own shores from garrison troops and through fighting overseas with modern and advanced military forces. This exposure would prevent a return to such archaic, but then-acceptable, practices in the past as the barter system managed by the all-powerful fish merchants. To this generation of Newfoundlanders, the overwhelming power of church and state lost their legitimacy.⁴

Additionally, the near defeat of Great Britain in 1940 and the sudden interest of the United States gave Canada a new appreciation for the strategic value of Newfoundland. After decades of little interest in accepting the territory into the Canadian Dominion, suddenly the prospect of a starving guardian of the St Lawrence that was not under its own arms became a troubling concept for Ottawa.⁵ Moreover, a post-war possibility of an American Newfoundland blocking the Atlantic coast reflected the Alaskan panhandle affront on the Pacific and raised an ugly spectre in Ottawa. It created debate in Mackenzie King's cabinet over the status of Newfoundland.⁶

The purpose of this paper is to examine the militarizing influence that the Second World War had on Newfoundland joining the Dominion of Canada. It is an oft-quoted axiom of Clausewitz that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other

³Richard Gwyn, *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), 59.

⁴David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 128.

⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

⁶Gwynne Dyer, "The Strategic Importance of Newfoundland and Labrador to Canada," *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada* (March 2003), 322.

means.”⁷ In the history of Newfoundland, rather than a continuation of policy or, by association, politics, war created and influenced rather than ‘continued’. This was particularly true in the Second World War when Newfoundland was exposed to Canadian policies that helped to lay the foundations for union. A very real opportunity existed during the heady post-war period of prosperity for independence - a return to Dominion status - on the back of a newly reinvigorated economy in Newfoundland. This opportunity was waylaid in the interests of confederation with Canada which was made possible by the war and Canadian investment and armed presence in Newfoundland.

This argument will initially examine the history of militarization in Newfoundland, paying particular attention to her place within the Atlantic Triangle during the Second World War. Newfoundland’s history and relationships with the three major powers involved in her political evolution – Great Britain, Canada, and the United States – will each be examined in separate chapters, chronicling early relations but focusing on the crucial war years. Next, the three very different histories will be brought together to examine how the arming of Newfoundland during the Second World War contributed to the political disarming of Newfoundlanders in the post war period when the question of self-government arose and necessitated the Confederation debates. Finally, confederation itself will be discussed highlighting how Canadian presence in Newfoundland during the war laid the foundations for union with Canada.

In researching this paper, a wealth of information pertaining to Newfoundland’s political and military history was found using the *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web Site* and historian D.W. Prowse’s classic study, *The History of Newfoundland*, which

⁷Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard & Peter Paret, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 69.

has lost none of its appeal a century after printing. Regarding American relations with Great Britain and Newfoundland during the war years, William Langer and Everett Gleason's, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War, 1940-1941*, was invaluable in its scope and political analysis of American isolationism, "Destroyers for Bases", and the Lend-Lease Act, exposing the special relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt. No less a figure than Churchill elaborated on this relationship with Roosevelt in his monumental, multivolume work, *The Second World War*, while his views were supported (albeit with less enthusiasm) by Warren Kimball in his examination of the politics of war in *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941*.

No study of Canada in the Second World War would be complete without C.P. Stacey's, *Arms, Men, and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*, which, in this paper, was crucial in establishing the politics behind the garrisoning of Newfoundland and the Canadian quest for her airfields. Peter Neary's *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* and David Mackenzie's *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation 1939-1949*, were both indispensable in demonstrating the politicking that went on under the guise of war and social change. Particularly interesting was Mackenzie's analysis of Canadian policy towards Newfoundland as moving from studied indifference to near frantic interest after the establishment of American forces on the island.

Finally, valuable primary source documents were contained in Paul Bridle's edited work *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volumes 1 and 2*. These volumes contain literally hundreds of memorandums, letters, and diplomatic notes from a host of British, Newfoundland, and Canadian bureaucrats that give clear insight

into the political thinking that took place between 1935 and 1949. Specifically, the change in tone in notes exchanged between Canadian representatives ranging from indifference to concern provided evidence of an emerging strategy to deal with the political question of post-war Newfoundland. Particularly important to this paper was evidence of the clear and quiet campaign of appeasement that was undertaken by Canadian representatives in Newfoundland to facilitate the eventual confederation. Illustrated numerous times in Bridle's collection, Ottawa's standing orders to all concerned authorities were to establish better ties with Newfoundland without being seen to in an attempt to dilute the bad blood between the two states.

Together these sources form an historical discourse concerning the evolution of Newfoundland from a pre-war starving colony to a prosperous state at the end of the Second World War; from a colony ruled by committee to a people poised to once again gain self-government with the prosperity and experiences of war behind them. They provide evidence of the interaction of three world powers during wartime which would contribute to Newfoundland becoming Canada's tenth province. Interwoven into the politics and aims of Great Britain, the United States and Canada are the multitude of factors and motives that permit a fuller examination of this period of Newfoundland's history and the actions that would shape her future.

CHAPTER TWO – MILITARY BACKGROUND

PAWN OF EUROPE

An exhaustive retelling of Newfoundland's history is outside the scope of this paper. However, a brief synopsis is useful to provide an understanding of the influence that armed force has had in this region on both the political stage and, during the Second World War, on the social fabric. The island of Newfoundland, and to a lesser extent Labrador, has figured largely in the military and strategic plans of many of the world's powers. From the first tentative landings of Spanish and Portuguese fishermen and whalers, to the wars of empire of Britain and France, Newfoundland and Labrador has both benefitted from militarization and on occasion, paid heavily as a result of participating in war. Newfoundlanders fought for King (and Queen) and Empire whether pressed in the case of the 18th and 19th Royal Navy, or as willing volunteers in the wars of the 20th Century. Newfoundland lost a generation on the beaches of Gallipoli and in the mud of Flanders in defence of the British Empire and again, in the Second World War, Newfoundlanders fielded two regiments of artillery, a squadron of fighters in the Royal Air Force, and contributed thousands of men and women to the Royal Navy and to the forces of Canada.⁸ Today, as a province of Canada, Newfoundlanders continue to contribute soldiers, sailors and airmen to the Canadian Forces. While this may reflect the

⁸Although many books and publications have been published on Newfoundlanders and war, the companion volumes *The Fighting Newfoundlander* and *More Fighting Newfoundlanders*, written by Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, CD and endorsed and published by the provincial government of Newfoundland are generally recognized as the definitive history of the Newfoundland war effort in the Second World War. G.W.L. Nicholson, *More Fighting Newfoundlanders: A History of Newfoundland's Fighting Forces in the Second World War* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1969)

traditionally poor economic state of the island, it may also speak to the sense of loyalty and service that colours so much of Newfoundland history.

From the early 16th Century, parts of Newfoundland had been fortified by the British against the French, Spanish, and Americans, by the French against the British, and most recently by the British, Canadians, and Americans against the threat of the Axis. In so doing, massive infusions of capital and manpower was spent by not only the British Empire, but by the United States and the Dominion of Canada on what was, essentially, foreign soil for the North Americans.

A visitor to Newfoundland today would be hard put to find real evidence of that long history of militarization. If one were to look closer, however, and armed with historical proof, the picture becomes clearer. The termini of most routes to the island silently hint at their origins. Near the ferry terminal in Argentia lie the remains of one of the largest United States Navy establishments outside of the continental United States. Near the other terminal of Port Aux Basques, the town of Stephenville grew from a few rambling shacks to a prosperous hub under the shadow of the United States Army Air Corps and then the United States Air Force (USAF) base at Harmon Field. St. John's International Airport located in the once small village of Torbay, was established by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) during the Second World War. Distributed throughout the east end of St. John's itself are Forts Pepperell, Amherst, and the fortifications of Signal Hill, all showing evidence of American, Canadian and British Army bases and gun emplacements. The RCAF, along with the Royal Air Force (RAF), and later the USAF, used Gander as a major link in Ferry Command during the Second World War and as an air base for much of the Cold War. The Royal Canadian Navy

(RCN) operated a Second World War convoy route from St. John's, while for decades, Cold War pilots were trained in Goose Bay in Labrador. Bay Bulls was not only the site of a Seven Year's War battle between French and English forces in 1762, but was established as a RCN repair facility. It was also the location of the surrender of U-190, the submarine that sank HMCS ESQUIMALT, the last RCN casualty of the Second World War. Placentia was once a stronghold of New France and the tiny town of Brigus was burned by not only that hero of New France, Iberville, but by also by his Lieutenant, Bois Briand, in 1695 and again in 1696. Carbonear Island in Conception Bay had the distinction of being the only remaining British stronghold on the Avalon Peninsula to hold out against Iberville's marauding French forces. Today, its cannons stand in silent testament to a time when ownership of the Island practically depended on the nationality of the first sail on the horizon after the ice freed the shores.⁹

THE ATLANTIC TRIANGLE

Although often times fought over and indeed used as a bargaining chip in far-away European negotiations, Newfoundland was never a lynchpin in any nation's quest for power or defence until the Second World War. In the waning days of 1940, the phony war was well and truly over with German forces ranging far and successfully throughout Europe. The British Expeditionary Force and the remnants of the once proud French Army were thrown against the beaches of Dunkirk, and but for a series of

⁹Abbe Jean Baudoin, transcribed by Alan F. Williams, "Abbe Jean Baudoin's journal about the siege of Carbonear Island from January 24th, 1697 to February 1st, 1697. Written in Carbonear," Baccalieu: Crossroads for Cultures, [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.crossroadsforcultures.ca/index.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.

blunders on the part of the Axis and extremely good luck on the part of the British, Great Britain would have lost her Army. Suddenly the British Empire stood alone with vast territories, massive amounts of men and raw resources, but dangerously little war stock. Britain need planes, ships, tanks and other war materiel to continue the fight. The industrial bases of India, Australia, and Canada lacked both the expertise and time to replace both the ships of the merchant fleet and the Royal Navy (RN) that was being sunk in staggering numbers. Nor could they replace the loss of an Army's worth of rolling stock, left on the beaches of France. Great Britain's industrial base was hammered hard by the Blitz and by losses at sea, denying it much-needed raw resources and consequently reduced its normal output to a mere fraction of its previous production.¹⁰ Technical and, more importantly, mechanical assistance and supplies were needed and quickly. The one avenue of ready supply that remained open and which could satisfy Britain's desperate need was the United States. Despite an official stance of neutrality, the United States began its 'Undeclared War' with Roosevelt firing the first shot by supporting a beleaguered Great Britain.¹¹

Winston Churchill became Prime Minister at Britain's darkest hour. His rousing speech in the House of Commons on June 4th 1940, soon after the disaster of Dunkirk, moved a nation.

...we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on

¹⁰W.K. Hancock & M.M Gowing, *British War Economy* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1949), 252.

¹¹William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War, 1940-1941* (New York: harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), xiii.

the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...¹²

Moving words but one that belied a deep-seated fear that, without assistance, the United Kingdom could not hope to survive a German invasion, let alone win the war.¹³

American assistance conflicted with a strong anti-war and isolationist faction that permeated all strata of American society resulting from the losses suffered during the First World War.¹⁴ Under no circumstances, the American people were told again and again by successive governments, would American boys be sent to die in a foreign land for a foreign power. Of course, all would eventually change with the attack on Pearl Harbour, but even the sinking of American ships by German submarines and the loss of American lives throughout war-torn Europe, could not alter the official stance of non-involvement.



Figure 2.1 - Winston S. Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Atlantic Conference at Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, 1941.

Source: Meredith College FDR Photo Gallery, available from www.meredith.edu/summer-reading/roosevelt/fdr.htm

¹²Winston S. Churchill, “We Shall Fight on the Beaches, June 4, 1940,” *The Churchill Centre: Speeches and Quotes*, [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=393.html>; Internet; accessed 21 April, 2009.

¹³W.K. Hancock & M.M Gowing, *British War Economy* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1949), 104.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

However, Churchill had found a friend and a willing ally in Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Ever the master of theatre, Churchill would emphasize his American connection from his Mother's family and the fact that both he and American president Franklin D. Roosevelt had led their respective Navies (FDR as Secretary of the Navy, Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty) to good effect.¹⁵ In Roosevelt he found a sympathetic if not always compliant ear. War goods were brazenly sent to the United Kingdom and the Empire in direct contravention of America's stated neutrality, often dragged across the Canadian border in a classic case of adhering to the letter of the law, rather than the spirit. A mutual defence of North America agreement was signed with Canada at Ogdensburg, New York on August 18th 1940.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Churchill and Roosevelt spoke regularly on both the state of the war and things that could be done to help Great Britain without officially assisting her.

On this side of the border, Mackenzie King had declared war a mere (scandalous, some would allege) four days after Great Britain and what was to become a formidable army, air force, and navy, was frantically being built by Canadian industry. Initial thoughts from Ottawa on the war were similar to popular American thought in that few were willing to send Canadian boys to another European war. Indeed, King foresaw

¹⁵Winston Spencer Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, in 1874. The son of Tory statesman Lord Randolph Churchill and Lady Randolph (Jennie) Churchill (nee Jerome), Churchill was particularly close to his American mother throughout his childhood and early adulthood, relying on both her counsel and her connections to court for preferential treatment while a war correspondent and political favours as a young MP. His youthful dismissal of an Anglo-American alliance viewed as "that wild impossibility", soon gave way as he enthusiastically championing the cause as a means to preserve world order and promote peace. On leaving office in 1955, he advised ministers to, 'Never be separated from the Americans', a view that remained with him for the rest of his life. Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006) 184, 429.

¹⁶C.P. Stacey, *The Canadian-American Permanent Joint Board on Defence, 1940-1945: Historical Section Report No. 70* (Ottawa: Historical Section, Army Headquarters, 1954), 17.

Canada as being the airfield of the Empire with the institution of the British

Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Canadian military historian C.P. Stacey recorded:

King's problem was that while he wanted to help the British he did not want to go so far as to make it appear that he was getting the country involved in a military commitment which would endanger Canadian unity.¹⁷

This was quickly seen to be overly optimistic on King's part as he faced growing and almost fanatical pressure from his cabinet, his government and the thousands of Canadians clamoring to enlist to commit all and put Canada on a full war footing. As the German *juggernaut* rolled across Europe it seemed that Canada was going to war, whether she wanted to or not.

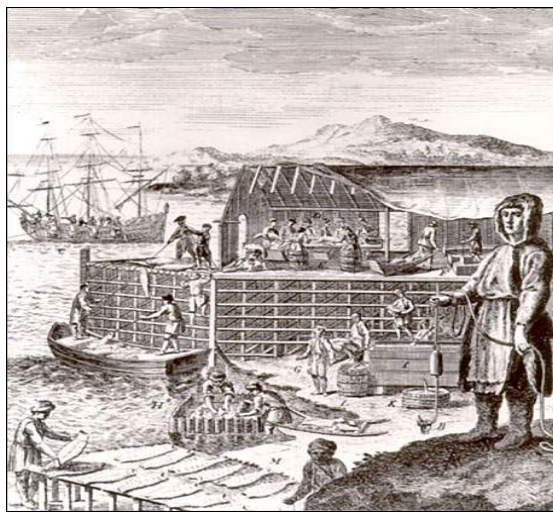
In an effort to bolster what was effectively a loyal, staunch, but impoverished and starving neighbour with no military capability of her own, Canada deployed military forces to Newfoundland to assist the Newfoundland militia in guarding key installations. Later, with the influx of the Americans on the heels of the Lend-Lease deal, Canada would not only deploy much larger quantities of army, but also naval and air force personnel. Before examining the relationship of Newfoundland and Canada, one would be amiss not to examine the development of this tiny player on the world stage from the British, American, and Canadian perspectives.

¹⁷F.J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, Directorate of History, 1983), 10.

CHAPTER THREE – BRITAIN’S OLDEST COLONY

THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY ROAD TO SELF-GOVERNMENT

Newfoundland and the ‘mother country’ have always shared an uneasy relationship. The colonization of the island of Newfoundland can best be characterized by incoherent policy with respect to settlement and development. Essentially, Newfoundland was viewed by Britain as simply a resource. It was the discovery of fish in Newfoundland that set off initial exploitation of the region. Settlement was discouraged and indeed, private shipping and fishing interests violently opposed any tentative development of the island. They were afraid that their monopolizing interests would be interfered with by established settlers.¹⁸ The fact remained that, although the land was overshadowed by the importance of the Grand Banks fishing grounds and the wealth they represented, *terra firma* was necessary to facilitate the processing of the catches.



**Figure 3.1 - Fishing Stage
Used in the Newfoundland
Migratory Fishery.**

Source: A French woodcut of unknown origins with the English description, “A VIEW OF A STAGE & ALSO YE MANNER OF FISHING FOR, CURING & DRYING COD AT NEWFOUNDLAND.”

¹⁸D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 83.

Consequently, the land was used to dry and cure the fish and with the construction of wharves and stages, fish stores and buildings soon followed. Commercial ventures being what they were, this necessitated watchmen to prevent vandalism and destruction by rival fishers. These caretakers were soon required to remain over winter and their survival each spring showed that life was possible on the island. A life wrought with hardship, danger, and poverty while facing real starvation, but a life nonetheless. It was still a better option for most indentured labourers of the fishing fleets, sentenced to years of body-breaking work for cruel overseers with little or no recompense. A chance of freedom motivated many who abandoned or escaped their slave-like circumstances and took their chances on 'the rock'.¹⁹

These early runaways and illicit 'liveryers' (settlers or "lives here") soon multiplied and eked out a living despite of the hardships and lack of support from the mother country. These early settlements were ruled with an iron fist during the fishing season by fishing admirals. The captain of the first ship into a port at the start of the fishing season was designated 'admiral' and was empowered to keep the peace and parcel out justice to any and all who used the port in any way he saw fit. These men, uneducated in law and often cruel, were the early lawmakers of the fledgling colony. Even after this practice was abandoned and governance of the island fell to military governors, who were to figure largely in Newfoundland's history, the 'Newfoundlander' himself was still an afterthought, treated as nothing more than an extension of the fishery.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 201.



Figure 3.2 - Whipping post.
 Respect for law and order was taught at the whipping post. Typical punishment in the early 1700s was a back-lashing from a cat-o'-nine-tails carried out by the fishing admiral.
 Source: J.A. Cochrane, *The Story of Newfoundland*, 1938

By 1762, the Seven Years War (1756-1763) came to Newfoundland. A small French force was landed at Bay Bulls near Ferryland on the Avalon Peninsula (Figure 1.1) and with the aid of disgruntled Irish labour, marched to St. John's and took the barely defended British Fort William and garrisoned the high ground, overlooking the harbour, now known as Signal Hill. Soon after, Jefferey Amherst landed a force of British regulars at Quidi Vidi, a small village outside the city and, in a bold attack, took Signal Hill back and pummeled the French garrison into submission.²⁰ The strategic value of the island was certainly by this time in the war not particularly an issue as, any threat coming from Newfoundland would have to be naval and the French fleet was in tatters. Rather, the value of Newfoundland was the land that abutted the valuable fishing grounds to garner economic wealth.

Newfoundland again warranted a footnote in military history when St. John's was home to a flotilla of RN ships engaged in anti-privateer and blockade duty during the War of 1812 (1812-1814). As well, a regiment of fencibles was raised to provide security at the docks and other vital military establishments. Using the island as a

²⁰*Ibid.*, 305.

manning pool for land forces was a relatively new concept as the island and its waters had long been considered valuable from the perspective of the fishery. Newfoundlanders had a hand in earning the Presidential mansion its current moniker when Washington was burned showing that Newfoundland contributed to Imperial security from its earliest days.

Although commonly referred to as “Britain’s oldest colony,” Newfoundland did not receive official colonial status until 1825, when Westminster granted a Royal Charter and appointed the first civil governor, Sir Thomas Cochrane. This edict saw an end to governorship in Newfoundland by Royal Naval officers, a practice that had endured since 1729. The Royal Charter established the post of Governor as a political appointment under the purview of the Colonial Office in Great Britain. Cochrane arrived in Newfoundland to much acclaim and was lauded in the local press.²¹ Although not a constitutional reformer by any standard, his early attempts to lay the basis for an elected yet Westminster-controlled government in Newfoundland were not without difficulties. His bid to establish a charter of incorporation for St. John’s was met by resistance by a group of merchants who, concerned about taxes, delayed this legislation. As historian Gertrude Gunn noted of Governor Cochrane:

He had deplored the total absence of municipal government and by-laws in St. John’s and the consequent prevalence of squalor and disorder, and had urged the citizens to form a town council with powers of assessment. Hopes for this had foundered on factionalism and aversion to direct taxation, and the Colonial Office had refused to impose a town charter by Imperial act.²²

²¹*Ibid.*, 424.

²²Gertrude E. Gunn, *The Political History of Newfoundland, 1832-1864* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 4.



Figure 3.3 - Sir Thomas Cochrane (1789-1872), n.d.
Governor of Newfoundland from 1825 to 1834.

Source: Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL V27-37B), St. John's, Newfoundland.

This aversion to taxation, for betterment or no, was a harbinger of things to come and was unsettlingly similar to the initial dissatisfaction of the rebellious Americans to the south a generation before.

Cochrane's arrival also saw the emergence of a sense of nationalism and reform that was only now finding its voice. Two factors combined to make his tenure not only one of sweeping governmental and democratic change, but also one that saw Newfoundlanders become involved in their own political affairs. The first was the emergence of two non-partisan publications in St. John's, the *Public Ledger* and the *Newfoundlander*. Although neither were particularly harsh on Cochrane nor his policies, the fact remained that he did not control these publications and their free and independent voices inevitably led to the creation and dissemination of political commentary which impacted on Cochrane. This gave the means through which political opposition could be literarily mobilized in a new and novel manner in Newfoundland.

The second factor was embodied in two remarkable and memorable figures that emerged as the voices of reform in St. John's. William Carson, a Scottish surgeon, was outspoken in his call for an elected assembly, while Patrick Morris, a fiery Irish pamphleteer, lent his voice to the cause through the published word with wit and political

savvy. These factors allowed the groundswell of aversion to taxation without representation to manifest itself in the call both in Newfoundland and London for an elected assembly. It is interesting to note that all this came about during the tenure of the first civil governor. It can be surmised that again in Newfoundland's history, the military influenced politics. However, this time, it was its absence in governance which allowed an emerging desire for independence to gain momentum.

On June 7th 1832, a bill was introduced in Parliament to provide Newfoundland with an elected assembly. Gunn wrote:

After two centuries of illicit settlement and eight years of colonial status, the island was to acquire "the transcript of the constitution" which had been given the other colonies of British North America. The Governor had urged that representative government was ill suited to the condition of the population and for a time the Colonial Office had hesitated and considered alternatives. But pressure from the political reformers, the resident merchants, and the inhabitants of Newfoundland had its effect on a ministry which had championed the principles of political freedom and parliamentary reform.²³

Thus, Representative Government came to Newfoundland. The scattering of outposts that had grown up around the coast anywhere that could support a modicum of life had come to number hundreds. The once sleepy harbour of St. John's had developed into a colonial capital with a population numbering in the thousands and an emerging class of politically-minded merchant princes.²⁴ No longer able to ignore Newfoundlanders and write them off as indentured Irish labourers and disaffected Dorset fisherman, Westminster made Newfoundland a self-governing colony and instituted a local

²³*Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴Olaf Janzen, "St. John's," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 2001, [journal on-line]; Available from http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/st_johns.html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 3.

government. Against the better judgment of Governor Cochrane, the Imperial leaders in London came to acknowledge that Newfoundland's growing population and trade status within the Empire would eventually force the issue of self-government. This action of the British Parliament effectively quelled the cries of dissension from the colony, thus preserving the support and loyalty of Newfoundland, and ensured that a degree of autonomy was granted under Westminster's terms.

During these fractious years, two things emerged that were to dictate and influence much of Newfoundland's political history. The first was the demographics of the Island. Quite simply put, the population was split nearly equally between Irish Catholic and English Protestant. The population was further divided between St. John's and the remainder of the settlements that peppered the coast. This divide between Catholic and Protestant, rich and poor, educated and ignorant, and all with a British governor attempting to arbitrate, stagnated real and tangible democratic reform. If examined within the context of the period, the "United Irish" rebellion in Ireland coincided with considerable emigration from that poor and tired country. Many of the Irish coming to Newfoundland were either associated with the rebels or had been raised in an environment of political unrest and reformatory zeal.²⁵ Couple this with the fact that much of the power rested in the hands of the Protestant merchant elite and it is no wonder that on several occasions, violence rose to the surface. Fear was the motivation on one side; resentment, the consequence on the other.

A momentous decision was made in 1855 when Newfoundland was granted Responsible Government. Responsible Government was a shift in the politics to date in

²⁵Gertrude E. Gunn, *The Political History of Newfoundland, 1832-1864* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 8-9

that, much like today, the effective political power lay with the political party which held the majority of seats in the House of Assembly.²⁶ Practically the Empire's first Dominion, Newfoundland was self-governing and self-reliant in everything save defence and foreign affairs. St. John's was still garrisoned by regular British soldiers, as the concept of Militia and Colonial or Provincial troops was immature. The Royal Navy still patrolled the territorial waters and kept a wary eye on the French in St. Pierre, Miquelon and the French Shore. (Fig 1.1) Of course, Newfoundland was no different in this regard than the rest of British North America, but unlike the colonies that were to become Canada, Newfoundland's defence issues were, as always, centered on defending the vast fishing grounds. The fishery was the staple of the economy and netted the tiny country most of its revenue. The remainder came from import duties on goods brought in from abroad of which there were few. With practically one industry, one focus, and one defence concern that was the Newfoundland fishing grounds, British troops and the Royal Navy were never far from the eyes of the inhabitants of Newfoundland or the interests of her merchants.

THE COLLAPSE OF DEMOCRACY

As a result of this focus on the fishery, Newfoundland politics barely extended beyond the shores of the island. Despite the fact that diplomatic affairs were the responsibility of Westminster, Newfoundlanders were not isolated from the world. Newfoundland seamen were regularly sailing with their cargoes of salted cod to Europe

²⁶Government House, "The Governorship, 1610-Present," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/govhouse/governorship/colonial.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.

and the West Indies, returning with such staples as salt, rum, and molasses.

Newfoundlanders had gained a reputation as world-class seamen and navigators who uncannily found their way from St. John's to such far flung destinations as Alexandria, Limassol, Trinidad, and Glasgow with little more than a compass and a natural feel for the elements. The Royal Navy and, in particular, British explorers recognized this ability and regularly employed Newfoundland crews in their quests for both the North and South Poles. Moreover, Newfoundland ships built primarily in Scotland for the seal hunt, nosed their reinforced bows into the record books of Arctic exploration under the command of Newfoundland skippers used to finding leads in the ice when there seemingly were none. Without the pressures of loading their hulls to the point of capsizing with stinking seal pelts or catering to greedy merchants, exploration was akin to a holiday where these crews could exercise their skill with aplomb and genius. This seafaring expertise would come to the fore in Newfoundland's contribution in the First World War.

When the First World War broke out, Great Britain's initial considerations for the use of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders was that of men. It is typical to summarize Newfoundland's contribution to Great War with the fielding as part of the British Army of the famed and unfortunate Royal Newfoundland Regiment. This unit was the only regiment to receive the 'Royal' prefix during the war signifying not only its unquestionable loyalty, but also its great sacrifice. On July 1st, 1916, the First Newfoundland Regiment went "over the top" and in less than an hour, ninety percent of the Regiment lay dead or wounded.²⁷ This catastrophic loss was but a footnote to one of the darkest days in the annals of the British Army. For the struggling Colony however,

²⁷Pierre Burton, *Marching as to War: Canada's Turbulent Years 1899-1953* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001), 151.

the news was met with national mourning while July 1st has remained Newfoundland's day of remembrance. Over 6200 men were to serve in the Regiment over the course of the war, but that was by no the extent of the Colony's contribution. Together with nearly 6000 more in the Forestry Corps, the Canadian Expeditionary Force, other British regiments, as well as the Royal Navy, Newfoundland's contribution was indeed significant. Less glorious perhaps, but no less considerable was Newfoundland's contribution to the Royal Navy in the form of reservists. It has been written in retrospect that: "Unlike the men of the regiment, they had no opportunity to make a name for themselves as an identifiable Newfoundland fighting unit, and were consequently overshadowed."²⁸ Their history though, pre-dated the Newfoundland Regiment as a formed unit of Newfoundland volunteers.

With British garrisons leaving the island to its own defences after a general withdrawal of troops throughout the colonies in 1870, Newfoundland had infrequent success with raising militia units of its own. More successful was the Empire's efforts at recruiting a Royal Naval Reserve. Through the combined efforts of both the government of Newfoundland and that of Great Britain, the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve was formed in 1902 with an authorized establishment of 600 men.²⁹ With 28 days of annual training paid for by the government, men from across Newfoundland joined up while Great Britain supplied the depot and training ship HMS CALYPSO. By August 2nd, 1914 in response to the inevitability of war in Europe, the Newfoundland reservists were called

²⁸Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Newfoundlanders at War," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/greatwar/articles/nfldatwar.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.

²⁹Quoted in Stanley I. Hillier, "For King and Country," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/greatwar/articles/fkac.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.
1.

to active duty. Commander A. MacDermott, commander of the Newfoundland naval reserve unit, “expected problems with the call-up, as it was the height of the fishing season,” but his fears were unfounded. MacDermott reported that once the call was issued “every man-jack of them (responded) and with no trouble at all, though many of them had to walk fifty or sixty miles to the nearest steamer or railway station.”³⁰ By the end of the war, over 2000 Newfoundlanders had served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in a broad spectrum of duties ranging from defending the local telegraph station just outside St. John’s to the great fleet actions of Heligoland Bight (1914) and Jutland (1916). MacDermott again noted that, “their conduct was exemplary, punishments were practically unknown, and every order was carried out with cheerful alacrity and seamanlike intelligence...I may say, indeed, that there were no smarter looking men in the whole Service.”³¹



**Figure 3.4 -
Newfoundland
Reservists on wharf
adjacent HMS *Calypso*,
ca. 1914.**

Source: Hillier, *For King and Country*, 1.

³⁰Quoted in *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹Quoted in *Ibid.*, 2.

Praise was universally high for the Newfoundlanders who fought in the First World War for ‘King and Country’. Newfoundlanders of all faiths and backgrounds responded with equal alacrity to their martial duties in times of crises. This service would not come without some expectation of reward in the form of a continuation of protection under the Imperial umbrella but also, recognition in the world for an emerging, albeit minor country. Some of this recognition would come at the peace talks.



Figure 3.5 - Royal Newfoundland Regiment crossing the Rhine into Germany, December 13, 1918.

Source: Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL VA-28-146), St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Prime Minister of Newfoundland sat at a reserved seat at the table at the Paris peace talks in 1919. If some may find this remarkable, their opinions may be tempered somewhat when one considers that on a per capita basis, Newfoundland was one of the largest contributors of manpower in the British Empire to the war effort. 12,000 Newfoundlanders served representing nearly 10% of the total male population or nearly 40% of males aged 19-35.³² Despite the loss of nearly a generation of her young men, Newfoundland profited as a result of the war. Newfoundland's economy was centred on

³²Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, “Newfoundlanders at War,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/greatwar/articles/nfldatwar.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009.

the cod industry when war broke out in 1914, much like it had for three hundred years. As France and Portugal directed their attentions to war, trade competition from other countries fell and by 1915, Newfoundland exports of fish, lumber for pit props in Great Britain, and iron ore for the Canadian war machine was at an all-time high. The rampant unemployment of the pre-war years gave way to opportunity for all who wanted to work and who were not fighting overseas. The short term economic prospects for the Dominion were bright indeed with Newfoundland posting a surplus in 1916 for the first time in years.³³ Unfortunately, this new found affluence belied the longer-term economic picture as Newfoundland had also borrowed heavily to pay for its war contributions. Its debt steadily rose and by war's end, stood at \$42 million, while interest payments on this debt accounted for nearly one quarter of the annual revenue with disastrous results.

Historian Jenny Higgins notes:

Interest payments on the debt had by then become the government's largest yearly expense, swallowing 22 per cent of its annual revenue. The situation deteriorated in peace, when a post-war recession cut deep into the country's revenues...the markets became quickly glutted with fish and this, combined with a post-war decrease in the value of some global currencies, caused fish prices to drop...The government reported a deficit in the 1920-21 fiscal year, followed by 14 more in the next 15 years.³⁴

This trend, more than any other factor, was to spell the end of the young country as an independent nation. The Newfoundland blood spilt in Europe to defend an Empire could not wash away the debt incurred to do so.

Dissatisfaction with London and her policies was not a new phenomenon with Newfoundland political leaders. The same fishing resources that created British interests

³³Jenny Higgins, "WW1 and the Economy," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/wwi/economy.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 2.

³⁴*Ibid.*. 2.

in the island were also the impetus behind the common and recurring protectionist stance of Newfoundland politicians. The majority of communities of Newfoundland in the 19th Century were but a stone's throw from the coast. Communication was difficult and expensive with thousands of people relying on government sponsored shipping to provide mail, medical care and the necessities of life. Further, a large swath of Newfoundland coastline was not under Newfoundland economic control but was ceded to the French. This was a vestige of a treaty signed by the British after the Seven Year's War and allowed French fishermen to process their fishing catches. Many in the colony resented the French presence and thus the denial of coastline to Newfoundlanders. Successive governments believed that this loss of economic potential could be mitigated by the building of a railway across the island. Not only would this facilitate communication but more importantly, it would open up the interior to mining and lumber interests. Writer Jeff Webb sums up the twin problems:

Two issues were particularly divisive and controversial. One was how to deal with the problems of the French fisheries on the Treaty Shore and on the Banks; the other was the ambitious and potentially expensive proposal to build a railway across the island...the railway and French Treaty Shore issues were closely linked, and were central to the politics of the late 19th century.³⁵

The French Shore issue was not to be resolved until 1909, years after Newfoundland identified it as a major barrier to economic development, with the French restricted to St Pierre and Miquelon. However, despite high hopes, the railway ended up heaping more debt on the young country and, coupled with that owing from the First World War and the post-war recession, resulted in an economic crisis. This debt, combined with global

³⁵Jeff A. Webb, "Responsible Government, 1855-1933," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 2001, [journal on-line]; Available from http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/responsilbe_gov.html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 4.

recession and plummeting trade, led to a drastic political set-back for the country. The Newfoundland parliamentary system was abandoned in favour of a Commission of Government tasked with solving Newfoundland's economic woes. This regression in local control over political affairs was to have a profound effect on Newfoundland in regards to her defence during the Second World War.

COMMISSION OF GOVERNMENT

1934 was a pivotal year in understanding the eventual militarization of the island during the Second World War. Party politics had dissolved in the face of unmanageable debt and when the prospect of Newfoundland defaulting on loans became a very real possibility, Great Britain once more stepped in. Regressing from what had been a century-long road to full independence, self-government was suspended rather than allow the struggling country to embarrass the Empire by being a bad debtor. Britain's previous attempts to influence Newfoundland to consider confederation with Canada as a solution to nagging economic problems had repeatedly failed for any number of reasons.

Newfoundland had jealously guarded her political autonomy but now, the proud but broke country demanded a political solution to a financial problem. Confederation with Canada may not have been a viable option but the links to Canada were already forged.

Newfoundland's principal creditors were a syndicate of Canadian banks who, at the beginning of the Depression, placed increasingly restrictive terms upon the outstanding loans. Indeed, the Canadian Prime Minister personally intervened at one

point to encourage the banks to extend yet more credit to the struggling Dominion.³⁶ Despite this, by 1932 the Newfoundland government was bankrupt and most of the population unemployed. As a result, the government collapsed. The new Prime Minister, Frederick Alderice, was elected on a platform of reform and specifically, the “...possibility of suspending the constitution and having a commission administer the country until conditions improved.”³⁷ Very soon after taking office, Alderice learned he could neither borrow more nor reduce expenditures. Most of the country's revenue was dedicated to paying interest on the national loans with the residual directed to feeding the unemployed and hungry. He eventually proposed to Newfoundland's creditors a temporary default on the loans and a reduction in payments until the economic situation improved.

This proposal was acceptable to neither the British nor the Canadian governments. Canada feared that this move would damage the strength of its currency, which Newfoundland had used since 1894. Further, it was believed that as an associated effect, even more damage could be inflicted on its banks, themselves on the brink of insolvency. The economic woes of Canada were almost as dire as Newfoundland's. The Canadian government believed that with millions out of work, it would be political suicide to extend even a modicum of assistance to her neighbour. As for Great Britain, she feared that this move would damage the prestige and credit of the Empire, a political entity particularly and acutely vulnerable to world trade. Instead, Westminster appointed a royal commission headed by Scottish Labour peer Lord Amulree to study the financial state of the country. Together with two Canadians, financier Sir William Stavert and

³⁶*Ibid.*,4.

³⁷*Ibid.*,4

industrialist Charles Magrath, Amulree toured Newfoundland and after consultations with the British Government, published his report in November 1933. The report recommended that Responsible Government in Newfoundland should be suspended and the country administered by an appointed “commission” until such time as the finances improved to the point of self-sufficiency and the populace requested a return to self-government.

Left with little choice, the Newfoundland legislature voted itself temporarily out of existence and ended 80 years of self-government. Newfoundland’s use of democracy to deny itself a democratic form of government was the greatest irony. Certainly, it was an event that would be difficult to accept today. However, there is nothing like flames in the kitchen however to make one overlook a burning barn and the depression years of the ‘dirty thirties’ presented a grim outlook to most of the world. Around the globe, people expressed dissatisfaction with their elected governments and their lack of ability to protect and advance industry, as well as ensure the well-being of their populace. Responsible Government, a form of political autonomy hard fought for by Newfoundland, was relegated to history in the face of hunger and debt in the hopes that the Empire would support Newfoundland's population.

THE COMING CONFLAGRATION

The appointed Commission Government that was Newfoundland’s political and administrative guardian during the War lacked the authority of an elected body. It held little sway over Newfoundland's defence and its war role. It solidified the foundation laid

by debt and poor management upon which many of the military decisions taken by others rested during the Second World War. Only marginally more adept at getting the island's financial affairs in order than the previous regime, the Commission was hamstrung from the beginning by a world economy that did not facilitate Newfoundland interests. The international price and demand for lumber, ore, and cod was low. Despite this, the one thing that the Commission Government did bring to Newfoundland was a total absence of the partisan politics and corruption that had become synonymous with the previous administration. The seven men making up the Commission were not elected and thus, not responsible to any constituent. They had a clear financial mandate unfettered by the desire to make friends or avoid enemies. Their sole duty was to the economic survival of Newfoundland and the revitalisation of social welfare. For all that, their results and Newfoundlander's initial enthusiasm over a stable and secure governing body waned in the face of continuing global economic crisis.



Figure 3.6 Newfoundland and Labrador. The geographical location of the province dominating the east coast of Canada is clearly shown.
Source: www.hometowncanada.com/nf/

Newfoundland was decidedly undefended after the First World War. Long relying on the strength and sporadic presence of the Royal Navy, the country had even disbanded the Royal Newfoundland Regiment along with other units in the face of fiscal and social restraints. There were no fortifications and military accommodations, training

installations, and airfields were virtually non-existent. It would be erroneous to say had Responsible Government retained its mandate after the First World War that anything would have been any different. Newfoundland, even during its most self-autonomous phase of democratic development, was still constitutionally dependant on London for direction and funding in both defence and foreign affairs. The dissolution of self-government, however, did negate whatever input Newfoundlanders had in the manner and degree of that defence. The fact that Newfoundland was a pawn between the great English-speaking powers during the Second World War was mitigated in that these arrangements eventually became economically beneficial over the course of the war to both Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. In any case, the island had little recourse if these arrangements did not prove to be mutually beneficial. That there were few serious issues with the presence of the armed representatives of three 'foreign' powers may be credited to good luck rather than any Commission Governmental restraints.

THE REAL STRATEGIC WORTH

The relative poverty of Newfoundland did not mean that she was bereft of tactical targets or strategic importance for a would-be aggressor. Her geographical location, her largely untapped resources and her populace hinted at her strategic worth. More specifically, four primary characteristics of Newfoundland demanded protection and a re-thinking of defence issues.

The first was the coming realization of the geographic importance of the island as a necessary stop for a burgeoning transatlantic air route. From the infancy of long-

distance flight, Newfoundland was a popular starting point for many cross Atlantic attempts. English aviator Sir John Alcock and navigator Arthur Brown took off from Lester's Field in St. John's and succeeded in the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic in 1919. The island was again the starting point for famous aviatrix, Amelia Earhart, in her successful bid to be the first woman to fly 'across the pond' in 1928. By the mid thirties when air travel, although restricted by the depression, was making inroads as a practical means of transportation, Newfoundland was recognized as an important fuel stop on the trans-Atlantic route.³⁸

The very characteristics of the coastline held importance as well. Newfoundland was blessed with literally hundreds of safe natural harbours. Although, by the 1940s these havens were not as relevant as they once were in terms of safe havens from wind and for storm-flung ships, they were still relevant nonetheless.³⁹ St. John's was long recognized as an excellent natural harbour and a vital refuelling and re-victualling stop. Its location and the protection it offered made the city the commercial and political hub of the island and was to become an essential component in the Battle of the Atlantic because of its proximity to the mid-Atlantic.

The third characteristic of Newfoundland that demanded defence consideration was its wealth of natural resources. In addition to the island's ability to supply a large amount of seafood, its mineral resources and related mining operations were critical to any war effort. Specifically, the iron ore mine at Bell Island in Conception Bay which supplied Canada with a large portion of her ore requirements, was particularly accessible to sea-going traffic and likewise, vulnerable to enemy raids.

³⁸D.H. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography: General Characteristics of the Empire in Relation to Defence, 9th Edition* (London: Sifton Praed & Co., Ltd., 1937), 216.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 216.

Finally, there was the loyalty and utility of Newfoundlanders themselves. The Anglo-Saxon, loyal, and hardy population of Newfoundland had more than shown their mettle in the First World War. Newfoundlanders continued to serve in the Royal Navy and not even the short-sighted Chamberlain government could discount their proficiency at sea and unwavering loyalty. Historian Peter Neary relates:

Despite their many criticisms of the British record in their country since 1934, Newfoundlanders, especially the largely Protestant elite, were intensely loyal. This was demonstrated anew in June 1939 when the King and Queen visited the country at the end of their Canadian tour...as happened everywhere they went, the visit of George VI and his gracious wife Elizabeth was a great success and a drawing together of kinsmen before the hour of battle.⁴⁰

With nothing to offer in the line of defence or an organized offensive force, seafaring expertise and fierce loyalty was once again to make Newfoundland a ready and willing ally in the coming conflagration.

THE NEWFOUNDLAND DEFENCE SCHEME

The Commission Government's first overtures to Great Britain concerning defence arose in 1939 with the outbreak of war. The United Kingdom's declaration of war on Germany on September 3rd, 1939 changed the priorities of the Commission from primarily those of an economic, and to a lesser degree social, nature, and made the defence of Newfoundland its first priority.⁴¹ Indeed, the Commission had come up with a list of prime locations in the country that they considered strategically important as part

⁴⁰Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 109

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 109.

of the Newfoundland Defence Scheme. Just prior to the war in March 1939, the government assessed the most likely targets of enemy attack in the defence scheme as:

(a) The Newfoundland Airport [a world class seaplane aerodrome located at Botwood under mutual agreement between Newfoundland, the United Kingdom and the Irish Free State] (b) The Bell Island Iron Mine (c) The cable terminals at Bay Roberts and other places [and] (d) The City of St. John's.⁴²

This list of possible enemy targets notwithstanding, the Commission had few military resources to dedicate to their defence. The Commission did offer to raise a small battalion of home defence troops numbering no more than 300, armed and uniformed by the Commission, but trained by British experts. Neary explains that offer terminated with:

While admitting that the scheme proposed was neither “elaborate” nor “exhaustive,” the Commission submitted that it represented what the government could afford. If it was thought necessary to base aircraft or anti-aircraft guns in Newfoundland in order to defend the country, these would have to be provided by others.⁴³

The obvious ‘others’ referred to by the Newfoundland Commission of Government included Canada. Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, had already acknowledged a Canadian responsibility towards Newfoundland’s defence in Parliament on September 8, 1939 when he said that, “The safety of Canada depends upon the adequate safeguarding of our coastal regions and the great avenues of approach to the heart of this country.”⁴⁴ (See Figure 3.6) Further, in the same speech, he also said:

⁴²Quoted in *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁴Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. “Extract from a Speech by Prime Minister, Ottawa, September 8, 1939,” *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1974), 43.

At the entrance of the St. Lawrence stands the neighbouring British territory of Newfoundland and Labrador. The integrity of Newfoundland and Labrador is essential to the security of Canada. By contributing as far as we are able to the defence of Newfoundland and the other British and French territories in this hemisphere, we will not only be defending Canada but we will also be assisting Great Britain and France by enabling them to concentrate their own energies more in that part of the world in which their own immediate security is at stake.⁴⁵

Although early in the war, King hoped that air power would be Canada's primary contribution to the defence of the Empire and ensure political survival of his government by not repeating the horrors of the First World War. However, Canada's involvement in the war, and Newfoundland, was to be much more than simply aeroplanes or air training. The degree of this involvement would have profound political effects in, not only St. John's and Ottawa, but also in London and Washington.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 43.

CHAPTER FOUR - COME NEAR AT YOUR PERIL

THE MAPLE LEAF FOREVER...BUT NOT NOW

Hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland!
 Not a stranger shall own one inch of its strand!
 Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf.
 Come near at your peril, Canadian wolf!
 -19th Century anti-confederation song.⁴⁶

Newfoundland's relationship with Canada has always been tentative. Its people's feisty nationalism was buttressed by a fiercely independent spirit that was exhibited throughout the colony's history, but particularly in Newfoundland's insistence in its individual contributions during the First World War. This attitude also belied the distinct and quite often violent sectarianism in the country where the influence of church in every facet of life from faith to education and health, made it impossible to escape the divisions of Catholic from Protestant. This sectarianism and its influence is generally moot when examining Newfoundland in the Second World War because, despite religious differences, opinions generally were united in times of war. However, as a large and obvious thread in the fabric of the Newfoundland culture, it should be kept in mind. In dealing with the long and sordid tale of attempts to join the 'Canadian' colonies, then provinces, and finally Dominion, Newfoundland interests and opinions on the matter can only be thought of as generally unified against confederation, no matter the denominational flavour, until the end of the Second World War.

⁴⁶Gerald S. Doyle, ed., *The Old Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* (St. John's: Gerald S. Doyle, 1940), 69.

Canadian political interest in Newfoundland in the years leading to Confederation was driven particularly by trade and economics and later, during the Second World War, the growing possibility that American interests in Newfoundland would overshadow Ottawa's influence. Historian Gwynne Dyer has noted in the latter case that, "Ottawa's strongest motive for supporting the Confederate cause in Newfoundland and offering reasonable terms to the prospective new province was fear that a Newfoundland which regained its independence might pass into the control of the United States relatively quickly."⁴⁷ As a result, this post-war interest in Newfoundland was born out of necessity, but this motive was certainly not always prevalent. During the opening overtures of Confederation in the early 1860s, the relationship between the two colonies was fractious, mutually ignorant, and rarely united in either vision or purpose. From the first moves to unify British North America that emerged from the Colonial Office in London, a trend developed in which Newfoundland consistently refused to bend to the will of Westminster and unite with other former British possessions.

One need only look at a map of North America to be convinced of the logic of Newfoundland and, more obviously Labrador, joining with Canada. (See Figure 3.6) However, in the 19th century this understanding was far from prevalent. As early as 1839, the Earl of Durham, Governor-General of British North America, in a report tabled before Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, noted issues with Newfoundland that could be resolved with unification with her nearest neighbours. Specifically, he deemed the political state of Newfoundland a case of "...ordinary colonial collision between the representative body on one side and the executive on the other; that the representatives

⁴⁷Gwynne Dyer, "The Strategic Importance of Newfoundland and Labrador to Canada," *Royal Commission on Renewing Our Place in Canada*, (March 2003), 322.

have no influence on the composition or the proceedings of the executive government...”⁴⁸ He extrapolated from this a common argument used in Britain’s attempts to unite the fractious colonies of British North America. He put forward that, if their internal strife or weakness prevented the establishment of separate branches of parliamentary government, then perhaps the colonies should unify together to incorporate themselves into a larger community. This would permit individual regional aspirations to be pursued with the backing of a central and unified government. His reasoning extended beyond just domestic politics and into the realm of international relations. For nearly a century, Great Britain had been advocating a unification of the entirety of British North America in order to present a unified front to the United States as well as to capitalize on a whole being greater than the sum of the parts. For example, with respect to Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, Lord Durham stated his concerns and proposed solution:

With respect to the two smaller colonies of Prince Edward’s Island [sic] and Newfoundland, I am of opinion, that not only would most of the reasons which I have given for an union of the others, apply to them, but that their smallness makes it absolutely necessary, as the only means of securing any proper attention to their interests, and investing them with that consideration, the deficiency of which they have so much reason to lament in all the disputes which yearly occur between them and the citizens of the United States, with regard to the encroachments made by the latter on their coasts and fisheries.⁴⁹

The machinations of Canadian confederation seized the political stage of British North America for most of the middle of the 19th Century. Although confederation was

⁴⁸The Earl of Durham, “The Report of the Earl of Durham, 1839 (Extract)” [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/yosemite/rapids/3330/constitution/1839ld.html>; Internet; accessed January 18, 2009.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

not to happen for Newfoundland until the middle of the 20th century, Newfoundland delegates and ideas about including the colony in a Canadian confederation were present at many of the confederation conferences. At a conference of delegates representing Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland held at Quebec City in October 1864, several resolutions made specific mention of Newfoundland and the proposals for confederation. Quite possibly in the light of the eventual withdrawal of British troops from provincial and colonial garrisons in 1870, one resolution listed intended federal responsibilities to include “Militia, Military and naval service and defence.”⁵⁰

While federal responsibility would alleviate the issue of self-defence for Newfoundland, the granting of Responsible Government in 1855 to the colony left it with a wealth of promise and one can only surmise that to lose that hard-fought independence by joining a Canadian confederation in order to be governed from far-away Ottawa did not meet with universal appeal on the island. Especially from the mostly Protestant merchants, that part of the population that held most of the political power and all of the political clout who, were as in the past generally tax averse.

Unlike the cohesion that emerged during times of war, sectarian differences played a big part in the confederation issues of the 1860s. The Roman Catholic portion of the population were strongly opposed to giving up their sizable influence in the small pond of Newfoundland to negligible influence in the giant English lake that was to

⁵⁰E.P. Tache, chairman, “Report of Resolutions adopted at a Conference of Delegates from the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, and the colonies of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, held at the city of Quebec, October 10, 1864, as the Basis of a proposed Confederation of those Provinces and Colonies,” [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/yosemite/rapids/3330/constitution/1864qr.html>; Internet; accessed January 18, 2009.

become Canada. Although it was not as simple as whether Sunday service was heard in Latin or English that decided which side of the confederation issue one found themselves on (both sides commanded Protestant and Catholic support), it certainly played a significant role and confusedly, it swung from one side to the other depending on the issue. More so than sectarian issues, one cannot discount the emerging and recurring theme of independence that appears again and again in the confederation debates of the time. Prowse contends:

The great political movement of the time was the confederation of British North America. To complete the union our Island was necessarily included in the scheme...[Shea was] sent as our delegates to the great conference, and returned with a draft of the terms on which we might become united with the Dominion. The proposals to unite our destinies with Canada were not received with enthusiasm. The main question was one of terms; what would Canada give us in return for surrendering our independence?⁵¹

Delegates met in London in 1866 and made provisions for Newfoundland to join Canada. Newfoundland delegates did not attend this conference but the Canadian statesmen were careful to include resolutions that would provide for Newfoundland's eventual inclusion in the Confederation. Although the Newfoundland election which took place the year before in November 1865 was won by the 'confederate' friendly party, the government procrastinated on dealing with the issue of confederation and impetus was lost. Canadian diplomatic historian Paul Bridle noted that contrary to the political dithering of the Newfoundland government, the "...British Government, notably in forthright statements to the Legislature by the Governor, made abundantly clear its

⁵¹D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland*, originally published: London: MacMillan and Co., 1895, (Ottawa: Second Boulder Publications Ltd. Edition, 2007), 494.

wish that Newfoundland join the confederation of British North American colonies that was then taking shape.”⁵²

This debate continued in 1869 with a committee of the Newfoundland House of Assembly formed under pressure from the Colonial Office proposing terms of union with the new Dominion of Canada.⁵³ This proposal was expedient as the new and somewhat struggling country of Newfoundland was facing some debt, many unsecured markets, and again, the rising spectre of little in the way of defence once British troops marched (or sailed) away in response to a general repositioning of assets throughout the Empire.

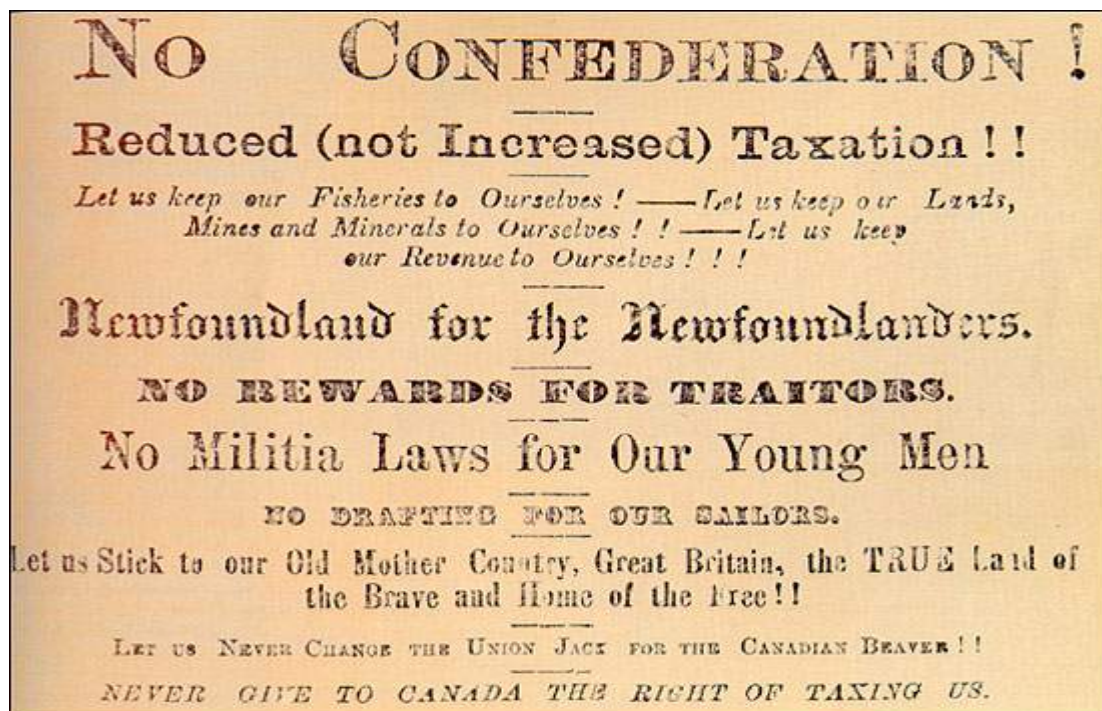


Figure 4.1 - **Anti-Confederation Advertisement**

Source: *Morning Chronicle, St. John's, September 29, 1869* available from www.mysteriesofcanada.com

⁵²Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 2, 1940-1949: Confederation, Part 1* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), xvii.

⁵³*Ibid.*, xvii.

Featured prominently in the proposed terms of union with Canada was a strengthening of the present naval reserve division in Newfoundland and an appeal to garrison installations in St. John's. The Island's only peacetime contribution to self-defence, Newfoundlanders enthusiastically supported the naval reserve, evident on the eve of the First World War when the reserve was robust and morale high. As for garrison troops, British and Newfoundland governments were aware that the fisheries were the major employer in Newfoundland and consequently it would be a major source of naval reservists. However, given this the island would not support a militia service in the traditional sense. Therefore, the buttressing of the naval reserve and a 'Canadian' garrisoning of the city seemed to be the solution to Newfoundland's defence requirements. Alas, the government of the day was defeated by the anti-confederates with such an overwhelming majority later that year that Newfoundland researcher Jeff A. Webb, in his treatise on Responsible Government notes that:

...confederation disappeared for many years as a practical political issue. From this time on, politicians took to smearing each other as confederates when convenient, just as sectarian prejudices were sometimes manipulated to shore up political support.⁵⁴

A HISTORY OF BAD BLOOD

Two major issues were to characterize the relationship between Newfoundland and Canada over the next half century, leaving frustration, outrage and no small amount of bad blood between the two. The first was trade, more specifically, reciprocity with the United States and the second was Labrador. Whatever potential overtures could have

⁵⁴Jeff A. Webb, "Responsible Government, 1855-1933," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 2001, [journal on-line]; Available from http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/responsilbe_gov.html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 3.

been made between the two towards a confederation in the late 19th Century and the early 20th Century, was often clouded by frustration over competing trade markets and vitriol fueled by disagreements over ownership of Labrador.

As was to be realized in the post-war years of the 1940s, from the mid-19th Century onwards many Newfoundlanders thought that one of the keys to a more prosperous future was tapping into the American market. Here was a vast and almost unfathomable opportunity which Newfoundland author J.K. Hillier described as a market “...which could easily absorb exports of all kinds from Newfoundland. Further, Americans might also be induced to invest in Newfoundland. The significant level of emigration from Newfoundland to the northeastern United States helped keep the idea alive.”⁵⁵

The issue of reciprocity or as more commonly referred to "free trade," entered into Newfoundland political debates as early as the 1850s when it was proposed that Newfoundland should become a signatory to a reciprocity treaty being negotiated between the British North American colonies and the United States.⁵⁶ Newfoundland was eventually admitted to this agreement which allowed an easier flow of some goods, but was not the expected panacea to Newfoundland's constantly recurring financial troubles. The American Civil War and Great Britain's sympathy with the South probably did not allow the treaty to mature to a point where benefits were fully realized and it was abrogated in 1866 by Washington.

⁵⁵J.K. Hillier, "Reciprocity with the United States of America," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 2002, [journal on-line]; Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/reciprocity.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 1.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

By the end of the century, joining the unified colonies of Canada was perceived as being a definite disadvantage to Newfoundland when it came to the issue of trade with the United States. With both Canada's and Newfoundland's foreign affairs handled by London, they tended to be grouped together in terms of American relations because of this representation and their geographical proximity. However, Canada's many disagreements with the United States that Newfoundland was not a party to, was detrimental to Newfoundland's relations with America. This conviction that Canada's disputes would stand in the way of a favourable trade treaty between the United States and Newfoundland caused successive Newfoundland governments to attempt unilateral negotiations with their American neighbours, without the burden of Canadian prejudices.

Needless to say, unilateral trade negotiations between the United States and Newfoundland did not go over well in Ottawa due to the possible negative impact on Canadian trade. The intricacies of one such agreement, the Bond-Blaine Convention (named for Robert Bond, the Newfoundland Colonial Secretary and James Blaine, the American Secretary of State) brought Canadian ire to the surface. Permitted by Great Britain to negotiate with the United States, Newfoundland had reached an agreement that allowed free entry for fish and ore into the United States in exchange for American access to Newfoundland bait supplies. Canada was furious over what it viewed as a weakening of its own bargaining position in 'British North America' not presenting a unified front to the Americans. Ottawa's resentment was not lost on Westminster and, as a result, the treaty was not ratified. This was a clear indication of Great Britain's willingness to sacrifice Newfoundland's interests to Canadian opinion. Newfoundland retaliated by refusing to allow Canadian fishermen to purchase bait from Newfoundland

ports, an essential factor in the Canadian banks fishery. Following this, according to Hillier:

Canada took the issue to court, and imposed duties on Newfoundland imports; Newfoundland did the same to Canadian imports. Canada then threatened to impose sanctions on Newfoundlanders fishing on the Canadian Labrador. At this point it was decided to end the “war”, and refer all points in dispute to a conference between the two governments...[Canada’s] position was strengthened by a court decision that Newfoundland could not refuse bait to Canadian fishermen, the only lever which the colony [sic] had at its disposal, and by the knowledge that...the British government would support Canada over the reciprocity issue.⁵⁷

This bantering back and forth over competing economic interests characterized Canadian-Newfoundland trade relations for the rest of Newfoundland’s time as an independent country. More importantly, interference by the British Government was to leave Newfoundland in an often times untenable position, as her external affairs were managed by the same entity that managed Canada’s in these early and formative times. Unfortunately, in this particular chapter of the history of the British Empire, Canada’s interests often trumped those of Newfoundland bringing to the fore the disadvantageous strategies of the Empire towards Newfoundland.

Despite this, in one festering debate with Canada, Westminster unquestionably decided in Newfoundland’s favour. The Labrador coast had long been an integral part of the Newfoundland inshore fishery. During the summer months, lucrative schools of cod beckoned thousands of islanders north to fish, cure, and export the fish to markets south. ‘Going down on the Labrador’ was an annual migration for many families and a successful season was often the difference between a sustainable winter and starvation. Canada, in general, and Quebec, in particular, had long laid claim to the Labrador shore.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*,3.

This conflicted with Newfoundland's interests. Disagreement over these claims marred the early histories of the two countries, but were to come to culminate in the 1920s when control of Labrador was decided once and for all.

In 1927, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council decided the delineation of the Labrador boundary in Newfoundland's favour.⁵⁸ Although in question since the end of the Seven Year's War, the British government had originally given control of the coast of Labrador to the Governor of Newfoundland in recognition of Labrador's integral part in the Newfoundland fishery, while the interior fell under the stewardship of the Governors of the Hudson Bay Company. Briefly, the coast was shared between Quebec and Newfoundland with Quebec holding the title, but Newfoundland the fishing rights. By 1809, the coast was returned to Newfoundland however, the western border remained uncertain. Competing prospecting and timber interests aggravated the problem until the debate was finally settled 1927 with a decision that reflects the provincial boundaries of today. This finding was heralded in Newfoundland not because Labrador was considered a resource or an asset, rather than a part of Newfoundland fabric manifested in a wild and savage land. This asset, has often been used as either collateral or as a potential means of satisfying Newfoundland's chronic economic woes. In 1925, not for the first or last time, Newfoundland offered up Labrador for sale. Hillier maintains:

This decision [the 1927 ruling] has always been unpopular in Quebec. Ironically, in 1925, the Newfoundland government had offered to sell Labrador to Quebec in order to pay down the public debt, but the Quebec premier turned the offer down.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ J.K. Hillier, "Relations with Canada, 1895-1939," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 1997, [journal on-line]; Available from http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/relations_1939.html; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 1.

⁵⁹J.K. Hillier, "The Labrador Boundary," *Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage*. 1997, [journal on-line]; Available from <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/boundary.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2009. 3.

The acquisition of Labrador added nearly 8000 kilometres of undefended and barely inhabited coastline to a country that had neither the will nor the resources to patrol, let alone defend it. That Sir Wilfred Grenfell, famed physician of the northern peoples, likened living conditions in the region to little better than medieval spears volumes for the isolation and difficult conditions. This delineation agreement nonetheless, practically hemmed in Canada's Atlantic coast and offered no small amount of angst in Ottawa. (Fig. 3.6)

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY...

With the declaration of the Second World War in 1939, Ottawa was faced with the daunting prospect of a poor and undefended country straddling its eastern border from the Arctic to the entrance of the St. Lawrence. Along this region, Newfoundland commanded the approaches to a country whose focus was firmly placed in the Atlantic triangle and from which much of the succour for war-starved Britain would come. On another front, Canada-American relations entered a new phase of cooperation that was before this time, unheard of. King quite rightly saw the defence of Canada as being simply a part of continental defence and in Roosevelt, he found a like-minded ally.

According to Canadian military historian C.P. Stacey:

The European situation was growing rapidly worse, and as a result Canadian-American cooperation showed signs of coming out into the open. During the summer of 1938 Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. King made public speeches on the two countries' military relations. On 18 August Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. King made public speeches on the two countries' military relations. On 18 August Mr. Roosevelt, at Kingston, declared that the United States would "not stand idly by if domination of Canadian soil

is threatened”; and on the same occasion the President had a further – but apparently still limited – conversation with Mr. King on defence, with particular reference to the Atlantic coast.⁶⁰

This last reference to the Atlantic coast was with regards to producing an agreement on Canadian and American defence interests on the Atlantic coast and the resulting decisions would affect Newfoundland in a way that neither King nor Roosevelt could have imagined.

The defence of Newfoundland and more importantly, whose responsibility it was, caused obvious concern to Great Britain, Canada, and obviously, to Newfoundlanders. Great Britain, particularly after the fall of France, was fighting for her life. Her fleets were being reduced by both the German and the Imperial Japanese Navies. There simply were no British naval assets to maintain the defence of the island or the resources to protect the convoys that sailed from it. Also, the convoy system that had been put in place early in the war was the purview of the Royal Canadian Navy, which was experiencing the difficulties of wartime expansion although augmented by a limited number of British ships and crews. Ironically, the answer to Newfoundland’s defence dilemma came as a result of Great Britain’s inability to protect her Empire on all fronts and took the form of the ‘Destroyers for Bases’ agreement. This accord was orchestrated by Churchill and endorsed by Roosevelt, in contradiction to the United States Neutrality laws. As part of this agreement Newfoundland, along with other British Western Hemisphere holdings were offered to the United States to garrison and defend as part of a wider continental defence. The results of these arrangements will be explored in the next chapter.

⁶⁰C.P. Stacey. *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1974), 97.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE FRIENDLY INVASION

DESTROYERS FOR BASES

The armed American presence in Newfoundland lasted almost half a century. The last United States' military installation in Newfoundland finally closed in 1990 bringing to an end a period of Newfoundland-American relations that had brought prosperity, interaction, understanding, and, incidentally, not a few marriages.

On March 11th 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed bill H.R. 1776, more commonly known as the Lend-Lease Act.⁶¹ Although this 'subsidy' of war materiel found its genesis in a bid to assist Great Britain, then the last bastion of freedom in the way of Hitler's European *Juggernaut*, it resulted in lasting effects that went beyond its intended purpose. It would end American isolationism and pave the way for a more natural American entry into the war. However, it was not the first overt act of American assistance to Great Britain in the war. Predating Lend-Lease was a deal that saw the Americans hand over "fifty ships that saved the world."⁶² This exchange of obsolete ships for base rights throughout British Empire holdings in the Americas was a hard-fought and much publicized affair in both Washington and London.⁶³ The ships themselves were old, ill-suited for the primary North Atlantic theatre for which they were intended and, with few exceptions, had been already stricken from the active list. Despite

⁶¹William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 275.

⁶²Philip Goodhart, *Fifty Ships that Saved the World* (London: Heinemann, 1965), i.

⁶³Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006), 278.

popular myth, their tactical contribution to the war effort was negligible. A United States Navy history suggests:

While there is no doubt that the TOWNs [all the ships were named after towns that existed in both the United Kingdom and the United States] did contribute to the Royal navy's efforts, the oft repeated quote 'fifty ships that saved the world', while emotive, is very far from fact. The act of transfer, and the situation brought about by the acquisition of sovereign rights in a belligerent's territory, certainly affected the strategic position and brought American participation in the war against the Axis nearer. The tactical effect of the ships themselves was, however, small...⁶⁴

What was not negligible however, was the effect that Churchill's announcement of the deal had on Nazi Germany. American historians William Langer and Everett Gleason state that:

It is apparent that the Destroyer Deal had profoundly disturbed the Nazi leaders. It was greatly in their interest to defeat Britain before the United States threw its weight into the scales. The prospect of an early invasion of England had by this time become dimmed, and it was therefore all the more important for the Fuehrer to make provision against American interference.⁶⁵

Although they are often confused as being one in the same, the 'Destroyers for Bases' deal was concluded a full 10 months before the famed Lend-Lease act. As a result, the United States was neutral now only in name. Churchill crowed over the indisputable and blatantly obvious fact that, by entering into the exchange, America's official indifference to the war was over and those fifty old ships were the harbinger of a military might such as the world had not seen.⁶⁶ From Churchill's perspective and more importantly Hitler's, this 'undeclared war' by the United States spurred Germany to

⁶⁴Arnold Hague, *Destroyers for Great Britain: A History of 50 Town Class Ships Transferred from the United States to Great Britain in 1940* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 17.

⁶⁵William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 26.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

attempt to force the United Kingdom to sue for peace before the full weight of American troops and industry could be brought to bear. It was also to have an unimaginable effect on Newfoundland politics.

From the perspective of the Lend-Lease Act, the real implications of the agreement for Newfoundland and Labrador and, later Canada, would soon become evident. A 99 year lease on sovereign territory is not an agreement lightly undertaken. Indeed, Churchill expressed grave misgivings over this deal and his eventual acceptance of it speaks volumes for the desperate straits that Great Britain found herself in after the fall of France.⁶⁷ From Roosevelt's perspective, the stunning political coup that led to Lend-Lease and the Destroyer for Bases Deal may only be fully understood and appreciated when one examines the political air that pervaded Washington in the years preceding.⁶⁸

With the declaration of war in 1939, America was faced with a political and legal conundrum. Long recognized as the factory of the world, she could now no longer sell war materiel or provide aid to belligerents under her Neutrality Laws.⁶⁹ Clearly, the majority of Americans sympathized with the Allies' plight but a vehement and vocal majority also prescribed any American involvement in another European war. The Neutrality Acts cemented this view on the heels of committee allegations during America's darkest days during the depression that American involvement in Europe during the First World War had been orchestrated by investors and bankers to create an economic boom. The Acts were seen by many as a sure way to remove any option of a

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁹Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), v.

country tapping into America's massive industrial base thus denying to any belligerent, aggressor and defender alike, the benefits of the "Arsenal of Democracy".⁷⁰

Consequently, the non-interventionist camp was strong, unified, and well-represented in the halls of Congress. Such notables as Charles Lindbergh, arguably the world's most famous aviator and an American folk hero, argued vehemently to keep America and her sons out of Europe and her squabbling.⁷¹ Roosevelt was more forward thinking, however.

Roosevelt and Churchill had a special relationship that went beyond simply mutual admiration. Both men personified and put a recognizable face to an idea that had been flaunted as early as the end of the nineteenth century, that of a pan-Anglo-Saxondom on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.⁷² Churchill viewed Anglo-American relations as key to, not only surviving the war, but towards building a new world order, a not entirely new idea.⁷³ As early as 1898, United States Secretary of State Richard Olney wrote that "the close community between Britain and America, based on a shared origin, speech, thought, literature, institutions, and ideals would not only prevent future conflicts between the two countries but would also encourage them to stand together against common enemies."⁷⁴ That common enemy, to both men, was fascism. Soon after taking office in 1940, Churchill continued with vigor his personal correspondence with Roosevelt that he had started in 1939. The two statesmen's ties and, of course, their

⁷⁰William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 244.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 244.

⁷²Robert Self, *Britain, America and the War Debt Controversy: The Economic Diplomacy of an Unspecial Relationship, 1917-1941* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 1.

⁷³Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 40.

⁷⁴Quoted in Robert Self, *Britain, America and the War Debt Controversy: The Economic Diplomacy of an Unspecial Relationship, 1917-1941* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 1.

shared fear of the Nazi onslaught gave them much to discuss. Consequently, Roosevelt waived American neutrality laws for the British through a system of cash purchases for materiel. But, with the fall of France and His Majesty's bullion reserves dwindling, a system of credit was needed to not only keep Britain in the war, but to bolster British morale through hopes of American involvement. As a result, the non-interventionists resisted but Roosevelt won the day through some quite remarkable politicking.

The Lend-Lease Act of March 11th 1941 in combination with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour of December 7th ended the isolationist lobby. In any case, by Spring 1941, American naval forces were already escorting convoys through their sphere of influence in the Atlantic. More significantly, American troops and aircrews were also operating from American bases on British soil. These bases had been secured through the Destroyer Deal and were located in Bermuda, the West Indies, and Newfoundland. One of the largest was in Argentia on Newfoundland's South East coast. (Fig. 1.1)

In 1940, Argentia was a small fishing village in Placentia Bay, with barely 500 people. Somewhat prophetically, this was the same location Roosevelt and Churchill would later meet in August 1941 aboard HMS PRINCE OF WALES for the Atlantic Conference and create a much-needed convoy agreement for the North Atlantic.⁷⁵ Due to the American construction, Argentia was to see its population increase by 20,000 people and transform from a sleepy village, virtually untouched by the war, into one of the most modern United States Naval facilities outside the United States. Argentia was to become the largest of a dozen American installations peppered throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. From Fort Pepperell in St. John's to Harmon Air Base in Stephenville and

⁷⁵William L. Langer & S. Everett Gleason, *The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy: The Undeclared War 1940-1941* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 663.

all the way north to Goose Bay in Labrador, American military personnel appeared within weeks of the signing of the Destroyer for Bases Deal, to initially, much consternation and, later, intense glee amongst the populace.

This deal transformed large swaths of territory in the colony almost overnight through frenzied building and a massive influx of men and materiel. There was no time to be lost. As Washington was well aware after the fall of France, had Britain fell, the American eastern seaboard was woefully undefended. Newfoundland and the other British holdings on this side of the Atlantic were easily defended with aircraft and naval establishments while the building of bases and the influx of personnel would not impact the Continental United States or American voters. It was a way of participating in the war without bringing the war to America. So it came to pass that many Newfoundland villages were uprooted, moved, razed, or simply plowed under to make room for the American machines and installations of war. The Americans moved quickly for, not two weeks after signing the Destroyer Deal, representatives of the United States government were in St. John's to meet with colonial authorities to select sites for their bases.⁷⁶

THE BUILDING BOOM

The Americans concentrated their attentions on three main areas on the Island. A naval base was to be built at Argentia with an airfield near Stephenville on the West Coast and a garrison at Fort Pepperell in St. John's. Argentia, at the head of Placentia Bay, was blessed with deep water and an ice-free harbour due to the influence of the

⁷⁶David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 78.

warm Gulf Stream. Geographically close to the major ports of the American Seaboard, it had the capacity to accommodate any ship of the day and, most importantly, there was no sizable population to object to the military construction nor a local government to answer to. The ‘Argentians’ that were there were simply uprooted, along with their dead.⁷⁷ Despite this, whatever animosity existed amongst the Newfoundland population with having foreigners on their soil in strength, soon gave way as it became apparent that the number of jobs that would have to be filled by locals would herald an unprecedented economic windfall. Literally thousands of locals were put to work to erect and then maintain numerous American military installations around the colony. With the average annual salary of \$1500.00 for those Newfoundlanders hired by American forces far eclipsing the average \$333.00 that a fisherman could earn, whatever resentment existed was soon washed away in this foreign economic largesse.⁷⁸



Figure 5.1 - Aerial view of United States Naval Base Argentia during the Second World War.
Source: Cardoulis, *A Friendly Invasion – The American Military in Newfoundland 1940-1990*, 17.

⁷⁷John N. Cardoulis, *A Friendly Invasion: The American Military in Newfoundland 1940-1990* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1990), 25.

⁷⁸Melvin Baker, "The Tenth Province: Newfoundland Joins Canada, 1949," *Horizon*, Vol. 10, No. 111 (1987), 2641-67.

These high American wages forced the Commission of Government to put limits on amounts paid to Newfoundlanders in the employ of the United States. Newfoundland historian Melvin Baker explains that, “Newfoundland workers did not receive wage parity with their American civilian counterparts, because the Commission of Government did not wish to drive up wages in other industries.”⁷⁹ However, this exposure of Newfoundland workers to what was essentially a fair wage paid in an Allied country’s labour market was just one example of opening up of Newfoundland throughout the war. During the war, it became patently clear to the populace what a ‘fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work’ amounted to and this in turn contributed to awakening Newfoundlanders from their isolationist slumber. It helped to enforce the value of being connected to the larger North American economy. The Commission of Government’s attempt to subvert or minimize this wage was simply an example of a rear-guard action by an administration trying to benefit from the opportunities of war without having to assume the social responsibility that an economic boom should bring by ensuring all wages increased.

If the Commission of Government’s reluctance to see large domestic wages while still welcoming the financial boom that base construction and maintenance brought seems at odds with a government of the people, it is because the Commission was nothing more than an appointed administration. The presence of both American and Canadian militaries, while welcomed from a defence and monetary perspective, was thrust upon St. John’s by the ‘Destroyers for Bases’ deal and in the interests of continental defence. Newfoundland representatives were neither consulted nor counseled. Although, while not responsible to a constituency or an electorate, the Commission of Government was still a caretaker of the colony until such a time that Responsible Government could be

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 2641-67.

recovered. With this in mind, financial and economic interests taking precedence over social development may be forgiven but hardly ignored as a contributing factor to Confederation.

Apparent to Newfoundlanders, and arguably for the first time as popular opinion, economic union of some sort with North America was definitely advantageous. Moreover, the strategic value of Newfoundland, recognized so clearly within the Atlantic Triangle, effectively brought the wealth of the continent to the Island's shores and provided economic benefits exclusive from the fishery. The realization that apart from fish caught, ore mined, or trade concessions negotiated, geographical location within a strategically vital area of North America was economically valuable. Both Canada and the United States were pouring millions of dollars into Newfoundland's economy and into Newfoundlander's pockets because Newfoundland was located where she was.

CHAPTER SIX – THE ARMING OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND THE POLITICAL DISARMING OF NEWFOUNDLANDERS

FROM SO VERY LITTLE...

Soon after taking office in 1934, one of the first undertakings by the Commission of Government was a study of the state of defence in Newfoundland. The Newfoundland Defence Scheme of 1936 was described by historian David Mackenzie as "...a survey of existing defence needs and objectives, examining vulnerable area and presenting a reasoned discussion of how best to protect these areas in time of war."⁸⁰ Given the financial state of both Newfoundland and Great Britain in the midst of the Depression there was little that could be done to mitigate the glaring defence issues. As already highlighted, the poor economy was the Commission Government's first and arguably, only priority. The Newfoundland Defence Scheme received exactly the amount of attention that it should have at the time and was duly signed, submitted to Great Britain and shelved. Great Britain, for her part, earmarked some minor war vessels for the Newfoundland station should the need arise but the key strategic targets identified by the Scheme went undefended. Conversely, Canada took special interest in the protection of the production of ore from the Bell Island mine as it supplied nearly one-third of all of her steel requirements.⁸¹

The Canadian Joint Staff Committee (JSC), an inter-service committee established in 1927 and the forerunner of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Canada's

⁸⁰David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 22.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 24.

wartime joint command structure, underlined the need for concern in the defence of Newfoundland. The Bell Island mine in particular led the JSC to make the statement that, "...Canada has undertaken to make provision for her own local defence and insofar as her Atlantic coast is concerned that defence is intimately bound up with the defence of Newfoundland. The two problems are really one and no good purpose can be served by treating them separately."⁸² Alas, the JSC was to be frustrated by the Canadian government's reluctance to do anything about the state of affairs in Newfoundland in the midst of Depression-era economic difficulties. We may dismiss this as lack of action by a country hardly able to defend her own borders, never mind those of a struggling neighbour. Yet, one may also take away a certain political reluctance to get involved. Mackenzie King, then leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, had spoken out years earlier against loans to the cash-strapped country. He thought that helping Newfoundland was taking away job creation from Canadians when he said, "A guarantee was given to Newfoundland as a means of aiding unemployment in the Dominion of Canada."⁸³ It is not hard to see why King, now as Prime Minister in the mid-1930s, would be so reluctant in building infrastructure and deploying troops to Newfoundland when his own country was still deep in the throes of depression. Simply, it would have been political suicide and as illustrated throughout his political career, King was above all else, a survivor.

Political historian David Mackenzie notes:

For Mackenzie King, political considerations and preservation of national unity were the paramount concerns, and this view was reflected in a government stance which emphasized avoidance of war rather than a preparation for it. Under these circumstances it was considered dangerous to make any explicit arrangements that could potentially commit Canada to participation in a European war. Hence, even though the military

⁸²JSC Memo, 22 March 1937, PAC RG24 vol 2787, file: HQS 7410 vol.1.

⁸³Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 26 March 1934.

planners had taken a few steps towards an informal defence understanding, on the eve of the Second World War the questions concerning Newfoundland's defence remained unanswered.⁸⁴

CONTROL OF THE AIRFIELDS

By 1938, measures were taken by the Commission Government to create the Newfoundland Defence Force. However, the training, arming, and equipping of these men remained outside the financial ability of the Commission of Government. Like during the First World War, Newfoundland could offer what she had in abundance; that was, willing and enthusiastic recruits, but little else. Canada agreed to 'lend' the Newfoundlanders the equipment they needed while permission was granted by the British Government for Canadian aircraft and crews to overfly and patrol Newfoundland skies, and use Newfoundland airstrips.⁸⁵ The use of these aerodromes although political, was a practical solution to a very real problem for the Newfoundland government. The defenceless state of Newfoundland was far more pressing for the Commission than for Westminster. Mackenzie notes that "Long term questions of control were less of a problem to the commissioners than the immediate defence of the island and Labrador."⁸⁶ Although the Commission of Government had recommended to the Dominions Office that the Canadians be invited to assume control of both the Gander airport and the Botwood seaplane base, the British were particularly averse to ceding any control of

⁸⁴David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 29.

⁸⁵Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, September 3, 1939," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 42.

⁸⁶David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 35.

Newfoundland facilities to Canada. Simply put, Great Britain had spent considerable sums in developing these air assets and in anticipation of Newfoundland becoming an essential focal point for international air travel, was reluctant to give up control.⁸⁷

Indeed, British attitude early in the war reflected, according to Mackenzie, "...not a reluctance to accept a Canadian offer of help, but a desire to maintain Britain's long-term rights in Newfoundland."⁸⁸ In fact, as J.J.W. Herbertson of the British Air Ministry wrote, "It is one thing to let them in, but it would be quite another thing to get them out."⁸⁹

Notwithstanding this reluctance to grant the Canadians much in the way of ownership, their temporary assistance was gladly accepted. This trend was to continue throughout the war, especially when it came to the question of Canadian control over port facilities for naval operations out of St. John's. All stops were removed however, when it came to the Americans but, given that Lend-Lease was signed at a critical time in Great Britain's history, it seems to make sense. After all, Canada's involvement in Newfoundland was likely perceived by the British as self-serving as it was noble. Had Newfoundland not been such a critical geographical region in the defence of Canada, perhaps the deal would have been sweetened for the Canadians by Great Britain to entice them to come. As it stood, Canada had no option in participating in Newfoundland's defense because of geography, and because Great Britain could ill afford the resources to do so. Further, the Americans were about to set upon an almost unprecedented building

⁸⁷Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Dominion Secretary to Governor of Newfoundland, November 6, 1939," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume I, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 53.

⁸⁸David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 31.

⁸⁹Quoted in *Ibid.*, 31.

and military development in Newfoundland which had the potential of granting them much influence in a politically immature environment.

...TO SO VERY MUCH

Upon declaration of war, the first action of the Newfoundland Commission of Government was to mobilize the Newfoundland Militia. Finally equipped and armed by Canada, they were posted around the island in such perceived target areas as cable termini and the Bell Island ore mine. This was immediately followed by the call up of 625 Royal Naval reservists, of which 198 sailed out the Narrows of St. John's for overseas service with the Royal Navy on November 27th 1939.⁹⁰ The RCAF had already determined where and to what degree they could operate in Newfoundland through a series of reconnaissance flights during the preceding year with eventual plans of transferring a squadron from Nova Scotia.⁹¹ The Royal Navy requested that the RCAF undertake aerial reconnaissance of the Newfoundland coast on their behalf to determine if any enemy ships were in adjacent waters. Researcher Robert Kavanagh notes that: "In response Canada requested authority from the Newfoundland Government to overfly its territory and make use of local landing facilities should they be required."⁹² The Newfoundland Government through Governor Walwyn, London's vice-regal

⁹⁰Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 116.

⁹¹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Memorandum from Director of Plans and Operations to Air Staff Officer, March 30, 1938," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 18.

⁹²Robert L. Kavanagh, "W Force: The Canadian Army and the Defense of Newfoundland in the Second World War" (master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995), 47.

representative in Newfoundland, agreed.⁹³ Meanwhile, St. John's, along with the rest of the island, was under the control of British forces and the Royal Navy's presence although certainly not in great force, was evident from the first days of the war.

After the initial efforts of 1939 to get military forces positioned, the 'arming' of Newfoundland continued slowly. Despite Mackenzie King's public statements that linked the defence of Newfoundland to the defence of Canada, Canadian military cooperation with Newfoundland was still quite limited. This may have been partially due to the war in Europe that was still in the 'phony' stage. Although RCAF Aerial reconnaissance flights were still being conducted with some regularity, 'Canadian' presence in Newfoundland was primarily confined to the supply of arms and training to the Newfoundland Militia, in addition to the establishment of a Canadian shore battery at Bell Island.⁹⁴

However, the shocking speed and ease with which German forces secured victory in Europe in the spring and summer of 1940 shook the world and the Allies out of their 'phony war' complacency. Canada suddenly was faced with no having a choice in its military commitments to Newfoundland. In April 1940, O.D. Skelton, Canada's Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, advised the British High Commissioner in Canada that the RCAF intended to dispatch an officer to Newfoundland to inspect local air facilities for possible RCAF use. He also made mention of Canadian intentions to establish an air base at Red Bay, Labrador to protect the Straits of Belle Isle and,

⁹³Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, September 3, 1939," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 42.

⁹⁴Steve Neary, *The Enemy on Our Doorstep* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1994), 9.

depending on the situation, the transfer of a squadron from Nova Scotia to Botwood.⁹⁵ These overtures caused the Newfoundland Governor to once again state his reasons to the British government to support handing over not only use of, but control also to the Canadian Government of air facilities in Newfoundland. As much as Great Britain was reluctant to potentially lose these assets in the light of imagined post-war civil aviation importance, the new reality highlighted certain advantages of doing so, at least for the duration of the war. Walwyn used both the financial burden of maintaining said facilities and the less tangible but no less important fact that Canada would, as a result, "...take much more interest in maintaining aerial reconnaissance of the whole coast of Newfoundland which we regard as of great importance from a defence point of view."⁹⁶

During the "Phony War", before the spectre of Nazi Europe had raised its ugly head, the British government welcomed any and all Canadian assistance in defending the colony and protecting the approaches to the St. Lawrence. Britain was, however, consistently reluctant to turn over control of assets in Newfoundland to Canadian authorities as post-war considerations loomed large. For instance, the Canadian airfield control question was rejected out of hand by J.W. Herbertson Director of the British Air Civil Administration, War Group, who understood the United Kingdom's "...policy to be that Newfoundland, the oldest British Colony, should remain a separate entity and that anything tending to increase Canadian domination should be avoided as far as possible."⁹⁷ Although this seems to fly in the face of consistent British policy throughout

⁹⁵Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner of Great Britain, April 16, 1940," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 72.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 73.

⁹⁷Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 116.

the 19th century, which leaned towards pushing Newfoundland into the Canadian union, this probably reflects the thinking of the day with respect to civil aviation. After the fall of France though, Great Britain's post-war considerations gave way to current concerns over defence and both Canada and the United States were given increasingly more responsibilities.

Great Britain remained reluctant to transfer the responsibility of the air facilities to Canada until June 5th 1940 when, in a telegram from the Dominions Secretary, Viscount Caldecote, to Newfoundland Governor Walwyn, the Secretary indicated that not only would the British Government allow the RCAF to operate from the Newfoundland air bases, it agreed in principle to Canadian control of these bases for the duration of the war.⁹⁸ This telegram was the first indication that Great Britain's interest in the post-war civil air industry of Newfoundland was waning. It may have been that the newest generation of bombers rolling off the lines in both America and the United Kingdom enabled His Majesty's Government to forsee the day when an airplane did not need Newfoundland to refuel in a transatlantic flight. More likely though, the situation in Europe and particularly in the United Kingdom made the policy of holding potential post-war assets to the detriment of increased security in the Western Hemisphere untenable. The British Expeditionary Force, the bulk of the professional British Army, was in tatters and unarmed after being driven from France and all the reports of "The Miracle of Dunkirk" could not hide a devastating defeat. Great Britain's reluctance at giving up control of the air assets in Newfoundland was based on post-war speculation that could

⁹⁸Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Dominions Secretary to Governor of Newfoundland, June 5, 1940," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 79.

not hope to compete with wartime realities. The loosening of British control of air fields introduced an unprecedented relinquishing of Newfoundland's defence to a foreign power and contributed to increasing Canadian involvement in Newfoundland and eventually confederation.

By August 1940, the Permanent Joint Board on Defence had been constituted between Canada and the United States. This committee, whose purpose was to facilitate the shared defence of North America between cooperating American and Canadian militaries, identified one of its primary concerns as Newfoundland. The Board recognized Newfoundland's strategic importance along with its vulnerability. Stacey wrote that "Much of the Board's business was concerned with Newfoundland. That colony was not represented on the Board, but its voice was heard there."⁹⁹ Indeed, at a preliminary meeting held at Washington in July, it was noted that:

It is considered unlikely that Germany and Italy would attempt a major scale invasion of Canada's East Coast without first having established an advanced air base or bases from which the landings could be supported by shore based aircraft. Successive or simultaneous attempts to establish such bases in Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland, and in our Maritime Provinces, are possible...In the meantime it is Canada's problem, with such assistance as can be obtained from the United States in the way of equipment for our army and airforce, to provide for the effective defence against small scale invasion of the Botwood Bay and Newfoundland Airport areas.¹⁰⁰

Spurred on by the desperate situation in Europe, Stacey writes that Canada assumed large responsibilities for "...Newfoundland's defence, and Newfoundland's

⁹⁹C.P. Stacey. *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1974), 344.

¹⁰⁰Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Report of a Meeting at Washington to Discuss the Defence of the Atlantic Coast, July 15, 1940," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, volume 1, 1935-1949: Defence, Civil Aviation and Economic Affairs* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 89.

small forces were placed under Canadian command. Canadian air and ground units were stationed there from June 1940 onwards, and Canada made a small beginning on developing defences in the island.”¹⁰¹ The Canadians were to eventually place a small army in Newfoundland and Labrador called “W Force”. At the height of its strength in 1943, W Force numbered almost 6000 troops.¹⁰² While W Force was a sub-command of Atlantic Command, the regional command of the East Coast of Canada, it was the primary garrisoning force in Newfoundland. The Canadians also commanded the Newfoundland Escort Force which escorted east-bound convoys across the Atlantic originating from Royal Naval facilities in St. John’s and operating upwards of thirty escort ships from the port. The Newfoundland Escort Force (NEF) came into being as an answer to a new thrust westward by German U-Boats. Naval historian Roger Sarty relates:

On 20 May 1941 Admiral Pound again sent an urgent personal message to Admiral Nelles. The time had come to provide convoys with anti-submarine escorts in the western part of the central Atlantic so that they would have protection against U-boat attack through the whole of their passage. Within 24 hours, the Canadian naval staff agreed that St. John’s, Newfoundland, would be the best base for the new escort force...in view of this large Canadian contribution, the Admiralty nominated Commodore L.W. Murray, RCN, to take command.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹C.P. Stacey. *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1974), 357.

¹⁰²Robert Kavanagh describes the force in detail and lists their units and duties as: Two infantry battalions located in St. John’s and Botwood; two airfield defence companies (one at Gander and one at Torbay); one company of the Veteran’s Guard at St. John’s; two anti-aircraft Regiments located at St. John’s and Gander/Botwood; three coast defence batteries sited at St. John’s, Botwood and Lewisporte; a fortress company of engineers; a company of signalers; and the numerous administrative and support units required to maintain this force. The Commander W Force also had under his command the Newfoundland Regiment which, in addition to a coast defence battery sited on Bell Island, had two infantry companies which carried out various local defence functions. Robert L. Kavanagh, “W Force: The Canadian Army and the Defense of Newfoundland in the Second World War” (master’s thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995), 78.

¹⁰³Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montreal: Art Global, 1998), 63.

The establishment of the NEF in May 1941 was a milestone in Canadian naval history. Despite the fact that Newfoundland's defence was assumed by Canada early in the war, that responsibility was becoming obscured by the presence of large American forces. In any case, as historian Marc Milner notes, with the repositioning of all available RCN escort vessels to form the NEF, "Canada tipped the balance in the 'battle for Newfoundland' in her favour..."¹⁰⁴ The appointment of Murray, a graduate of the first class of the Royal Navy College of Canada at Victoria, was a coup for the RCN. Murray's presence and commonsense approach to all facets of his position, operational, as well as diplomatic, added a particular lustre to Canadian presence in Newfoundland. As the most senior Canadian in Newfoundland, he was, to all intents, the voice of Ottawa until C.J. Burchell was appointed Canadian High Commissioner in the fall of 1941.

It is interesting to note here that the same acrimonious deliberations took place over the Canadians seeking the title to the base at St. John's as those that resulted from Newfoundland proposing Canadian control over the airfields. In this case however, it was Newfoundland, not Britain, which was vehemently opposed to any Canadian possession of the base or rights to St. John's harbour. Obviously, controlling an air base was far different to Newfoundlanders than naval command of a harbour, essential as it was to both the war effort and the economy. Notwithstanding lack of ownership, the RCN's operations in St. John's was an essential piece in the convoy war; a role which they willingly filled. Sarty notes that "At a stroke, Canadian naval forces were being brought closer to home waters, and Canada's special interest in Newfoundland was being

¹⁰⁴Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy, The First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 90.

recognized and strengthened.”¹⁰⁵ It is for this reason that Newfoundland saw the RCN’s proposed reorganizing, renovating, and re-equipping of the harbour to facilitate fleets of escorts as something that could decidedly and adversely impact post-war commercial interests. Although protected and well-sited, St. John’s harbour is very small and the combination of a naval and commercial port, while tolerable during the hostilities, could diminish post-war trade and commerce. In the end, the harbour housed both interests comfortably and each rarely had a negative impact on the other.

ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

At the height of Canadian and American presence in Newfoundland during 1943, the immediate effect was decidedly economic. The Canadian government erected 600 permanent and 100 temporary buildings, overhauled St. John’s harbour facilities, expanded Botwood, Gander and Goose Bay airports, and established numerous fuelling, radio, and road systems throughout the country. All told, Canada spent over \$65,000,000 and at the peak of construction, employed more than 6700 Newfoundlanders in these projects.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montreal: Art Global, 1998), 63.

¹⁰⁶Robert L. Kavanagh, “W Force: The Canadian Army and the Defense of Newfoundland in the Second World War” (master’s thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1995), 133.



Figure 6.1 - Anti-aircraft battery manned by Canadian soldiers, Goose Bay airport, Labrador, May 1942.

Source: faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/nfldhistory.html

On the American side, three large establishments were built from scratch in Argentia, Stephenville, and St. John's. Mackenzie explains:

The American interests in Newfoundland were centred in three specific areas: on the west coast of the island, Harmon Field was constructed to the south of Corner Brook at Stephenville; in Placentia Bay, on the west side of the Avalon Peninsula, a naval base was built at Argentia, and close by Fort McAndrew was established; the third area was St. John's and its vicinity – Fort Pepperrell was constructed by Quidi Vidi Lake, an emergency landing strip was built nearby, and several hundred feet of wharfage was leased to the Americans in St. John's harbour.¹⁰⁷

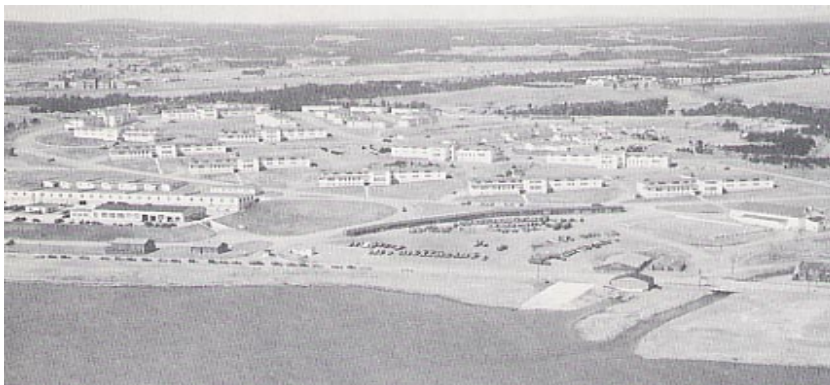


Figure 6.2 - View of the American base of Fort Pepperrell, near Quidi Vidi Lake, St. John's Newfoundland (1944)

Source: faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/nfldhistory.html

¹⁰⁷David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 78.

The total cost of all this construction was just over \$60,000,000 and at the height of the war, in 1943, American forces in Newfoundland peaked at nearly 11,000 servicemen.¹⁰⁸

The economic and social implications of the single largest period of development in Newfoundland's history to date were profound. Arguably for the first time in its history, there was virtually no unemployment. Those able-bodied men not in uniform, were either engaged in the traditional industries of fishing, logging, and mining or working for wages for the governments of either Newfoundland, Great Britain, Canada, or the United States or a combination thereof. For a people more used to the 'truck system' whereby merchants outfitted a man to work on credit and then deducted his wages at source to pay for his purchases at the merchant's store, cash in hand was a new and novel concept. Thousands of Newfoundlanders worked for foreign powers with the whole colony benefitting from the wartime boom. Surpluses were reported by government for the first time in generations. The other effect of this economic boom was something of a cultural invasion. Newfoundlanders were exposed to new music, fashions, regular and standardized health care, schooling, and a whole new vocabulary. As Mackenzie points out:

The war did for Newfoundland's economy what the Commission of Government had tried and failed to do – it transformed the country's deficit into a surplus, established full employment, and brought the standard of living of thousands of Newfoundlanders up to a more decent level. This minor miracle was not home grown; rather it was a direct product of the influx of thousands of foreign troops and millions of foreign dollars.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 128.

Newfoundland's surpluses remained throughout the war but already, the end was in sight. Taking a lesson from the First World War, political and economic pundits predicted the world wide depression that would occur soon after the hostilities ceased. Without war-time demand and markets, Newfoundland's economy would once again be in jeopardy. This ominous prediction was not lost on statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic and much like before the war, London and Ottawa once again began to deal with the question of Newfoundland. However, unlike the aftermath of the First World War, Ottawa, after poring millions into developing and strengthening Newfoundland's infrastructure, had a real stake in the colony. Further, relationships had been established and Newfoundland's strategic value and worth realized; things that may not have been as obvious in 1939. The most important of these was the very real and, to Newfoundlanders, the very much appreciated presence and influence of American troops in the colony. Arguably this factor, more than any other, brought home the realization to Ottawa that Canada would have to play a much bigger role in the political future of Newfoundland or risk losing her to American influence.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONFEDERATION, BY THE SMALLEST OF MARGINS

Since the Commission of Government was established in 1934, British, Canadian, and Newfoundland statesmen had wondered about the political future of Newfoundland. The sudden change in economic fortunes during the war reawakened thoughts of nationhood and was the impetus behind much of the political wrangling. From the earliest days of the war, the question of Newfoundland reasserting its nationhood factored into many of the decisions made about her defence. “What about after the war?” seemed to be a common theme in most of the correspondence flowing back and forth from London, Ottawa, and St. John’s. In a memorandum from the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs, Sir Eric Machtig of Great Britain to his superior, Clement Atlee, the Dominions Secretary, noted that:

...we must actively consider the future after the war [because] the immense efforts made by Newfoundlanders during the war in the Allied cause and the completely changed financial position, even if only temporary (they are now lending us money instead of our financing them), means that when the war ends there will be an overwhelming political move in favour of the restoration of self-government. This it will be difficult to resist and we ought to be prepared with our line of action.”¹¹⁰

Consistently, the British thinking during the war hinged on the conviction that Confederation with Canada was beyond the scope of the imaginable. Further, Canadian policy followed a cautious path to not be seen as pushing Newfoundlanders in a direction they did not want to go. The British opinion that Newfoundlanders would not consider

¹¹⁰Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. “Memorandum from Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great-Britain to Dominions Secretary, June 13, 1942” *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 27.

joining Canada served to influence some very real political thought on Newfoundland and her post-war political future from the British perspective. Early in the war, in a memorandum to the Dominions Secretary from his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State after a visit to Newfoundland, G.H. Shakespeare dismissed out of hand the suggestion that Newfoundland would join Canada as "...[this alternative] would [not] be acceptable to the Islanders who are exclusively of Scottish, Irish and English stock and intensely loyal."¹¹¹ Likewise, C.J. Burchell, Canadian High Commissioner to Newfoundland, echoed Shakespeare in 1941 in a telegram to the Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, N.A. Robertson when he remarked that "...the attitude of the great majority of the people here is that they think Canada is standing by ready to gobble Newfoundland up at the proper time. They look with great suspicion on the spending by Canada of money for the defence of Newfoundland, as apparently they fear the Greeks bringing gifts."¹¹² His reasoning for this is the lack of any perceived good that Canada had done prior to the outbreak of the war Newfoundland to dissuade this opinion. In fact, he alleges that he "...can recall some instances in which the attitude of Canada has been anything but helpful to Newfoundland and in respect of which Newfoundlanders have so many grievances."¹¹³ If anything, Burchell was an astute politician and he concluded his correspondence with the observation that there had been no attempt by the Canadian government to educate Newfoundlanders:

¹¹¹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Memorandum from Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great-Britain to Dominions Secretary and to Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great-Britain," *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 5.

¹¹²Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "High Commissioner in Newfoundland to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 11, 1941", *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 7.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 7.

...with respect to Canada and Canadians...it will take some thought and some planning to educate, or really re-educate, the people of Newfoundland about Canada. This I regard as an essential preliminary to any plan of Newfoundland coming into the Canadian Confederation.¹¹⁴

Seemingly, the real focus of the Canadian government was winning the war but this did not stop the constant correspondence that flew between various departments concerning Newfoundland. Not everyone in King's Government felt the same amiability towards Newfoundland. H.L. Keenleyside, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs and, later, Canada's High Commissioner in Newfoundland wrote to Burchell:

My personal view is that we would be better off in almost every way if we could avoid taking over the responsibility for the Government of Newfoundland. On the other hand, defence considerations make it, in my opinion, inevitable that we must either take Newfoundland into confederation, or else have so close an alliance with the island that we can be assured that the necessary defence precautions are effectively maintained.¹¹⁵

This opinion was voiced in 1942, a scant seven years before Confederation with Canada. Mr. Keenleyside's opinions cannot be representative of the country as a whole but it is interesting to note that this view was acceptable enough to be voiced by a senior bureaucrat and seems to reinforce the strategic importance of Newfoundland despite his perceived associated problems of responsibility.

¹¹⁴Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "High Commissioner in Newfoundland to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 11, 1941" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 8.

¹¹⁵Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Extracts from Letter from Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner in Newfoundland, February 6, 1942" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 9.

As well, the positive impact of the Americans was apparent. Prosperous, efficient, and for the most part respectful, the coming of the Americans has been likened to “a friendly invasion” and the influence they had on Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders was not lost on either London or Ottawa.¹¹⁶ Concluding a letter in 1942 with a recommendation that “...our policy in Canada at the present time should be to increase the number of links in the chain which now connects Newfoundland with Canada,” Burchell observed that “...beneath the surface and among other sections of the people [of Newfoundland], there is quite a strong undercurrent running towards the U.S.A....I am reliably informed also that in several of the outports there are a number of people who would strongly support Newfoundland going in with the U.S.A. instead of with Canada.”¹¹⁷ Ignoring the popular anti-confederation sentiments all around him, Burchell again stated in the summer of 1942 that “...the ultimate aim of our policy should be to bring Newfoundland into the Confederation.”¹¹⁸ He proposed to do this by a series of Canadian-funded infrastructure programs and the development of natural resources on the island. It is difficult to believe that Burchell imagined he would have gotten the resources to undertake such endeavours in the middle of the war, but in collaboration with the Canadian military in Newfoundland, he married war projects with social development as much as possible.

¹¹⁶John N. Cardoulis. *A Friendly Invasion* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1990), title.

¹¹⁷Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. “Extracts from Letter from High Commissioner in Newfoundland to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, April 10, 1942” *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 13.

¹¹⁸Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. “High Commissioner in Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 9, 1942” *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 17.

Burchell's attempts to and his recommendations for Canada to establish relations with Newfoundland started to find an appreciative audience in London, as well as in Ottawa. Again in the summer of 1942, a memorandum to the Dominions Secretary from his Permanent Under-Secretary stressed that the reason why Newfoundlanders were so averse to the idea of Confederation with Canada was "...largely due to the fact that the Canadians have regarded them as poor relations, have done in the main little to help them and have always taken the line that circumstances would force Newfoundland into Canada in due course on Canada's own terms."¹¹⁹ He went on to state that "...if Canada were induced to take a more liberal view of the terms which she would offer Newfoundland...public opinion would move in the direction of union with Canada."¹²⁰

Given these debates, it would seem to be that the stance of the King government throughout the war was to appease Newfoundland, but not seem to be doing so. In other words, the decision to join Canada had to be Newfoundland's decision alone but Ottawa was not above assuming a friendlier face to Newfoundland. In order to facilitate the process, the Canadian government was walking a fine line between generations of bad blood and recent wartime relations. King also had to worry about what the voting population of Canada might accept if it came time to offer terms of confederation to Newfoundland. The one constant in all this was the undeniable and growing influence of the Americans. As the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great Britain wrote late in the war:

¹¹⁹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Memorandum from Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great-Britain to Dominions Secretary, June 13, 1942" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 26.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

...Newfoundland, situated as she is at the mouth of the St. Lawrence and commanding the gateway to Canada, is essential to Canada's defence, and that her full partnership is necessary not only for Canadian security but also for the proper rounding off of the Confederation...what has served to drive home this lesson has been the American entry into the island...¹²¹

With the end of the war and the repatriation of thousands of young Newfoundlanders, who returned more worldly than when they had left, the time came to revisit the idea of self-rule. Under the original recommendations of the Amulree Report, once Newfoundland achieved a degree of financial stability and if the populace so wished, then responsible rule should be restored. Despite Newfoundland surmounting the single greatest obstacle to self-government in economic recovery, the political future of the colony still rested on a referendum, the mechanism decided on to determine the population's wishes. To decide upon the options presented to the electorate within this referendum, Great Britain called for a National Convention with elected delegates to deliberate and debate the issue. The debates lasted months with Newfoundland delegates dispatched to both London and Ottawa to clarify what exactly Great Britain and Canada would offer. The reception in Ottawa of the Newfoundland delegates, who were led by Smallwood, was markedly warmer than that in cash-strapped, war-weary London. So much so, that contrary to expectations, confederation with Canada emerged as a real option with promising terms. It gained such popularity in the pro-confederate campaign that, even after the anti-confederates of the National Convention defeated it by vote and

¹²¹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs of Great-Britain, 1945" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 131.

had it struck from the list of possible voting options, a telegram writing campaign by the populace got it back on the ballot.¹²²

Confederation had found its champion in Joseph Smallwood. A chronic failure in both business and journalism, he was blessed with an unfailing spirit, indefatigable energy, and a silver tongue. His success was a combination of many factors that had, hitherto been absent on the Newfoundland political scene. The first was simply the emergence of a champion of confederation that was articulate, could speak to the average Newfoundlander, and was passionate about his cause. Further, he was a potential future leader in Newfoundland and, as recognized by the King government, decidedly a Liberal. Secondly, when British voters thanked Churchill for leading them in war, but elected Clement Atlee to guide them in peace, the general attitude in the British Government changed. Smallwood's biographer Richard Gwynn noted that:

Gone from Westminster were the flag-wavers, doggedly clinging to every tangle of jungle, every field of sand, and every outcrop of rock painted red on the map. In their places sat the earnest graduates of trade unions and the London School of Economics, determined to administer good in the name of the people...and so far as the Labour Government was concerned, the good for Newfoundland lay in union with Canada.¹²³



Figure 7.1 - Joseph 'Joey' Smallwood.

'Joey' was an accomplished orator who moved a populace towards Confederation with Canada, a political union that would have been unimaginable even a decade before his rise to power in 1948.

Source:

www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=11281

¹²²Richard Gwynn, *Smallwood: The unlikely Revolutionary* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), 94.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 59.

With the ties to Mother England loosened, if not cut, one side of the triangle was firmly in the Confederate camp. Of great assistance to the pro-confederates was also the recent history with Canada that had built a legacy forged in war; one strong enough to counter the ongoing American presence. Whether union with the United States was a better option for Newfoundland or not, the United States had no evident designs on Newfoundland. Rather, it was the fear of American influence that worried Ottawa.

In the middle of the confederation debates of 1947 and, over a question of whether or not to receive a Newfoundland delegation, King noted in his journals that:

Pearson [then Under Secretary of State for External Affairs] said we will have to watch to see that the United States do not get too great a control through what they have in there of airfields in Newfoundland. To that I replied I was not at all sure that, having regard to the future, we would gain rather than lose in having the United States assume a certain military responsibility for the protection of this Continent rather than our taking on the whole thing ourselves in that Island.¹²⁴

The delegation was received and in a sweltering Ottawa summer, Smallwood and the Canadians hammered out draft terms of union. The question of American presence in Newfoundland and, more worryingly, American influence was raised again and again in Cabinet and back room meetings in Ottawa during the period prior to the confederation referendum. Further, King was obsessed with finding the balance between offering Newfoundland enough to get it into the union, but not so much as to upset the other provinces. After all, it was Canadian tax dollars, of which Newfoundland had contributed none, that would be used to settle debt and increase the standard of living on the island to the level enjoyed by other Canadians in the post-war period.

¹²⁴J.W. Pickersgill & D.F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record, Volume 4, 1947-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 50.

If the referendum vote of 1948 seems rather soon after the end of the war, it may be safely assumed that the whole process was accelerated by all parties involved. Newfoundlanders wanted their political future settled while they were still in a position of relative economic strength. Although wartime levels of troops and equipment had dropped considerably since the height realized in 1943, the installations were still there and, unlike the Canadians who had mostly departed in 1945, the Americans were still in Argentia, Stephenville, and St. John's, an obvious thorn in the Canadian side. Great Britain felt a particular affinity towards Newfoundland by the end of the war in light of the outstanding service to the Empire that the tiny colony had paid once again. It had become unconscionable for a member in good standing of the British Empire that had contributed so much to continue with a Commission of Government. At the same time, Canada was anxious not to let the opportunity pass before the good will so painstakingly built up over the course of the war became a distant memory. War had brought Canada to Newfoundland, forced it to acknowledge Newfoundland's strategic worth and became involved in the defence of the colony. Once this importance had been acted upon, it was difficult to relinquish responsibility. There was also a political legacy matter that King felt particularly keenly in these, his final months in politics. He wrote:

...that Canada would wish Newfoundland in Confederation and that if a way were not found at this time, future generations might feel that the government was at fault in taking chances in the changed relationships that might develop, for example, between Newfoundland and the United States. It is true that a Union cannot be brought about without our assuming a considerable liability and one which may make some of the other provinces, particularly the Maritimes, resentful, at giving better terms to a bankrupt colony than we would give to our own provinces. However, the feeling was that there were larger national and Commonwealth considerations of which full account should be taken.¹²⁵

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 54.

King was a man who believed as much in fate as the supernatural.¹²⁶ He believed his career was inexorably tied to Canada's destiny. Particularly, he was taken with the idea of uniting the country from sea to sea and often cited his desire to see confederation through with Newfoundland joining the union, "...the dream of a great country – a British country, extending from the waters of the Atlantic to the Pacific, all one, united, etc..."¹²⁷

Idealism aside, there is very real evidence that Canada had launched a public affairs campaign to strengthen ties with Newfoundland early in the war until the referendum of 1948. The American presence had in such a strategically located region provided impetus to these efforts. Vincent Massey, then High Commissioner in London, wrote to Norm Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, in 1943 that the problem of Newfoundland was likely to become more urgent as time goes on with respect to the Americans and their influence. He reinforced the 'Canadian' concern and stated that "...Canada had been presented with a *fait accompli* when the agreement was made between Great Britain and the U.S.A. in connection with Newfoundland defence, and that we had practically no opportunity to express our views although we were vitally concerned with the plans."¹²⁸ Burchell again offered a solution to the bad blood between the neighbours in adapting the same policy that the United States had adopted towards

¹²⁶J.L. Granatstein, *Mackenzie King, His Life and World* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1977), 80.

¹²⁷Quoted in J.W. Pickersgill & D.F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record, Volume 4, 1947-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 52.

¹²⁸Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "High Commissioner in Great Britain to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 6, 1943" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 51.

Canada, "...the good neighbour policy."¹²⁹ Following on this, the Third Secretary of the Wartime Information Board in Ottawa, the precursor to public affairs, issued the following declaration in 1943 in a secret memorandum:

Assuming that it is of the first importance to Canada to maintain and extend our position in Newfoundland after the war and, if possible, to incorporate Newfoundland in Canada, and assuming further that we can only accomplish these ends with the consent of the Newfoundlanders, it is clear that every effort should be made now to win their goodwill and, equally, that no opportunity should be lost of presenting them in as favourable a light as possible to Canadians.¹³⁰

Thus Canada found herself in an untenable position with regards to the Americans in Newfoundland. This position forced a softening of the rhetoric that had historically characterized relations with Newfoundland and this more amicable stance was not lost on Great Britain. Evidence throughout the war foreshadowed eventual Canadian acceptance of Newfoundland into Confederation. Forced into responding in the Canadian House of Commons in 1943, King rose to answer a question by The Honourable J.W. Noseworthy who had demanded clarification on the relationship that was to exist between Newfoundland and Canada when the war ended. King reaffirmed his statement of 1939 that any thought of confederation had to be initiated by Newfoundlanders and Newfoundlanders alone. Ever the politician though, he was particularly conciliatory as he ended his remarks with the now famous lines:

If the people of Newfoundland should ever decide that they wish to enter the Canadian federation and should make that decision clear beyond all

¹²⁹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "High Commissioner in Newfoundland to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 6, 1943", *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 51.

¹³⁰Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Memorandum by Third Secretary, May [n.d.], 1943" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 69.

possibility of misunderstanding, Canada would give most sympathetic consideration to the proposal.¹³¹

The British response was generally favourable to this but guarded. In a draft letter from Robertson, the Under Secretary of State for External Affairs to Massey, Canada's High Commissioner in London, the bureaucrat maintained that had the Newfoundland populace detected even a perceived "...effort on the part of the Canadian Government to accelerate this development [it] would be seized upon by chauvinistic elements...as sticks to beat the drums of patriotism and nationalism in Newfoundland and to combat Canadian "aggression" against the Island."¹³² The general consensus on both sides of the Atlantic was to treat the issue delicately and simply make the option of Confederation as appealing as possible. Indeed, the British took from King's statements that with respect to Newfoundland "...Canada is now prepared to adopt a more forthcoming attitude than in the past..."¹³³

This understanding of the Canadian position coupled with a realization that the past responsibility to maintain a measure of control over Newfoundland for defence purposes was now largely negated by the wartime assumption of the responsibility by both Canada and the United States saw Great Britain to slip back into the pro-confederation camp. Although, as Bridle notes in his collection:

¹³¹Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Extracts from Debates of House of Commons, 1943", *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 73.

¹³²Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Extracts from Draft Letter from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner in Great Britain, July 16, 1943" *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 75.

¹³³Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Extract from Memorandum from Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs of Great Britain to Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs of Great Britain, July 23, 1943", *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 77.

There was a period, especially during the Second World War and even after it, when the British government veered towards keeping Newfoundland in the British fold and nurturing it. More than anything else, this probably reflected the affection which had developed for Newfoundland because of its unflinching and self-effacing support of Britain in two wars.¹³⁴

In the face of the post war depression and larger problems with colonial possessions, this nostalgia passed and the realization that a British colony joined to a staunch member of the British Commonwealth like Canada was entirely acceptable.

Consequently, two referendums were held and the people of Newfoundland decided to join Canada by merely 7000 votes; the narrowest of margins. This was enough of a margin though, to convince the government of Canada that the importantly positioned island of Newfoundland was to become the country's tenth and final province. This ended also Newfoundland's brief history as an independent member of the British Commonwealth. Canada and, more particularly King, welcomed the newest province.

As observed by Gwynn:

In fact, King was determined to mark his retirement with the grand gesture of rounding out Confederation, the last star in his political crown, and to refuse Newfoundland at this point would have damaged Canada's international image.¹³⁵

Often overlooked though, was the influence of the presence of American servicemen on both Newfoundlanders and their future political masters in Canada and how that influence affected Canadian policy towards confederation and diplomatic actions throughout the war. Still at pains to deny any involvement in influencing the decision,

¹³⁴Department of External Affairs, Paul Bridle, ed. "Introduction", *Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume 2, Part 1, 1940-1949: Confederation* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984) xxix.

¹³⁵Richard Gwynn, *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1968), 113.

King announced that the results of the referendum were “attained without any race of influence or pressure from Canada.”¹³⁶ In this fashion, Newfoundland entered into the Canadian federation and truly joined the North American economic community. For better or for worse, Newfoundland abandoned all aspirations of independence and threw in her lot with her former rival and brought Confederation to completion.



Figure 7.2 - Signing ceremony of the Terms of Union in the Senate Chamber in Ottawa on December 11, 1948.

Seated were Louis St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, and the Hon. A. J. Walsh, head of the Newfoundland delegation. Joseph R. Smallwood is standing (second from the right).

Source:
faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/NFLDHistory.html

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 113.

CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSION

The present-day nationalism that surfaces from time to time in Newfoundland over such issues as offshore petroleum rights and transfer payments, hints at the fierce spirit of independence that influenced much of the Island's political history. It was this same spirit of independence that, coupled with a dismal history of poor governance and political corruption, led to the financial and political crisis of 1934 resulting in the loss of parliamentary government and reversion to colonial status. From its earliest days, Newfoundland's economy, and the world's interest in the region, was focused on the fishery. In other words, Newfoundland's livelihood depended on a seasonal and unreliable industry that plagued economic and social development as much as it was the foundation of the region's wealth. With little other industry and wholly dependent on fluctuating world markets, the Island's population was chronically poor, socially backward, and economically dependent on a mercantile system that allowed little room for social progression. Likewise, throughout its history, Newfoundland's successive governments dealt poorly with progressing social welfare due to chronically empty coffers and repeated corruption. Despite this, the island enthusiastically responded to successive crises of the British Empire and specifically, Newfoundland's independent contribution to the First World War, led to a financial crisis from which the struggling dominion could not recover.

By 1934, Newfoundland's debt had reached an unmanageable amount and, in the midst of a world depression, credit options were limited. To combat looming loan defaults, Newfoundland's government was suspended by the British and a committee

appointed to both overhaul the colony's financial state and address critical social issues. This loss of self-government laid the foundation for Newfoundland's defence during the Second World War in that, arrangements for that defence were imposed, rather than arranged in conjunction with a government representing the populace. The 'Destroyers for Bases' deal brought American forces to Newfoundland through an agreement reached by the American and British governments. Canadian military presence in Newfoundland, although welcomed by the Commission of Government, was arranged between the British and Canadian governments. Neither the Newfoundland administration nor the population had very much say in the displacement or movement of military forces in Newfoundland. This lack of authority quite probably allowed the degree of influence that Canadian and American troops and accordingly, their governments, had on Newfoundland and its society. This lack of authority certainly allowed for the degree of militarization of Newfoundland during the Second World War as opposed to what an autonomous region would have allowed. Despite this, only 52.24% of a record turnout of 84.89% of the population that voted in the referendum of 1948, voted to not return to a political system that had allowed the previous crisis to develop.¹³⁷ Rather, the vote was for confederation with Canada. That Newfoundlanders elected to join the Dominion by only 7000 votes was a near run thing. That confederation was considered at all was a concept that was barely imaginable a decade previously.

Before the war, Canada was viewed with almost universal suspicion in Newfoundland. Nearly a century of trade and boundary competition had hardly endeared one to the other. Although Canada, and more properly Great Britain, had repeatedly

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 112.

made overtures to Newfoundland to join the union, a desire for independence and politically fired emotions as much as economic concerns, had resulted in nearly consistent refusal on Newfoundland's part. Both Newfoundland and the Provinces of Canada were partnered under the same mantle of Empire but this partnership was rarely mutually beneficial in terms of trade or external affairs. From Newfoundland's perspective, her interests were far enough removed from the rest of British North America to resist any union with the mainland.

Numerous examples of animosity and outright bitterness throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries over trade and boundaries highlighted the bad blood between the two regions. Perceived wrongs were regularly transformed by both sides into political vitriol to be used against the other. By the 19th century in Newfoundland, calling a political opponent 'confederate' or 'anti-confederate' could, in the right context and time, be akin to the worst insult.

Twice before, during the 1864 Confederation Conferences, and again in 1869, Newfoundland was offered the opportunity of union with Canada. Out of the 1869 attempt came a failed election, ruined careers, and an anti-confederate groundswell that lasted well into the 20th century. Immediately after the war, when Newfoundland had the opportunity to once again assume self-government, union with Canada seemed, on the surface, to be a slim possibility. Certainly, a default to British rule was generally accepted should the restoration of self-government fail once again. Yet, the confederate camp had done the impossible and swayed a majority of what was a very reluctant population to throw their lot in with the Dominion of Canada. That Smallwood and British ambivalence had much to do with this is indisputable. The idea of Empire and the

preservation thereof that permeated Churchill's thinking was swept from Westminster with almost shameful haste in the post war administration change. For his part, Smallwood, a late convert to the virtues of confederation with Canada, worked and cajoled tirelessly to get the option on the ballot and then, ensure its vote. The political advantage for Smallwood however, was the amiable and even progressive stance of the King government throughout the latter half of the war and into the referendum year of 1948. As much as King was a sentimental visionary who wanted to crown his political career with the expansion of Canada, the national interest alone ensured that if confederation was not an option, then a stifling close alliance had to be. Canada's geographical and strategic situation was such that she could not allow Newfoundland to drift into the American sphere. Whether this would have happened or not, is for speculation however, the presence and influence of America in Newfoundland could not be ignored.

Over the course of the war, America had gone from a peripheral entity, to an easy and welcome partner in the Island's defence. Historically, American influence in Newfoundland was primarily economic. The United States represented a massive market for Newfoundland fish and ore and indeed, it was the pursuit of this market that led to many of the trade disputes with Canada. As well, Newfoundlanders had been regular visitors to New England for centuries and, for a time, mass emigration in search of employment meant that nearly everyone knew of someone in the 'Boston States'. Nevertheless, the American presence in Newfoundland during the Second World War as a result of the 'Destroyer for Bases' deal was initially met with distrust. Employment and prosperity that accompanied the massive influx of American capital, however, soon

changed this distrust to appreciation and this presence was heralded and nearly universally well-regarded.

In addition to the millions of hard currency spent in developing several installations for the use of all branches of the American forces, thousands of Newfoundlanders were employed by the United States Government. For the first time, reasonable amounts of disposable income was available to the Newfoundland labourer and this newfound wealth ensured that the old days of merchant elite rule were forever gone. American servicemen were polite, respectful and exposed Newfoundlanders to the attitudes of an easy, classless society. This was a novelty for a population more used to the defined societal strata of English-accented magistrates, tight-fisted merchants and self-conscious clergy. Essentially, the easy-going American won the hearts of Newfoundlanders in general and thousands of island girls in particular, enforcing the strong but intangible bond long after the war was over.

Not since the early days of the global war debt crisis in the 1920s had Americans publicly voiced designs on acquiring Newfoundland. In the years after the First World War, Britain launched a legacy of worrisome politics that stretched Anglo-American relations to the point of breaking.¹³⁸ Shouldered with staggering debts owed which she could not pay outright, and owed to her which she was having great difficulty in recovering, Great Britain was reminded time and again by the United States of her vast Empire and speculative repayment plans involving land. The Great Depression complicated the matter and gave birth to a movement in the United States which could have had a very different future in store for such far-flung parts of the Empire as

¹³⁸Robert Self, *Britain, America and the War Debt Controversy: The Economic Diplomacy of an Unspecial Relationship, 1917-1941* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 15.

Newfoundland. As noted by Robert Self in his book on the war debt controversy, some unorthodox ideas of repayment emerged:

Another idea very popular in the United States was to exchange debt remission for parts of the British Empire. Suggestions of this sort had been in the air since 1919 and...the usual proposals were received at the White House calling for the debts to be traded for ownership of British Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and other European possessions in the Caribbean. Many such proposals continued to be considered with due gravity in Congress...during the remainder of the decade.¹³⁹

Thankfully for Newfoundlanders who put more stock in their homeland than it being a mere bargaining chip at the international table of money-lenders, this did not come to pass. However, the proprietorship and responsibility that Great Britain felt for Newfoundland waned as the war progressed.

During the “Phony War” (1939-1940), before the spectre of Nazi Europe had raised its ugly head, the British government welcomed any and all Canadian assistance in defending the colony and protecting the approaches to the St. Lawrence. Britain was, however, consistently reluctant to turn over control of assets in Newfoundland to Canadian authorities as post-war considerations loomed large. For instance, the Canadian airfield control question was rejected out of hand by J.W. Herbertson Director of the British Air Civil Administration, War Group, who understood the United Kingdom’s “...policy to be that Newfoundland , the oldest British Colony, should remain a separate entity and that anything tending to increase Canadian domination should be avoided as far as possible.”¹⁴⁰ Although this seems to fly in the face of consistent British policy throughout the 19th century, which leaned towards pushing Newfoundland into the

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁴⁰Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 116.

Canadian union, this probably reflects the thinking of the day with respect to civil aviation. After the fall of France though, Great Britain's post-war considerations gave way to current concerns over defence and both Canada and the United States were given increasingly more responsibilities. Into this vacuum of defence responsibility left by Great Britain rushed the United States, concerned over continental defence and Canada, with arguably some political motives.

Despite no evidence of American designs on the colony, the fear that Newfoundland might drift into an American sphere of influence was never far from the minds of both British and Canadian statesmen during and immediately after the war. Consequently, these Americans quite probably had far more influence on Ottawa than history will admit. It was the Liberal Government's pandering to the Americans for mutual continental defence in the establishment of the Permanent Joint Defence Board that brought Newfoundland's strategic value to light. It was the presence of the Americans through the 'Destroyers-Bases' Deal that reinforced the need for Canadian military presence in Newfoundland, if only to protect Canadian interests and a joint command structure during the war. It was the fact that the American forces stayed after the war when the Canadians were obligated to vacate their posts in Newfoundland that American-Newfoundland relations continued to grow. Finally, the impending and probable restoration of Newfoundland democracy and a very real possibility that she would drift into, at the very least, an American economic sphere of influence presented a situation that was unacceptable to Canada and cleared the way in Ottawa to welcome Newfoundland into Confederation.

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