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A Sickly Season: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Mainguy Commission

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the proceedings of the Mainguy Commission, which was established in 1949 to investigate and report on a series of three “incidents” of collective disobedience which had taken place aboard Canadian warships in the early months of that year. The “incidents” were the culmination of a series of challenges that the senior staff was already endeavouring to address internally. Media and political attention to the indiscipline, however, brought the minister to insist that there be a public enquiry.

Historians who have examined the report of the Mainguy Commission have generally accepted that in calling for the Canadianization of the RCN it represents a break between the RCN and its British traditions. As this thesis demonstrates, the idea that there was a groundswell of nationalist sentiment in the RCN, and particularly on the lower deck, that required a break with Britain is incorrect. In fact the RCN had been attempting to address morale issues for at least the two years prior to the “incidents” and had a very good idea of the issues that had to be dealt with.

This dissertation compares the transcripts of the hearings of the Mainguy Commission and the report that it produced. It will argue that the transcripts in fact do not reveal any particular concern on the part of RCN personnel that the navy was insufficiently Canadian. The issues facing the RCN, as disclosed in the transcripts, were related to the failure of the government to spend the money required to ensure a happy and effective fleet. In focusing on the issue of the Canadianization of the RCN, it will be argued, the government was attempting to draw attention away from the real issues facing the RCN and to exert control over the naval staff.

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No project of this magnitude is completed in a vacuum and there are a large number of people who have had a role in making it happen. Most of them know who they are. While there is not room to acknowledge everyone, there are a few people whose contribution deserves particular mention.

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INTRODUCTION

“Mutiny.” It is a word to conjure with. In the popular view it brings to mind visions of Captain Bligh, Fletcher Christian, and the *Bounty* of historical, and Hollywood, fame. In naval circles, it calls forth images of mass insubordination and the loss of discipline and control over ships in service. In either case, the very word has become synonymous with the most serious of naval offences. It came as quite a shock to the Canadian people and government, then, when, in the early part of 1949, it appeared that the spectre of mutiny had reared its head in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN).

In fact not one but three apparent mutinies in the RCN occurred in 1949. While one such incident could be regarded as unfortunate and isolated, three in rapid succession was a matter of concern for the senior officers of the RCN and the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton. Historians are undecided on the significance of the Mainguy Commission, which was struck to investigate the three "incidents," and the report that it produced. Some maintain that it marked the end of the RCN as a British institution. The reality is more complex. This study seeks to place the "incidents" and the report within a wider context, for the report was a product of a diverse set of strategic, political and budgetary agendas. It examines the development of the RCN in peace and war and then within the strategic uncertainty of the Cold War. Ultimately this thesis argues that the Mainguy Commission sought to divert attention from the Liberal government's post-war plans for the RCN, plans that were dramatically different from what the naval staff had long envisioned. The Commission did this by appealing to a nationalist sentiment that

was in reality a non-issue for the RCN but did serve to distract attention from the more significant issues facing the navy.

The first of the apparent mutinies took place aboard HMCS *Athabaskan* on 26 February 1949. While on exercises in company with a number of other ships as part of Task Group 215.9, *Athabaskan* had been ordered to detach and proceed to Manzanillo, Mexico to refuel. After she had arrived there, and after the ordinary morning routine had been observed, the hands refused to respond to pipes calling them to duty stations after lunch. After a meeting with the captain, during which a number of grievances were aired by the crew, the pipes again sounded, and the crew returned to their duties.¹

On 15 March 1949, less than a month later, the second apparent mutiny took place aboard HMCS *Crescent*. She had originally been dispatched from Esquimalt on a special mission in late January 1949. She proceeded, during February 1949, to Nanjing, making several stops along the way, where she replaced HMS *Cossack* as the senior naval vessel there. On 15 March, a Tuesday, the hands had breakfast at 0700 and were piped to duty at 0800. As was the case aboard *Athabaskan*, the hands refused to obey the call to work stations, and remained in their mess decks, having locked the doors. Upon learning of the situation, and after speaking to one of the disaffected seamen, the captain of *Crescent* went to the mess deck and spoke to the men there. After his meeting with the men, “hands fall in” was again piped at 0950 and the crew resumed its duties.²

The final incident took place aboard HMCS *Magnificent*, the only light fleet aircraft carrier in the RCN, and the lynch-pin of its post-war aspirations towards a balanced fleet. At the time of the apparent mutiny, *Magnificent* was engaged in flying

¹ “Appointment Composition and Terms of Reference of Board, Annex II,” MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5.

² “Appointment Composition and Terms of Reference of Board, Annex IV,” MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5.

exercises in company with the Pacific Squadron³ of the United States Navy. On 20 March 1949, while participating in these operations, the aircraft handlers refused to obey pipes calling them to duty after breakfast. Again, as with *Athabaskan* and *Crescent*, the men met with the captain, after which they obeyed the pipes for “flying stations” at 0900.⁴

None of the apparent “mutinies” lasted longer than two hours, and all three were resolved efficiently by the captains of the respective ships. There were no instances of violent confrontations between the ratings and the officers. None of the sailors were punished in any way for taking part in the incidents. From the point of view of the Royal Canadian Navy, the crisis seemed to have been averted and order restored with a minimum of fuss. The senior leadership, then, could be forgiven for believing that the RCN had done well in the circumstances and that the matter was behind them.

If the senior leadership of the RCN did harbour this belief, however, they were, at least in the eyes of the Canadian press, sadly mistaken. While more will be said about the public reaction to the incidents in subsequent chapters, suffice it to say that across the country, newspapers reported on the apparent mutinies in stories tinged with fear and alarm. The chief focus of the fear, given the era in which the incidents occurred, was of subversion within the RCN by communist agents. If an institution as essentially conservative as the RCN could be infiltrated by communists then no institution was safe.

The Government, of course, could not ignore the incidents, regardless of the results of the RCN’s internal inquiry. Brooke Claxton, then minister of national defence,

³ While it is difficult to determine exactly what this squadron refers to it is the manner in which it is referred to in the documents. In all likelihood it refers to a specific task group of the United States Navy. Squadron is the term used here as that is how it is described in the summary of evidence and findings.

⁴ “Appointment Composition and Terms of Reference of Board, Annex III,” MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5.

promised immediate action, and delivered on his promise. He established a Commission of inquiry, with both naval and civilian representation. This Commission, which became known as the Mainguy Commission, after its chairman Rear-Admiral Rollo Mainguy, was tasked with, firstly, determining whether there was evidence of communist subversion in the RCN. If no evidence of subversion was found, the second task of the Commission was to determine what was wrong with the RCN. The main focus of the second line of enquiry was to be on morale and discipline, not broader aspects of naval policy.⁵

The Commission duly held hearings over the late spring and summer of 1949, eventually hearing from 238 witnesses of all ranks, from the chief of the naval staff to ordinary seamen.⁶ In October of 1949, in what by today's standards would be considered a miracle of bureaucratic efficiency, the Commission presented its report to the Minister of National Defence. Encapsulated in 74 brief pages, the report summarised the evidence presented and made a number of recommendations to improve the service conditions in the RCN.⁷ As will be seen, the report was just what the Minister ordered, and put the issue of subversion to rest once and for all.

The report itself made fourteen observations and thirty-one recommendations regarding improvements of service conditions in the RCN.⁸ Only a few of these, however, were seized upon by the media and the Government. These recommendations involved mostly the "Canadianization" of the RCN. They included the reinstatement of

⁵ "Appointment Composition and Terms of Reference of Board," MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷ "Report on certain "Incidents" which occurred on board HMCS ATHABASKAN, CRESCENT AND MAGNIFICENT and on other matters concerning THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY made to the MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE," MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 4 (hereinafter the Mainguy Report).

⁸ Ibid.

“Canada” badges on uniforms of naval personnel, and ending the practice of training Canadian junior officers aboard Royal Naval vessels and the institution of a Canadian training establishment for both officers and ratings.⁹ As a result of these recommendations, some have dubbed the Mainguy Report as sort of a Magna Carta for the Royal Canadian Navy; the report is seen as representing the point at which the RCN ceased being an adjunct to the Royal Navy and became a truly Canadian institution. The Mainguy Report is, in fact, still taught to new recruits and at the Canadian Forces College.¹⁰ In spite of its importance, however, a detailed study of the proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry and of the Mainguy Report has never been undertaken by historians.

Any such analysis raises a number of questions. It is important to determine what exactly the Mainguy Commission was, and what it was not. It was neither a court martial nor a royal Commission in the full sense of the word. An examination of the composition of the Mainguy Commission and the rules set out for its operation will allow a consideration of what exactly the Commission was designed to achieve from both a political and military perspective.

There is also the question of what precisely constituted a mutiny. In their examination of a rather lengthy series of apparent mutinies in the Royal Australian Navy, Tom Frame and Kevin Baker discovered that, while there is a general understanding of what the word mutiny means, the legal meaning of the term allows for considerable

⁹ Ibid., pp. 52-72.

¹⁰ Richard H. Gimblett, *Gunboat Diplomacy, Mutiny and National Identity in the Postwar Royal Canadian Navy: The Cruise of HMCS *Crescent* to China, 1949*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Université de Laval 2000, p. 263.

flexibility.¹¹ The Australian Naval Discipline Act, initially brought into force in 1866, remained largely unchanged in its definition of “mutiny” well into the twentieth century. In section eight, it defined mutiny very broadly as the disobedience of lawful authority in “a subversive manner,” or seeking to overthrow the lawful authority aboard ship. No distinction was drawn between violent and non-violent actions.¹²

This definition raises several issues from a legal perspective. The first of these is whether the “subversive” requirement allows passive resistance to authority to constitute a mutiny. Similarly, the act required the specific intent to subvert the authority of naval officers. Leaving aside the question of how intent could be effectively proven, if the actions of the crew, particularly in cases of passive resistance, were not designed to overthrow the authority structure aboard the ship, then it would not appear that a mutiny occurred. Frame and Baker argue that the Australian definition was sufficiently vague that it allowed for the prospect of one man alone, acting violently towards the officers, could constitute a mutiny, but so also could a number of men, acting in concert and passively resisting authority.¹³ It appears from the analysis performed by Frame and Baker that the legal definition of mutiny in Australia was sufficiently vague as to be all but useless.

An examination of the legal position of mutiny in Canada, similar to the one performed by Frame and Baker, is necessary before any meaningful analysis of the Mainguy Commission and Report can be conducted. Canadian naval historians have generally characterised the incidents on *Magnificent*, *Athabaskan*, and *Crescent* as

¹¹ Tom Frame and Kevin Baker, *Mutiny! Naval Insurrection in Australia and New Zealand*, (Crow’s Nest, N.S.W., Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

mutinies in the commonly accepted sense of the word.¹⁴ An examination of the Canadian statutes and regulations governing the conduct of military, and more particularly naval, personnel will allow the accuracy of this understanding to be determined. The legal position of mutiny, it will be argued, had a significant impact on the decisions made by Brooke Claxton as to how to proceed. If the incidents were clearly mutinies in a legal sense, a number of disciplinary options were available to both Claxton and the senior naval leadership. They could have, for example, prosecuted those involved to the fullest extent of military law under the Naval Service Act, “pour encourager les autres.” This would have sent a clear message to ratings in the RCN that such action would not be tolerated.

If, on the other hand, the legal position of mutiny was cloudy, as was the case in Australia, the options available for dealing with the “incidents” were much more circumscribed. Prosecution would effectively have been out of the question. A prosecution and acquittal, in full public view, would have been a disaster both for the prestige of the RCN, and for naval discipline generally. Given the public reaction to the “incidents,” and the perceived need for governmental action, something had to be done to restore public confidence in the RCN. The decisions made by Claxton and by Mainguy and his colleagues can only be understood if the range of options available to them is also understood.

The second major question that must be asked of the Mainguy Commission is what it was seeking to do. The hearings themselves took place under what can only be described as unusual circumstances. As will be seen, the decision on which witnesses to

¹⁴ See Gimblett, for example, who refers to the “incidents” as mutinies in several places. This is indicative of the general view taken by Canadian naval historians.

call to testify involved an interesting mix of compulsory and voluntary attendance, with those not called to give evidence free to volunteer to do so. Prospective witnesses were also assured that no disciplinary action would be taken against them due either to their participation in the incidents, or as a result of their testimony.¹⁵ The witnesses were also informed that following their testimony all of the records of the Commission would be destroyed at the conclusion of the hearings, purportedly to encourage the witnesses to speak freely.¹⁶ These procedural decisions are curious in the context of what, to all appearances, was to be a public and supposedly transparent inquiry into the morale situation in the RCN.

The key to the procedural decisions can be found in the wartime experiences of the officers of the volunteer reserve. The Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) was comprised of men who had volunteered to serve but, unlike the reserves and regular officers, had no prior seagoing experience. They had to learn how to command ships in anti-submarine operations from scratch. What they lacked in experience, however, they more than made up for in confidence in their own abilities. The vast majority had university education and professional standing. Prior to the war they had been lawyers, accountants and bankers.¹⁷ They were used to being in charge and were comfortable in command. Louis Audette, who would later assume a prominent role in the enquiry, was one of these officers.

During the war these Volunteer Reserve officers developed a distinct approach to command. Most of the officers in the corvettes and frigates engaged in the Battle of the

¹⁵ "Appointment Composition and Terms of Reference of Board" MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5, p. 2.

¹⁶ "Mainguy Report" MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 4, p. 2.

¹⁷ David Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data," in Hadley, Heubert and Crichard eds. A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

Atlantic were volunteer reservists, including some outstanding commanding officers, and their leadership style was marked by practicalities of hard service in small ships. They tended to have little time for the finer points of naval discipline and routine more suited to the big British warships on which officers of the regular navy had received their formative training. Over time the volunteer reserve officers and their crews came to be rather proud of their reputation for their often unconventional dress and easier give and take between the ranks, and grew to resent attempts by less educated regular navy officers to interfere. The permanent force "professionals" viewed the volunteer reserve officers as amateurs and dilettantes, and did not welcome their interference in decision making, particularly at the higher levels. The volunteer reserve officers, for their part, viewed the "professionals" as essentially uneducated dullards, mimicking Royal Naval attitudes and accents for no other reason than to appear to be as "British" as possible.¹⁸

Where the Volunteer Reserve officers had the advantage, Richard Mayne argues, was in the field of political machinations. Many of them were very well connected both socially and politically, and Mayne traces a number of cabals of "hostilities only" reserve officers who actively campaigned against the senior naval leadership.¹⁹ Mayne argues that these groups, through a deliberate political campaign waged in the back corridors of power, ultimately brought about the dismissal of Vice-Admiral Percy Nelles as Chief of the Naval Staff in 1944 not due to any inability or incompetence on his part, but because he represented, in their eyes, everything that was wrong with the "professional" Canadian Navy.²⁰ While Mayne seems to have assumed that the machinations of the reserve

¹⁸ Richard O. Mayne, Betrayed. Scandal, Politics and Canadian Naval Leadership, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2006).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

officers ended with the close of the Second World War in 1945, Audette's participation in the Mainguy Commission raises the intriguing question of whether the campaign, in fact, continued into the post-war period.

The final question which arises from the Mainguy Commission concerns the dual themes of agency and identity in the military, and more particularly naval, context. In his examination of the Georgian navy, N.A.M. Rodger has concluded that the popular image of rigid and harsh discipline combined with unpleasant living conditions for crews from the dregs of society and only controlled through the perceived social superiority of the officers is incorrect.²¹ The Georgian navy was, in fact, much more egalitarian than is commonly assumed, and the seamen had a considerable amount of say in shipboard matters that affected their lives. The social structure of the navy, he argues, reflected the society that created it, and disturbances occurred when something happened to upset the accepted order of things and the expectations of the sailors in that regard.²²

While Rodger was studying the Georgian navy during a distinct period in the eighteenth century, an examination of the transcripts of the Mainguy Commission will enable some conclusions to be drawn about whether Rodger's findings about the Georgian navy as a reflection of its society hold true in a broader sense. If the RCN was also a reflection of the society which it was created to defend, then perhaps the incidents of 1949 were neither unusual nor unexpected based on naval culture as it had evolved over time, or in the context of a broader set of Canadian beliefs and understandings about how social relationships should be ordered. This would require a re-examination of both the purpose of the Mainguy Report and its impact on naval culture and organisation.

²¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World. An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*. (Toronto: William Collins & Sons Co. Ltd., 1986, p. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 344-346.

There is also, of course, the question of national identity, which is central to the Report itself and to its reception at the time it was published. While the Report's conclusions are, in fact, far ranging, both the Government of Canada and the Canadian media focused immediately on its findings on the issue of Canadian identity and the perceived need to make the RCN a more "Canadian" institution, reflecting Canadian values and attitudes.²³ While the discussion of this "Canadian" identity focused on the wearing of Canada flashes and the painting of the maple leaf on the funnels of the ships of the RCN, these two expressions of identity were, by the time of the Commission, non-issues. The Navy, following on from a report on morale prepared in 1947, had already reinstated the wartime practice of wearing the flashes and had approved the painting of maple leaves on the funnels of the ships, both of which actions were acknowledged in the Mainguy Report. The real issue addressed in the report was nothing more than the specific design that these indicators of Canadian identity was to take.²⁴

If the issue of Canadian identification for sailors had already been addressed by the navy's leadership, then what was all the fuss about? A detailed examination of the transcript will allow this question to be answered. It will be argued that the questions of identity went well beyond the "bric a brac" of national symbols, and that the discussion of the Canadian naval identity which took place before the Mainguy Commission was, in fact, representative of the crossroads of identity facing the nation. A younger generation of naval officers had shepherded the RCN through the rigors of the Battle of the Atlantic, and were justifiably proud of their achievements as Canadians, and not necessarily as members of the British Empire.

²³ Mainguy Report, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 4.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

The senior Canadian naval leadership, most typically represented by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Horace Grant, had grown up in a different time. They had served their apprenticeships aboard the large ships of the Royal Navy, and had "grown up," as it were, viewing the RCN as but one cog in the mighty machine that was the Royal Navy. While they too were proud of the achievements of the RCN during the Second World War, their pride was to a large extent based on the significant role played by the RCN as part of the greater whole, and not in the RCN's achievements as a strictly national institution. The differences between these two viewpoints, and the difficulties in reconciling the two, lay behind the at times acrimonious exchanges between Louis Audette, the member of the Commission who led most of the questioning, and Admiral Grant and other senior naval leaders. It was also part of a much larger national conversation about identity that was essential as Canada moved into a very different post-war world.

In a similar way, this thesis forms part of a larger conversation taking place concerning naval history, both in Canada and internationally. In Canada, particularly, naval historiography has evolved in recent decades to include a growing discussion of the evolution of Canada's navy as an institution. This, in turn, has required further examination of the interaction between Canada's navy and the rest of the country, both in terms of how the RCN came to identify itself, and how Canadians viewed their navy.

The study of the RCN as a Canadian institution has been a relatively late bloomer in the field of Canadian military history. Given the comparative youth of the RCN, and its limited role in the First World War, this is not particularly surprising. What is surprising is just how late a bloomer it has been. The official history of Canada's

involvement in the First World War, written by Gilbert Tucker, was not, for example, published until 1952 and covers the period from the inception of the RCN up to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.²⁵ Similarly, it was not until 1991 that Roger Sarty and Michael Hadley provided more background to the origins of Canadian sea power, and a more analytical treatment of the role played by Canadian ships in the First World War.²⁶

The reasons for this paucity of study are two-fold. First, due to Canada's position as a part of first the British Empire and then the Commonwealth of Nations, Canada in reality has no naval history independent of other nations. Since its inception in 1910, as Marc Milner has observed, Canadian naval activity has occurred only in the context of Canada's role as part of an alliance.²⁷ This situation continued post-war with Canada's involvement in NATO. The result of this participation in various alliances and collective defence organisations has been the acceptance by academics of the proposition that Canadian naval history only existed, and should only be considered, within the context of more general discussions of the British Imperial system or some other collective organisation.²⁸ Until recently, then, no significant study was undertaken which considered the RCN as a uniquely Canadian institution.

The second reason for the relatively limited consideration of the RCN is the simple fact that, between 1910 and 1939, not much happened which involved the RCN in an operational context. Even as late as 1939, after nearly three decades of existence, the

²⁵ Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History*, (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1952).

²⁶ Michael L. Hadley and Roger Sarty, *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces and German Sea Raiders 1880-1918*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

²⁷ Marc Milner, "The Historiography of the Canadian Navy: The State of the Art," in Michael Hadley, Rob Heubert and Fred Crichard eds. *A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

RCN only mustered 10 modern warships and only 309 officers and 2,967 ratings, including reserves. At best, and although the senior officers of the Naval Service of Canada had “blue water” hopes for the fleet, the RCN in 1939 was, as it had been for most of its history to that point, a small coastal defence force.²⁹ There was nothing in the uneventful history of this little fleet to stir the blood of naval historians, and so Canada’s naval history remained in relative obscurity.

The RCN overcame its humble beginnings during the Second World War and by the end of that conflict was the third largest naval force in the world, mustering over 400 warships of all types, and with a personnel complement of very nearly 100,000 men and women. From its beginnings as a coastal defence force, the RCN had grown also into a much larger role, assuming responsibility for the defence of the north Atlantic trade routes, and taking on a leading role in the battle against the German U-Boat fleet.³⁰ As well, the navy committed a hundred warships crewed by some 10,000 personnel to the Allied landings at Normandy in June 1944 and follow up operations for the liberation of Europe even while taking over major British warships that had begun to deploy to the Pacific when the atomic bomb brought Japan's early surrender in August 1945.

Between 1945 and the early 1980s most of the writing produced about Canada’s navy and its role in the Second World War took the form of memoirs and reminiscences written by participants, overwhelmingly officers, in the Battle of the Atlantic. While these memoirs tend to be of the ‘we were all really good chaps’ variety, they do provide

²⁹ W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, Michael Whitby et al., No Higher Purpose. The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943. Volume II, Part 1. (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2002), pp. 27-28.

³⁰ Marc Milner, Canada’s Navy. The First Century (2nd ed.), (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 156-157.

some interesting insights into issues that the Mainguy Commission would later expose as problematic.

Hal Lawrence, for example, joined the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) on 8 September 1939 and underwent eight weeks of training before joining a ship. In his memoirs, A Bloody War³¹ and Tales of the North Atlantic³² he discusses on several occasions his experiences as a Volunteer Reserve officer serving in the company of full-time professional naval officers. He characterizes the RCN officers with whom he came in contact as an elite who were often “excruciatingly British” in their attitudes and mannerisms. Members of the RCNVR and the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR) were frequently condescended to by these officers, who behaved “like members of an exclusive club that had been forced to open its doors to a ragtag and bob-tail not previously eligible.”³³ This treatment grated on the Volunteer Reserve officers, especially, it seems, those from Toronto who had come from the “big four” schools, Ridley, Upper Canada College, Glendon College School and St. Andrews, and among whom there was “a very old-boy social thing.”³⁴ Relations between the officers and ratings are treated in a much more nonchalant manner, with Lawrence describing the “good-natured vendetta of the lower deck against the wardroom” as one of the “chief sources of amusement to both.”³⁵ Nonetheless, by the end of the Second World War, he maintains, the RCN had earned its reputation as a good fighting navy and had added uniquely Canadian characteristics to the traditions that it had inherited from the Royal

³¹ Hal Lawrence, A Bloody War, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1979).

³² Hal Lawrence, Tales of the North Atlantic (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1985).

³³ Lawrence, A Bloody War, pp. 2-3.

³⁴ Lawrence, Tales of the North Atlantic, p. 239.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Navy.³⁶ Thus, while Lawrence's memoirs are in essence a loosely organized collection of personal reminiscences, and lack in substantial analysis, they do provide an interesting glimpse into the social attitudes prevalent in the RCN during the Second World War that would have an important influence in the early post-war service.

The same comments can be applied to the memoirs of James Lamb, published in 1977.³⁷ Lamb argues that there were, in fact, two Royal Canadian Navies operating during the Second World War. The RCN, comprised largely of permanent force officers, was, according to Lamb, the repository of naval tradition and discipline.³⁸ The second navy, the "corvette navy," was comprised of the corvettes, with officers and men drawn from the Volunteer Reserves. This navy, he maintains, founded its own tradition of "colourful character and eccentric individualism in a world away from the stereotype of the professional serviceman" and "jealously preserved an attitude of enlightened amateurism in a world of professional inanity."³⁹ These two navies, Lamb maintains, had, in fact, little to do with one another during the war and developed independently of one another for the most part.

Lamb also makes some interesting observations on the relations between officers and men in the "corvette navy." He argues that the discipline problems experienced by the RCN escort groups during the war were largely the result of the absence of social stratification in Canadian society. Very often, according to his observations, the officers and ratings came from the same social strata, leading frequently to situations in which the ratings could not understand why they had to obey officers who were socially no different

³⁶ Lawrence, *A Bloody War*, p. 7.

³⁷ James B. Lamb, *The Corvette Navy. True Stories from Canada's Atlantic War*, (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1977).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

from them, and therefore often resented taking orders.⁴⁰ Similarly the major problems with the Volunteer Reserve officers, both the “cringers” who deliberately curried favour with permanent force officers and the “martinets” who exercised their powers in an arbitrary and high-handed way, stemmed from the absence of stratification in Canadian society, which led to an almost inherent inability on the part of Canadian officers to exercise power in a hierarchical structure which ran counter to Canadian democratic institutions. This lack of stratification, combined with the absence of experienced officers, petty officers, and leading seamen made Canadians, in Lamb’s view, more difficult to discipline than the sailors of other nations.⁴¹

The Naval Officers’ Association of Canada produced a series of volumes entitled “Salty Dips” starting in 1985, in celebration of the navy's seventy-fifth anniversary. Consisting primarily of transcribed interviews with former sailors, there is very little about the reminiscences that would qualify as analytical. Even in Louis Audette’s contribution to the series, there are a number of amusing anecdotes, but very little attempt to analyse the performance of the RCN during the war. Audette does, however, comment on at least one occasion on the differences between the cultures of the Royal Navy and the RCN and on the difficulties that Royal Navy officers had in commanding Canadian sailors.⁴²

While the foregoing collections of reminiscences were generally written by Canadian officers who commanded or served aboard Canadian ships, there are a few works that are of interest primarily for their differing perspective. The two volumes of

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴² Louis Audette, “Une Mer Cruelle,” in *Salty Dips. Vol. 2*, (Ottawa: Naval Officers’ Association of Canada, 1985), p. 69.

memoirs written by Jeffrey W. Brock fall into this category.⁴³ Brock was a Canadian Volunteer Reserve officer who served for much of the war on secondment to the Royal Navy and, in fact, commanded Royal Navy vessels. Following the war, he transferred to the RCN, where he served for the remainder of his career.⁴⁴ His comments are somewhat unique, then, as they provide a Canadian perspective on the social structure of the Royal Navy.

Brock's perspective is readily apparent, as he speaks of the RCN throughout both volumes of his memoirs as if it were an entirely foreign service and completely distinct from the Royal Navy. Equally apparent is his admiration for the Royal Navy and its administration and customs, and his distaste for the different customs and traditions developing in the RCN.⁴⁵ By the time of his posting to command of Sixth Canadian Escort Group, Brock had become an adherent of the comparatively rigid disciplinary system prevalent in the Royal Navy, and found the more informal practices of the RCN to be irksome. He had, in short, become more British than the British. In one instance, for example, Brock retained an unpopular first officer and dismissed the captain of the ship in order, by his own admission, to emphatically communicate his authority as the escort commander, regardless of the feelings of the ratings or officers under his command.⁴⁶ Throughout both volumes of the memoirs, then, Brock's disdain for the RCN is apparent. He appears to be exactly the type of officer that Louis Audette, as will be seen, found objectionable.

⁴³ Jeffrey W. Brock, *With Many Voices: Vol. 1: The Dark Broad Seas*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981); Jeffrey W. Brock, *With Many Voices: Vol. 2: The Thunder and the Sunshine*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983).

⁴⁴ Brock, *With Many Voices: Vol. 1: The Dark Broad Seas*, p. 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 112 and 148.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-161.

While most of the memoirs produced were written by RCN officers after the war, there are two that are of particular interest from the perspective of morale and identity in the RCN during the Second World War. The first of these are the memoirs of Lt.-Cdr. A.F.C. Layard, an officer of the Royal Navy who, during the war, was appointed to command Canadian escort groups.⁴⁷ Unlike the other memoirs and personal recollections produced after, and in some cases long after, the war, Lt.-Cdr. Layard's observations were made at the time the incidents occurred, unclouded by the passage of time or the political exigencies of the post-war period. They also provide a unique insight into the RCN, both in terms of operational efficiency and in terms of its social development, from the perspective of an officer long steeped in the traditions of the Royal Navy.

Lt.-Cdr. Layard had entered the Royal Navy as a cadet in 1913 and by 1942 had been decorated for his participation in Operation Terminal, an attack on Algiers harbour designed to prevent it from being destroyed or blocked by the Vichy French troops stationed there. He received the Distinguished Service Order for his actions in helping to seize the port.⁴⁸ No stranger to difficult commands, then, in June of 1943, at the request of senior Canadian naval officers, Lt.-Cdr. Layard was appointed to command the escort group W10, a support group in the anti-submarine war raging in the North Atlantic. He was so successful in this role that in January of 1944 he was appointed to command the all Canadian escort group E.G.9, one of the most successful of the war, and remained in command of this formation until the end of the war.⁴⁹ As senior officer of E.G.9, Layard

⁴⁷ Michael Whitby ed., Commanding Canadians. The Second World War Diaries of A.F.C. Layard, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

would have ample opportunity to observe and interact with Canadian officers and ratings, and his diary provides a fascinating glimpse into these interactions.

From an operational perspective, he appears to have found the RCN, and in particular the crews of the corvettes, to have been frustrating but keen. He comments, for example, that “you cannot trust a Canadian ship to do anything without being told three times,”⁵⁰ a comment that is symptomatic of his long-standing frustration over the speed at which the corvettes under his command responded to orders. Conversely, when the corvettes were removed from his command and replaced by frigates (which tended to be commanded by Naval Reserve officers rather than Volunteer Reserve officers) he laments the loss of the corvettes, commenting that he would be “damned sorry to lose the corvettes, especially the C.O.s who are really a fine keen bunch of V.R.s.”⁵¹

While he may have become fond of the corvettes and the RCN personnel that manned them from an operational perspective, his diary clearly demonstrates that he did not become fond of the Canadians under his command on a social level. Throughout the diary Layard repeatedly comments on what he considers to be the social failings of Canadian officers, even remarking in October of 1943, on an incident in which a Canadian officer picked up a chicken bone with his fingers that the officer in question was “a very nice chap but [had] strange table manners.”⁵² In a similar vein, when he was asked to assume command of an entirely Canadian escort group, he confided to his diary his reluctance to accept the position “because one does get tired of them [Canadians] and they are not brought up in the same way as us.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵² Ibid., p. 45.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 61.

In addition to poor table manners, the other characteristic of Canadians, both officers and men, which gave Layard fits was their propensity to consume vast quantities of alcohol while ashore. In May of 1944, for example, he complains of being awakened by noise both from the wardroom and from men returning from shore, and asked of his diary “why must these Canadians get so *very* [emphasis in original] drunk?”⁵⁴ A similar exasperation is expressed in October 1944, when, shortly after arriving in Gibraltar, he was advised that Canadian sailors had been “breaking up the town.” In this instance his frustration with the Canadian sailors had reached the point at which he considered cancelling Christmas leave.⁵⁵

Overall, throughout his tenure commanding Canadians, Layard despaired of the lax discipline evident on Canadian ships, and found them more reminiscent of merchant ships than naval vessels. This, he believed, was due largely to the large number of Volunteer Reserve officers, with previous sea-going experience, in the RCN.⁵⁶ While it is easy to dismiss this and other comments about Canadians as the grouching of a stuffy British officer, Layard’s diary does provide some insight into the culture that was developing in the RCN during the Second World War. The hard charging, hard drinking and informal attitude of Canadian officers and ratings that gave Layard such anxiety can be viewed as the first sign of a distinctive Canadian naval culture which began to develop during the war years.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

The other memoir that is of particular interest is William H. Pugsley's Saints, Devils and Ordinary Seamen,⁵⁷ first published in 1945. What is particularly interesting about this memoir is the manner of its production. Pugsley was, in fact, an officer in the RCN who had gone to sea as an ordinary seaman in order to determine what conditions were like on the lower deck of the RCN. This had been done with the permission of the then Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast, Admiral G.C. Jones.⁵⁸ This would seem to indicate that even as early as 1945 rumblings of discontent among the lower deck had come to the attention of senior naval officers, who were willing to at least investigate the problems, if not to solve them. Pugsley's work, then, provides an interesting glimpse into the inner workings of the lower deck, and is one of the few memoirs written from that particular point of view.

The most telling comments made by Pugsley concern the application of discipline by the officers commanding corvettes. The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions were not, in his view, particularly well known to the officers, and the punishments handed out tended to be overly harsh and 'by the book.' This, strangely, instilled in the men of the lower deck a certain perverse pride in the fact that their punishments were harsher than those in the other services for similar offences.⁵⁹ Pugsley argues that this tendency to rely too heavily on formal discipline was the result of the officers having no experience of life on the lower deck, and describes the post-war policy of lower deck service as a prerequisite to Commissioning as "one of the most

⁵⁷ William H. Pugsley, Saints, Devils and Ordinary Seamen. Life on the Royal Canadian Navy's Lower Deck, (Toronto: Collins, 1945).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-62.

encouraging developments of the war.”⁶⁰ Overall, one gets the impression from Pugsley’s work of a navy officered by men new to command who had a tendency to become martinets to a greater or lesser degree, but that this had very little negative impact on morale overall.

According to Pugsley, there was no want of nationalism in the RCN during the war. Canadian sailors, he comments, were very proud of the “Canada” flashes on their uniforms, and tended, when ashore in Londonderry, Ireland, for example, to patronise establishments either run by or frequented by other Canadians.⁶¹ Where this lower deck nationalism ran into problems was in relations between officers and the men of the lower deck. Those officers who had been Commissioned during the war, he argues, treated the men of the lower deck with a “haughtiness and condescension that was totally uncalled for” and as if they were the “feudal overlords” of the lower deck.⁶² He found something fundamentally “un-Canadian” about Commissions being awarded based on personal connections and social standing, rather than on open competition.⁶³ Throughout the memoir, it is the artificial social divide which Pugsley seems to feel is the most problematic aspect of the developing RCN, second only to the inefficiency of the shore establishments.⁶⁴

While Pugsley’s work is interesting for its point of view, it is possible to give it too much weight. He was, for example, allowed the rare privilege of having a camera

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 207-223.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 126.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 223-231.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 224.

⁶⁴ Pugsley goes so far as to refer to RCN shore establishments as “Hitler’s secret weapon.” This criticism, however, goes more to operational efficiency than to morale, which is chiefly impacted by the artificial social distinctions that were prevalent. (Ibid., p. 170)

with him. This was not a privilege usually allowed ratings,⁶⁵ and it is difficult to believe that the other ratings with whom he served had not realized that there was something unusual about their shipmate, even if they did not realise that he was a plant. Louis Audette certainly believed that the men who served with Pugsley knew the true nature of his assignment, and claimed that a number of Pugsley's shipmates had told him as much.⁶⁶ While Audette is particularly bilious in his criticism of Pugsley, his comments are not entirely without foundation, and Pugsley's observations must be viewed with caution.

Regardless of its flaws, however, Pugsley's work does stand as one of the few sources of first-hand information about life on the lower deck during the Second World War. Even discounting for the exaggeration of the sailors with whom Pugsley served, it is clear that there was a social division between the lower deck and the wardroom, and that the Canadian officers commanding the corvettes were in some cases of dubious quality both as sailors and as leaders of men. More importantly in the context of the Mainguy Commission and its subsequent report, the officers Pugsley spoke of were officers of the Volunteer Reserve and not of the professional RCN. This, as will be seen, is a distinction of great importance to Louis Audette personally and as the leading member of the Mainguy Commission. It is perhaps this fact that lay behind the intense dislike that Audette felt for both Pugsley and his work.

While the memoirs and diaries of members of the RCN have provided an interesting and fairly consistent source of information about life in the RCN, they must be

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁶⁶ Audette to Admiral P.W. Nelles dated 9 December 1948, MG31 E18 Vol. 12, File 16. The entire letter is essentially a vicious personal attack on Pugsley, both in terms of his analysis, and more tellingly of his personality. It is the most bilious attack evident on any individual in all of Audette's voluminous personal correspondence.

treated with considerable caution. Firstly, they tend to be lacking in any detailed scholarly analysis of either the social or operational aspects of Canadian naval history. It is therefore difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from them in either of these areas. Secondly, with the exception of Pugsley's work and Layard's diary, they were produced after the Mainguy Commission had completed its investigation and report. It is impossible to determine, therefore, how much their depiction of shipboard life was influenced by the particular views in that regard expressed by Louis Audette and his fellow commissioners. Nevertheless, they provided an early starting point for an analysis of the RCN as a social institution.

Analysis of the RCN's role in the Second World War also got off to a promising start with the publication in 1950 of Joseph Schull's The Far Distant Ships.⁶⁷ Schull's work makes no pretence of discussing the human aspect of naval operations in any detail, focusing rather on the operations of ships in the broadest sense.⁶⁸ He argues that, while the RCN did play a vital role in protecting the convoys traveling to and from Britain during the war, the Royal Navy, and later the United States Navy, would have come up with a way to do so even without Canadian participation. The true significance of the RCN stemmed not from any particular operational skill or efficiency on its part, but rather from their dogged determination in holding the line against the U-Boats throughout the Battle of the Atlantic.⁶⁹ The image of the RCN created by Schull, then, is one of the RCN as a cog in the much larger machinery of the Royal Navy, and one that, through

⁶⁷ Joseph Schull, The Far Distant Ships. An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in the Second World War, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1950). Budget cuts following the war limited the production of wartime histories of the RCN to popular considerations like Schull's and limited the analytical operational history. See Tim Cook, Clio's Warriors, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2006), chapters 4 and 5.)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 425-427.

dogged determination, rather than any particular skill, helped to ensure success in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Following the publication of The Far Distant Ships, interest in the history of the RCN waned considerably, and Schull's work remained alone in the field for almost thirty years. It was Schull's vision of the RCN as a dull if determined organisation that remained the dominant one until the 1980s, when the RCN "awoke to its history" as a distinct national institution.⁷⁰

The publication of The RCN in Retrospect,⁷¹ in 1982, marked the beginning of a veritable hurricane of academic activity which continues to this day. Marking the seventieth anniversary of the RCN, it comprised a collection of essays on various aspects of Canadian naval history. The RCN in Retrospect was the first major effort in over thirty years to attempt to come to grips with Canada's naval history, and approached the subject with a sense of "sadness at the passing of a fighting force, pride in its achievements, and admonition to those who ignore the lessons of naval history."⁷² One is left with the sense overall that the volume was designed to serve as almost a requiem for the RCN after years of neglect.

Of particular note in connection with the present study are two essays in the volume. The first was penned by Louis Audette himself, and entitled "The Lower Deck and the Mainguy Report of 1949."⁷³ In his essay, he argues that the mutinies themselves were the result of social changes that had taken place during the Second World War which the naval leadership had failed to understand and account for in the post-war

⁷⁰ Milner, "The Historiography of the Canadian Navy," p. 31.

⁷¹ James A. Boutelier ed., The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1982).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁷³ Louis Audette, "The Lower Deck and the Mainguy Report of 1949," in James A. Boutelier ed., The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1982), pp. 235-249.

period. The Mainguy Commission, he contends, was necessary in order to socially modernise the RCN in order to make it an effective fighting force in the post-war period.⁷⁴

The second article of particular interest was written by Richard Leir. In “Big Ship Time: The Formative Years of RCN Officers Serving in R.N. Capital Ships,” he is the first to examine and analyse the impact of the long-standing practice of having Canadian naval officers learn their trade aboard Royal Navy ships. He argues that the training received by Canadian officers in the Royal Navy was useful in providing the skills required for both wartime and post-war service. The termination of this practice in 1951 robbed the RCN of these valuable skills, which the Canadian service educational system was not able to rapidly replace.⁷⁵

While the essays in The RCN in Retrospect focused primarily on social and organisational subjects, and not operational matters, naval operations were by no means ignored in the flurry of activity by naval historians in the 1980s. Marc Milner’s North Atlantic Run,⁷⁶ published in 1985, was the first in a series of volumes, which provided a much needed reassessment of Canadian naval operations during the Second World War. This, together with the follow-on works Canada’s Navy: The First Century⁷⁷ and Battle of the Atlantic,⁷⁸ provided a long overdue review of the performance of the RCN during the Second World War. Milner argues that the RCN in fact performed quite well during convoy escort operations. The learning curve was extremely steep for the men of the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Richard H. Leir, “Big Ship Time: The Formative Years of RCN Officers Serving in R.N. Capital Ships,” in James A. Boutelier ed. The RCN in Retrospect (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1982), pp. 75-95.

⁷⁶ Marc Milner, North Atlantic Run. The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

⁷⁷ Marc Milner, Canada’s Navy: The First Century, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁷⁸ Marc Milner, Battle of the Atlantic, (St. Catharine's, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2003).

RCN, but Milner maintains that they mastered it very well, and by the end of the war were experts in anti-submarine warfare and were more than capable of playing a vital role in the eventual allied naval victory.

In 1988, another collection of essays was published, The RCN in Transition⁷⁹ edited by W.A.B. Douglas, the leading Canadian naval historian at the time, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the RCN. The essays in the volume deal with a variety of subjects, but tend to focus on the political and strategic considerations behind naval operations. There are, for example, four papers examining anti-submarine warfare, both during the Second World War and in the post-war period, reflecting both the lessons learned by the RCN and its ongoing NATO role as an anti-submarine specialist navy.⁸⁰ These essays, and the conference that inspired them, represent an attempt by Canadian naval historians to move beyond the strictly operational elements of Canadian naval history, and identify a place for the RCN in a changing world.

Of particular relevance to any discussion of the Mainguy Commission is Richard Preston's essay "Marcom Education: Is It a Break With Tradition?"⁸¹ in which he examines the educational system for naval officers both before and after the Second World War. Preston argues that the Mainguy Report effectively changed the face of naval education in Canada, both by inspiring the end of the "big ship time" service by Canadian officers with the Royal Navy, and in requiring a university education for new

⁷⁹ W.A.B. Douglas ed., The RCN in Transition, 1910-1985, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

⁸⁰ Roger Sarty, "Hard Luck Flotilla: the RCN's Atlantic Coast Patrol, 1914-1918" in Ibid., pp. 103-125; Michael Hadley, "Inshore ASW in the Second World War: The U-Boat Experience," in Ibid., pp. 126-142; Marc Milner, "Inshore ASW: The Canadian Experience in Home Waters," in Ibid., pp. 143-158; Jürgen Rohwer and W.A.B. Douglas, "Canada and the Wolf Packs, September, 1943," in Ibid., pp. 159-186.

⁸¹ Richard A. Preston, "Marcom Education: Is it a Break With Tradition?" in Ibid., pp. 61-89.

officers.⁸² After some initial difficulties caused by the changes, he concludes that the RCN has managed to maintain the Royal Navy's traditional emphasis on leadership, while successfully combining it with an emphasis on national service, which has been reinforced by making the RCN more "typically Canadian."⁸³ Preston's view, then, is one of a well educated and highly professional naval officer corps, capable of meeting changes necessitated by the changing global situation.

Although Tony German's The Sea is at Our Gates.⁸⁴ (1990) purports to cover the entire history of the Canadian navy, its real focus is on naval operations during the Second World War. German attempts, unlike Schull, to include political considerations in his discussion of Canadian operations. He includes chapters on the political dimensions of Canada's naval participation in the Second World War, as well as on Canadian post-war fleet aspirations.⁸⁵ The expansion of the discussion beyond purely operational matters is a welcome addition in placing Canada's naval contribution in the Battle of the Atlantic in a wider perspective.

German's work is also the first general history to include a discussion of the post-war period. He argues that the Mainguy Commission was a watershed in Canadian naval history, and that the main problem with the RCN during the Second World War was a lack of education on the part of some of the naval officers, and a reliance on social status in place of leadership. This reliance on social status, he contends, was the main problem and flew in the face of 'Canadian' values. The lack of leadership, combined with

⁸² Ibid., pp. 70-74.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 88. Preston does not explain exactly what is meant by "typically Canadian" in any detail. Presumably he means the lack of elitism in the selection of officers, second language training, and a national representation.

⁸⁴ Tony German, The Sea is at Our Gates. the History of the Canadian Navy, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990).

⁸⁵ Ibid., chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

insufficient personnel to meet wartime commitments, led to the RCN enjoying less success during the war than might otherwise have been the case.⁸⁶ In the post-war era, the lack of leadership continued and combined dangerously with poor pay and living conditions⁸⁷ to create an unhappy fleet in which insubordination, once it began, was all but guaranteed to spread. In opening up the discussion of naval history to include issues of pay, living conditions, and morale, German helped to usher in a new interest in the social dimensions of the RCN, adding to its military and political aspects.

This trend continued with the publication in 1996 of A Nation's Navy.⁸⁸ This collection of essays represents the first concerted attempt to address the social and cultural aspects of the RCN and recognise the navy as a social institution with its own distinct identity. Prior to this, the focus had been primarily on the operational aspects of naval warfare, with a nod to the political decisions that governed its employment. With the movement towards the social history of the RCN, historians would start to examine the internal workings of the RCN in an effort to discover what made it work.

Of particular importance in this regard is William Glover's essay "The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy?"⁸⁹ Glover describes the 1949 mutinies as "a savage assault on the prestige and pride of a navy that had seemingly come of age during the Second World War."⁹⁰ He argues that the mutinies resulted from a deliberate decision by the senior naval leadership to model the post-war RCN on the Royal Navy both operationally and in terms of naval culture. This decision, made by senior officers

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.211.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ William Glover ed., A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

⁸⁹ William Glover, "The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy?" in Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

who had, for the most part, served their 'big ship time' with the Royal Navy, demonstrated either a failure or an inability to recognise larger Canadian social trends and the nature of the Canadian nationalism that was developing in the years following the war. He contends that emulation of the Royal Navy's culture flew in the face of these trends and was bound to cause problems. In the final analysis, then, Glover concludes that the 1949 "mutinies" were the result of a failure of leadership at the highest levels.⁹¹

James Goldrick, in his essay "Strangers in their Own Seas?,"⁹² draws a very interesting comparison between the RCN and the Royal Australian Navy. He comes to many of the same conclusions as Glover concerning naval policy being out of touch with national sentiment, in this case in Australia. He argues, however, that a closer cooperation between the R.A.N. and the Royal Navy in the 1920s and 1930s and following the Second World War, during which periods the R.A.N. actually manned and operated a number of capital ships, brought the differences in naval culture to light sooner, and allowed 'incidents' such as those which occurred in 1949 to be avoided in the R.A.N.⁹³

Michael Hadley approaches the idea of naval culture from a slightly different perspective. In his essay "The Popular Image of the Canadian Navy,"⁹⁴ he maintains that in its formative period the RCN had little choice but to borrow its naval traditions from another navy, and that borrowing from the Royal Navy was the logical choice. During the Second World War, however, a conscious effort was made to create a Canadian naval

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

⁹² James Goldrick, "Strangers in their Own Seas? A Comparison of the Australian and Canadian Naval Experience, 1910-1982," in William Glover ed., A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). ., pp. xxx.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 333-334.

⁹⁴ Michael L. Hadley, "The Popular Image of the Canadian Navy," in William Glover ed., A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). pp. xxxx.

tradition and culture independent of that of the Royal Navy. This was achieved, he argues, through the fostering of an irreverent and ‘devil may care’ attitude among the corvette crews, demonstrated by, among other things, the “gun shield graffiti” created by the crews which tended to make sport of the ships’ names. The evidence of deliberate culture of creation is found by Hadley in the fact that naval trainees at HMCS Cornwallis and Stadacona were shown films such as “Corvette K225,” which depicted the RCN as a ‘rough and ready’ organisation made up of rugged individuals. So powerful was this creation that Schull, in The Far Distant Ships, sold this view of the RCN to the Canadian public in the first "official" account of the RCN in the Second World War.⁹⁵ While Hadley’s essay is ostensibly about the public perception of the RCN, its conclusions can easily be adapted to any discussion of the RCN’s self-identification in the post-war period.

Peter Hayden also deals with the concept of Canadian naval identity. In his paper “Sailors, Admirals and Politicians: The Search for Identity after the War,”⁹⁶ he examines the Mainguy Commission and the ‘incidents’ of 1949 not as crises in themselves, but rather as symptomatic of a shift in the focus of naval culture. He argues that in the post-war period Canadian sailors came to view themselves more and more as North American rather than British. This change in alignment, he contends, drew them increasingly towards a cultural identification with the United States Navy and drew them away from their Royal Navy traditions. Canadian naval officers, on the other hand, maintained their cultural affiliation with the Royal Navy and its traditions. The difference in viewpoints,

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 38-49.

⁹⁶ Peter T. Hayden, “Sailors, Admirals and Politicians: The Search for Identity after the War,” in William Glover ed., A Nation’s Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996).

he argues, led to the frictions which culminated in the ‘incidents.’ The incidents and the Mainguy Commission were a part of the RCN’s quest for an identity. The conflict would eventually be resolved with Canada’s increasing participation in NATO exercises in close cooperation with the U.S.N.⁹⁷

David Zimmerman also made an important contribution to the emerging discussion of naval culture and identity in “The Social Background of the Wartime Navy.”⁹⁸ In this essay, Zimmerman analyses the social and educational backgrounds of regular RCN, RCNVR, and RCNR personnel. He finds that, contrary to the prevailing attitude at the time, there was a social difference between the officers and the men of the lower deck, but that, rather than being based on wealth, it was based on education. The overwhelming majority of the officers had at least some university education, whereas the vast majority of the lower deck did not. Given that at the time, education was equated to social status, the social distance was just as real as that created by wealth. Furthermore, he finds a considerable difference between the education of the volunteer reserve officers, most of whom had some university education, and regular naval officers, who had been educated in the navy.⁹⁹ The social differences that underpinned the findings of the Mainguy Report, according to Zimmerman’s analysis, had some grounding in fact.

Social and political elements of naval history continued to be the focus of study following on from A Nation’s Navy. In 1999 Captain (N) Wilfred Lund produced a

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 232-235.

⁹⁸ David Zimmerman, “The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data,” in William Glover ed., A Nation’s Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity, (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), pp. 257-279.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 258-278.

doctoral dissertation entitled “The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy,”¹⁰⁰ which, although it remains unpublished, is characteristic of the trend of naval historical research which has developed over the past two decades. Lund incorporates into his research what he describes as the “new model” governing the study of naval history. This new model goes beyond the study of operational matters and incorporates “the examination of personnel, administrative, technical, economic and financial” factors, together with the “socio-cultural background” of the decision makers into the study of naval operations.¹⁰¹ He applies this “new model” to the detailed examination of RCN personnel and manning policy in the post-war period and concludes that the dominant problems faced by the RCN during this period were two-fold. First, the RCN was being politically committed to too many tasks with too few resources. The second problem, and related to the first, was governmental parsimony, and the consistent failure by Parliament to provide the funds necessary to address the first problem.¹⁰² These two difficulties had a negative impact on morale, and at least indirectly led to the ‘incidents’ of 1949.

At almost the same time as Lund was writing, Richard Gimblett applied the “new model” of historical enquiry to the ‘incident’ aboard HMCS *Crescent* in his dissertation.¹⁰³ He examined the social and political situation surrounding both the deployment of *Crescent* to China, and the circumstances surrounding the ‘incident’ itself. In reviewing the Mainguy Report, and the testimony regarding the *Crescent* incident, he finds that the Commission failed to fully understand the true nature of the problems

¹⁰⁰ Captain (N) Wilfred Gourlay Dolphin Lund, “The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1945-1964: A Cultural Study of the Senior Leadership, Policy and Manpower Management,” University of Victoria, unpublished PhD Dissertation, 1999.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 530-532.

¹⁰³ Richard H. Gimblett, “Gunboat Diplomacy. Mutiny and National Identity in the Postwar Royal Canadian Navy: The Cruise of HMCS *Crescent* to China, 1949,” Université Laval, unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2000.

facing the RCN, and in fact got it wrong in their findings.¹⁰⁴ The scope of the Commission was too narrow, he contends, to allow an investigation into conditions generally in the RCN, and therefore was flawed from its inception.¹⁰⁵ According to Gimblett, the mere fact that the *Crescent* ‘incident,’ which was reasonably minor in its scope, received national attention demonstrates the degree to which the RCN had penetrated the national consciousness as a Canadian institution, and not as an adjunct to the RCN.¹⁰⁶ Gimblett’s work is of great importance for two main reasons, firstly as a direct challenge to the correctness of the findings of the Mainguy Report, which had largely been accepted as truth, and secondly as the first detailed examination of the activities of the Commission.

The first successful synthesis of the traditional operational analysis of naval history and the “new model” of study, incorporating economic, political and other considerations, was in the official history of the RCN during the Second World War, compiled by W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, Michael Hadley and others and spanning two considerable volumes.¹⁰⁷ Although on its face this work is an operational history, it provides considerable detail on the political, economic and technological factors that affected the performance of the RCN during the Second World War. It is also one of the few works that covers Canadian participation in the war in the Pacific, an aspect that is ignored in many of the operational histories. The picture of the RCN that emerges from this work is not one of dogged determination, but rather one of triumph; the navy

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁰⁷ W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, Michael Hadley et al., No Higher Purpose. The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943. Vol. II, Part I, (St. Catharine’s, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2002); A Blue Water Navy. The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945. Volume II, Part 2, (St. Catharine’s, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2002).

successfully adapted to a rapidly changing tactical and strategic environment with intelligence and determination and created itself essentially out of whole cloth, rising from obscurity to become a significant wartime naval force. This view is sharply at variance from the picture presented by Schull and German.

While No Higher Purpose and Blue Water Navy do an excellent job of bringing together the operational, strategic, tactical and political aspects of the RCN participation in the Second World War, they are, at their foundation, an operational history, and do not, to their credit, pretend to be anything else. As an operational history, there is very little attention paid to the development and maintenance of naval culture and morale in the RCN. These topics were left to more specialised studies.

The most recent of these is Betrayed¹⁰⁸ by Richard Mayne, a well researched and well argued examination of the tensions between officers of the regular RCN and those of the RCNVR which form the backdrop to the Mainguy Report. The examination has led him to the conclusion that there were, operating in the RCN during the Second World War, several groups “of well connected ‘hostilities only’ officers”¹⁰⁹ in the RCNVR who viewed the regular RCN officers with suspicion. These various groups had disparate agendas, from modernisation of the RCN to discrimination against V.R. officers and the effect of the attitudes of the Royal Navy on morale. All of them, however, were comprised of well educated reserve officers, and all agreed that the regular RCN officers in positions of responsibility were poorly educated and hampering the effectiveness of the RCN. Mayne concludes that these groups conspired to use their political connections to engineer the removal of Vice-Admiral Nelles as the Chief of the Naval Staff, effectively

¹⁰⁸ Richard O. Mayne, Betrayed. Scandal, Politics, and Canadian Naval Leadership, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

ending his career, not as the result of any incompetence on his part but rather as a result of his refusal to listen adequately to them.¹¹⁰

The type of social and political analysis of naval history done by Mayne and others is part of an ongoing trend internationally in the field of naval history. As previously mentioned, N.A.M. Rodger performed an excellent analysis of the Georgian navy to discover the truth to the commonly held view of that institution as a harsh and draconian environment. In addition to this work, Tom Frame and Kevin Baker have produced two studies of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), both of which examined the development of its culture and identity.

Together with Kevin Baker, Tom Frame in Mutiny! examined several mutinies which occurred in the RAN and Royal New Zealand Navy, both in peace time and in war.¹¹¹ They argued that navies, and in particular the navies of Australia and New Zealand, lack an effective vehicle by which sailors can raise complaints about service life, secure in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously, without triggering repercussions. The absence of such a system leaves, they conclude, mutiny as the only means available to the sailors by which they can exercise any effective agency. The way to reduce the incidence of mutiny, therefore, is to provide such a vehicle.¹¹² Mutiny, then, traditionally has been an essentially part of naval culture.

In his book Cruel Legacy, Frame examines in detail the process and results of the Commission established to investigate and incident which has become known as the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-16.

¹¹¹ Tom Frame and Kevin Baker, Mutiny! Naval Insurrections in Australia and New Zealand, (St. Leonard's, N.S.W., Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p. x.

¹¹² Ibid.

“Voyager tragedy.”¹¹³ While the book focuses more on the behind the scenes political machinations than on the hearings themselves, it does provide an interesting insight into the relationship between a government and its navy. While the RAN initially assumed that it would be conducting the inquiry into the collision between HMAS *Voyager* and HMAS *Melbourne* in 1964, Frame argues that it was rapidly disabused of that notion. Instead, a formal Royal Commission into the incident was established, in which the RAN played no formal role.¹¹⁴ What is interesting about this development is the removal of naval matters from naval purview. After the HMAS *Voyager* inquiry, the RAN would no longer be in a position to determine its own procedures.

Canadian naval historiography, then, has progressed a long way in a reasonably short time. In spite of the importance of the RCN’s contribution in the Second World War, there was initially very little historical interest shown in the RCN. Perhaps this was due, as Marc Milner has suggested, to the fact that up until the Second World War, not much happened from a Canadian naval perspective.¹¹⁵ The RCN, unlike the Canadian Army, had no Vimy Ridge moment to galvanize public support and to fire the imagination of military historians. Instead the RCN appeared to plod along in relative obscurity.

What is remarkable, however, is not the slow start to Canadian naval historiography, but rather the speed with which it caught up with developments in naval history in other nations. From an initial focus on operations, which had a tendency to view the RCN as a tool to be used in the prosecution of warfare, Canadian naval

¹¹³ Tom Frame, *Cruel Legacy. The HMAS Voyager Tragedy*, (Crow’s Nest, N.S.W., Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.

¹¹⁵ Milner, “The Historiography of the Royal Canadian Navy,” p. 23.

historiography has expanded to include studies of the RCN as an institution comprised of people with its own culture, beliefs and value systems, much like any other organisation. In doing so, a more complete and detailed picture of the RCN, in all of its complexity and subtlety, has emerged. Increasingly the RCN can be understood on its own terms as a unique and distinctly Canadian institution.

The present work contributes to this understanding. An examination of the hearings of the Mainguy Commission and its subsequent report is, in effect, an examination of the culture of the RCN that Canadians know today, from its moment of inception and is a snapshot into a point in time when the RCN was undergoing a transition from a wartime to a peacetime role. The Commission represents a direct discussion about the organisational culture that would govern the RCN going forward, as it broke away from cultural dependence on the RCN and stood on its own two feet. Who participated in that discussion, and just as importantly who didn't, and what conclusions were reached about morale in the RCN are important questions if Canadian naval policy in the post-war period is to be fully understood.

This study begins by examining how both external and internal factors influenced the public perception of the "incidents" and the range of options available to the RCN in dealing with them. This is followed by an examination of the efforts made by the RCN following the war to address the issue of morale in the RCN as it manifested itself through increasing wastage and recruiting difficulties up to the occurrence of the "incidents" themselves. These three chapters provide the context in which the "incidents" occurred and within which they must be viewed. Once the "incidents" had taken place, an examination of the options available to Brooke Claxton in dealing with them is

necessary so that the option actually chosen can be understood, followed by a review of the evidence presented at the hearings themselves. The study concludes with a discussion of how the press and the government responded to the report generated by the Mainguy Commission and what this means for its interpretation by historians.

CHAPTER 1

A Changing World

By the end of the Second World War, the stock of the RCN was on the rise. Having been created essentially from whole cloth at the beginning of the conflict, Canadians had every reason by the end of it to be proud of the navy that carried their ensign in every theatre of operations. It had become, in an astonishingly short period of time, one of the largest navies afloat, had acquitted itself well in the arduous, sometimes frustrating, and ultimately successful Battle of the Atlantic, and had thereby played a pivotal role in protecting Great Britain's vital supply lines. To add lustre to its achievements, a Canadian, Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray, had been made Commander in Chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command, becoming the only commander of an Allied operational theatre in the Second World War who was neither British nor American. By the end of hostilities, then, it appeared that the RCN had "come of age" and assumed its place in the international arena.¹¹⁶

In the immediate post-war period, however, the RCN's stock came back to earth with, if not a crash, a significant thud. The hard won respect that the RCN had earned with the lives of Canadian sailors would be challenged by a number of factors, some of which it was directly responsible for, and some which were beyond its control. The result was a navy that, by 1949, had lost much of the esteem in which it had been held by the Canadian public. This loss of esteem would, in turn, place the RCN in a significantly

¹¹⁶ W.A.B. Douglas et al., No Higher Purpose. The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part I. (St Catharine's, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2002), chapter 11.

more vulnerable position in the wake of the 1949 "incidents" than would otherwise have been the case. This vulnerability would compromise the ability of the senior Canadian naval leadership to pursue its vision of the RCN's position in the post-war world.

The RCN, in fact, began spending its hard-won public relations capital before the Second World War had even ended. Both the V-E Day riots in Halifax and the controversial decision made by the crew of the HMCS *Uganda* to remove itself from the Pacific Theatre of Operations served to erode public confidence in the RCN. To some extent the RCN itself was responsible for both of these occurrences.

The announcement of the victorious end of the war against Germany and its European allies was made over civilian radio at 1030 hours on 7 May 1945. As this was a Monday, the Government decided that, in celebration of the victory, the remainder of 7 May and the following day, Tuesday 8 May, would both be national holidays, and civilians would be given the days off of work. The Nova Scotia Liquor Commission had decided as early as April 1945, in anticipation of the eventual victory of the allies, that the liquor stores which would normally have been open would remain closed for the duration of the holiday. In addition, all restaurants and cinemas would remain closed until 9 May. To exacerbate the problem, Captain H.W. Balfour, the Commanding Officer of HMCS *Stadacona*,¹¹⁷ the main navy base in Halifax, had decided to close the canteens, save for a brief period during the evening of 7 May, for the duration of the celebrations.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ R.H. Caldwell, "The VE Day Riots in Halifax, 7-8 May, 1945," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* X No. 1 (January 2000), p. 12. See also James Frank Edward White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War," unpublished PhD Dissertation, McMaster University, 1995.

¹¹⁸ Caldwell., p. 4.

While the decision to essentially close down the country to allow a war weary and jubilant population to celebrate the end of hostilities against Germany may have had little impact elsewhere, in Halifax the situation was very different. As the major RCN port on the Atlantic seaboard, Halifax was home to more than its share of sailors. On VE Day, this was particularly true, as there were some 18,000 RCN personnel present in Halifax over the 7-8 May period, representing approximately 23% of the RCN's total complement, an unusually high percentage.¹¹⁹ Many of these personnel had been engaged in a gruelling and dangerous five-year campaign against the U-Boats, and there could be no doubt that with the end of the war they would be ready and more than willing to celebrate. For the sailors in Halifax, as in most other naval communities, that meant drinking, and lots of it.

The "exuberant and drunken" celebrations began in the naval canteens on the evening of 7 May, and continued, one can only imagine with much enthusiasm, until the canteens closed. Large numbers of naval personnel then left the base and moved towards downtown Halifax, which was only a short walk away. With all outlets for celebration closed to them they became, perhaps understandably, increasingly frustrated, violent and destructive. The gathering crowd of sailors began to loot liquor stores and physically engage both the civilian authorities and the navy's own shore patrol. They were aided in this by a deliberately promulgated shore patrol policy which allowed large crowds to gather, and prohibited the arrest of drunken personnel.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁰ This policy was formulated due to Rear-Admiral Murray's fear that the civilian population would take a dim view of the shore patrol arresting drunken sailors, to the point where they may have taken action against the shore patrol itself. Ibid., p. 4.

While there appears to have been a brief lull in the rampage during the morning of 8 May, by the afternoon the riot had again picked up its tempo. The sailors had been joined by numbers of soldiers, airmen, merchant seaman and civilians as they continued to loot liquor stores. The looting had, however, become far more general. Department stores and similar establishments were targeted as well. By 1800 hours the mobs in Halifax had become so violent and unruly that the mayor of Halifax, supported by Rear-Admiral Murray, announced that the celebrations were over and imposed a military curfew. The rioters responded by moving briefly to Dartmouth, across the harbour from Halifax, but by 2300 hours discipline had been restored and the curfew was in force. The riot was over, but the damage caused by the rioters had been substantial.¹²¹

While the RCN was experiencing its difficulties in Halifax, a drama of another sort was taking place half a world away, in the Pacific theatre of operations. Prior to May of 1945, the RCN's participation in that theatre had been extremely limited. The naval staff, however, believed that, once Germany had been defeated, Canadian participation in the Pacific was essential in order to allow the RCN to take its rightful and prominent place among the allied navies. The commitment initially envisioned by the Canadian naval planning staff included 25,000 personnel together with all of the RCN's large fleet units and the vast majority of its smaller ships. Prime Minister Mackenzie King, however, had substantially different ideas, and after an acrimonious argument with the naval staff, the eventual commitment that the RCN was to make to the Pacific was capped at 13,000 personnel and substantially fewer ships.¹²²

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹²² Douglas et al., p. 511-519.

When the dust settled, the decision was made to send HMCS *Uganda* and HMCS *Ontario* to the Pacific to participate in operations against the Japanese. They would be joined eventually by the RCN's four Tribal class destroyers and two Fleet Vs, the most modern destroyers available to the RCN. In addition there were plans to deploy eight of the RCN's Castle class corvettes and thirty-six River class frigates to the Pacific to perform escort duties. While this was not as large a commitment as naval service headquarters had initially wanted, the dispatch of the RCN's two newly acquired cruisers, among its largest and most modern units, represented a considerable commitment to the war in the Pacific in terms of its striking power, if not in terms of raw numbers of personnel.¹²³

It was at this point that things began to go decidedly wrong for the RCN. Both HMCS *Uganda* and HMCS *Ontario* represented a considerable portion of the RCN's hopes for a balanced, blue-water, post-war navy. They had been acquired from the British Government following the QUADRANT conference in 1943. Both were large by RCN standards, and relatively modern. They would be ideal core units for the balanced naval strike force of the sort that the RCN envisioned for the post-war period.¹²⁴

The dispatch of ships to the Pacific theatre had been a relatively straightforward matter when it was first planned in 1943. With the end of the war in Europe, however, the situation changed dramatically. By May of 1945 Mackenzie King and the Government of Canada were facing increasing difficulties recruiting enough volunteers to replace casualties and reinforce army, navy and air force units fighting in Europe and the North Atlantic. Government ministers were forced to seriously consider conscription as a

¹²³ Ibid., chapter 22.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 511-519.

means of remedying the manpower problem, at least for the Canadian Army. It was not a remedy that Mackenzie King favoured, as it was politically divisive and would, in his view, prevent him from achieving his goal of bringing Canada out of the war as a strong and unified country.¹²⁵

The end of operations in Europe, while on its face solving the immediate manpower problem, raised an even greater one. If Canada was to participate in the war against Japan in any meaningful way, a means would have to be found to break the news to thousands of "hostilities only" personnel serving in Canada's armed forces that their service was not, in fact, over and that more fighting in far away places would be necessary. It would also perpetuate the manpower crisis, and raise the spectre of conscription and all of its associated problems yet again.

The solution arrived at by King was a compromise of sorts. On 4 April 1945, the Government formally announced its policy on service in the Pacific. It would be on a purely voluntary basis, and each member of the army, navy or air force, upon conclusion of hostilities in Europe, would be specifically asked to volunteer for service with Canadian forces in the Pacific.¹²⁶ Thus, whether Canadian service personnel would participate in the war against Japan would be left entirely up to them and the decision would be made on an individual basis.

For the RCN this decision meant that the crews of *Ontario* and *Uganda* would be asked specifically whether they were willing to serve in the Pacific alongside the Royal Navy and the United States Navy, or whether they wished to be released from service following the surrender of Germany, which by that point was imminent. As the RCN

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 532.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

was composed entirely of volunteers, it was assumed by both the government and the naval leadership that the result of the question was a foregone conclusion, and that both ships' companies would volunteer en masse.¹²⁷ For various reasons, however, this assumption would prove to be woefully incorrect.

The two ships were in very different positions in the early part of May 1945. HMCS *Ontario*, under the command of Captain H.T.W. Grant, was newer than HMCS *Uganda* and carried more modern armament. While similar in many ways to *Uganda*, she was considered to be technologically at least a year ahead in her anti-aircraft armament and radar capacity. She had been completed in the early part of 1945 and was still finishing her working-up process when the ship's company was called upon to volunteer for continued participation in the Pacific. When presented with the undertaking to volunteer for Pacific service on 1 May 1945, 512 officers and men, some 64% of the ship's complement, accepted, while 388 refused.¹²⁸ Fortunately for the RCN, HMCS *Ontario* had not yet been formally Commissioned or deployed to active operations. Replacing those personnel who had declined service in the Pacific could be undertaken prior to her deployment and would neither hamper operations nor cause public embarrassment to the RCN and the Government of Canada.¹²⁹

In the case of HMCS *Uganda* the RCN was not to be so lucky. When the policy requiring volunteer service was formally announced, she was already actively engaged in operations in the Pacific as part of the British Pacific Fleet. She had participated in Operation Iceberg, the code name given to the amphibious assault on the island of

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 536.

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp. 523-524; 537.

¹²⁹ The result of the call for volunteers aboard HMCS *Ontario* was not raised in the House of Commons, nor did it feature in the press coverage.

Okinawa. Her role in that operation was the suppression of Japanese airfields in the Sakishima Gunto island group and the protection of the carriers supporting the assault. She was first engaged on 13 April 1945 and on 4 May participated in the bombardment of airfields on Myako Island, by all accounts performing well.¹³⁰

In early May the vote was taken aboard HMCS *Uganda* calling for volunteers for the Pacific war. From the RCN's perspective, the results were even worse than those aboard HMCS *Ontario*. An overwhelming number of officers and ratings, 576 ratings and 29 officers, representing 80% of the ship's company, chose not to volunteer for Pacific service. On 17 May the results of the vote were put to Rear-Admiral Brind, the Royal Navy commander of the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, of which *Uganda* was a part. While his response was polite and understanding, he cannot have been pleased with the result.¹³¹ Thus HMCS *Uganda*, while actively engaged in combat operations in the Pacific, had effectively voted herself out of the war, certainly a unique event in the annals of naval history, but one of which the RCN could not be proud. *Uganda* would have no choice but to go home to replace those crew members who had elected to end their service.

On her way there, still as part of the British Pacific Fleet, she took part in Operation Inmate, the bombardment of Japanese positions on Truk Atoll. Truk had been bypassed and left to "wither on the vine" in the progression of the Allied forces across the Pacific. By the time of Operation Inmate, 15 June 1945, it was serving essentially as a target for gunnery practice by the British Pacific Fleet.¹³² There was not a great deal of risk to *Uganda* or her crew in this exercise, and she once again performed creditably. By

¹³⁰ Ibid, pp. 541-542.

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 547-554.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 545-546.

the middle of July, she was headed home, both for a refit, and to put ashore those personnel who had declined to volunteer for continued service.¹³³ The war in the Pacific would be over before she could return to action.

The reasons behind the decision not to volunteer varied for each of the personnel put to the choice. There are, however, several possible explanations which go beyond a failure of courage or patriotism on the part of the officers and ratings involved. Of perhaps the greatest importance, after the difficulty of explaining to families, spouses and sweethearts that reunion would be postponed indefinitely, was the very real fear that the sailors would be late to the dance, as it were, in terms of post-war programs and benefits. As large numbers of naval personnel would be demobilising while *Uganda* and *Ontario* continued to serve, they would have a head start in obtaining post-war jobs and enrolling in programs designed to benefit veterans.¹³⁴ Nobody wanted to return home after an indeterminate period of additional service to discover that their prospects for post-war prosperity had disappeared in favour of someone who had served less time on active duty.

In addition to this very real fear, there was also a certain degree of umbrage taken to the question itself. Several of the officers and ratings who declined to volunteer found the question itself offensive. They had volunteered to serve for the duration of hostilities, which, in their minds, included hostilities against Japan. Since they had already volunteered once, they felt that their integrity was being questioned by being asked to do so again. Some of the officers, in particular, seemed to feel that asking them to volunteer specifically for Pacific service was offensive, as they were already bound to do so, and

¹³³ Ibid, p. 546.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 537.

implied that they were unreliable. In its haste to comply with the Government's policy, the RCN had, as it turned out, failed to consider carefully enough the way in which the call for volunteers was put to its personnel.¹³⁵ The response to the RCN's mishandling of the question was a perverse refusal to, in essence, volunteer for naval service twice.

The final, and perhaps decisive, factors which bore upon the vote aboard *Uganda*, although not *Ontario*, had to do with the service conditions aboard ship. When she was constructed, *Uganda* had been designed for service in the North Atlantic. She had not, therefore, been equipped with the cooling and refrigeration systems that service in the much warmer temperatures of the Pacific theatre would necessitate. The conditions aboard were, as a result, uncomfortable to say the least. Fresh provisions were all but impossible to maintain in the tropical heat, and the diet of the men suffered accordingly. In addition the temperatures in the living and work spaces below decks often exceeded one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, requiring the men to sleep on deck where possible, or in sweltering heat when it was not. Things were even worse in the engine room where the heat from the engines added to the discomfort.¹³⁶ Life aboard *Uganda* was far from ideal and inevitably had a negative impact on ship's morale. This in turn translated, at least for some of the personnel, into a refusal to volunteer for continued service.

Added to these physical discomforts was the discomfort of service aboard a larger ship. While *Uganda's* officers, including Captain, as he then was, Rollo Mainguy, were for the most part permanent force experienced men who had learned their trade in service with the Royal Navy, the story was entirely different for the ratings. Approximately two-thirds of them had come to *Uganda* out of service in corvettes. These men were largely

¹³⁵ Ibid, pp. 536-537; 553.

¹³⁶ Douglas et al. Vol. II, pp. 547-554.

volunteer reserve personnel who had no prior naval experience. They had served the bulk of their time with the RCN aboard corvettes, where the shipboard routine was much less rigid and discipline less stringent. They had considerable difficulty adapting to life aboard a larger ship where the daily routine was much more formal and where discipline was much more rigidly enforced.¹³⁷ These difficulties were exacerbated when the crew were called upon to volunteer for Pacific service by Captain Mainguy, who spoke out against non-volunteers in terms that made his disapproval very clear, and which served to alienate many of the ratings who up to that point had viewed him very favourably, and seen him as a “sailor’s sailor.”¹³⁸ For many of the crew, the difference in ship’s routine, combined with the uncomfortable physical conditions, must have tipped the balance in favour of going home. Regardless of the validity of the reasons, however, *Uganda* was heading home, and the Canadian public would be left to make of that what they would.

Both the riots in Halifax and the difficulties aboard *Uganda* occurred while the House of Commons was in recess for the summer, so there was no immediate reaction to either event in the House. In the press, however, the reaction, particularly to the riots, was immediate and vigorous.

As early as 9 May, Admiral G.C. Jones, the Chief of the Naval Staff, upon learning of the Halifax riots, promised an immediate and full enquiry into responsibility for them.¹³⁹ This was not, however, enough to satisfy Alan Butler, the Mayor of Halifax, who needed no such enquiry to fix blame for the destruction visited on his city. He immediately blamed the RCN for the entirety of the riots and was quoted in a Canadian Press story as saying “[i]t will be a long time before the people of Halifax forget that

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp. 521-523.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 547-554.

¹³⁹ Hamilton Spectator, 9 May 1945.

great crime.”¹⁴⁰ While the bulk of the negative comments about the navy and its conduct came from Halifax itself, the wide publication of these comments, through the Canadian Press news service, could not have gone unnoticed in the rest of the country.

The situation was not helped by the publication of the findings of the Kellock Commission, which had been struck by the federal government to investigate the riots and to, essentially, assign blame for them. Although Admiral Jones had promised a naval enquiry, the magnitude of the outcry was such that the government decided to take the matter out of the hands of the navy entirely. In fact the order striking the Commission was issued on 10 May and hearings began immediately. After several days of hearings, Justice Kellock produced his report at the end of July 1945. In agreement with Mayor Butler, Kellock placed the blame for the riots squarely on the shoulders of the RCN, and more particularly on those of Vice-Admiral Murray, who he blamed for failing to take into account the potential for disorderly conduct and put in place measures to forestall it. Kellock furthermore specifically discounted claims that in part the riots had been motivated by the frustration of naval personnel with the high prices being charged for food and accommodation in Halifax, finding that there was no evidence to support those arguments. Justice Kellock’s report justified the anger felt in Halifax and elsewhere towards the RCN and its personnel, and tarnished their hard won reputation.¹⁴¹ To make matters worse, Vice-Admiral Murray, who had earned the respect of both British and American naval leaders and of the Canadian men and women under his command, was

¹⁴⁰ The Globe and Mail, 10 May 1945.

¹⁴¹ The Globe and Mail, 18 August 1945.

held responsible for the riots and relieved of his command, marking a sad ending to an illustrious career.¹⁴²

When Parliament resumed sitting in the fall of 1945 both the Halifax riots and the failure of a significant portion of the crew of *Uganda* to volunteer for Pacific service were raised in the House of Commons. On 2 October 1945 Douglas Abbott, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, acknowledged, with apparent approval, the findings of the Kellock inquiry blaming the lack of discipline in the RCN for the riots. He also issued a plaintive plea to both the members of parliament and the Canadian people to forgive the navy and remember its admirable wartime service.¹⁴³ For the Minister responsible to have to rise in the House of Commons and apologize for the conduct of the RCN must have been a galling experience for Abbott, and the fact that he felt it necessary to do so is indicative of the extent to which the RCN had fallen in the esteem of both the Government and the public.

The comments in the House of Commons regarding *Uganda*, which arose at approximately the same time, were much more cursory but also indicated the extent to which the reputation of the RCN had been tarnished. George Pearkes, the Member of Parliament for Nanaimo, indicated to the House that he had received a telegram “asking if the good name of the ships’ company of HMCS *Uganda* might be vindicated because of the slurring remarks that [had] been made regarding some of the men who had not volunteered for service in the Pacific.” He went on to ask that the Government clarify the position of the men of *Uganda* and to confirm that they had initially volunteered to serve

¹⁴² Caldwell, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴³ *Hansard*, 2 October 1945, p. 703.

anywhere, and had subsequently been given the option of volunteering for the Pacific.¹⁴⁴ While Pearkes did not clarify what precisely the nature of the “slurs” had been, it is safe to assume that they had called into question the loyalty and courage of those members of the crew who had not volunteered for Pacific service, and may have gone so far as to suggest that a mutiny had occurred and that there had been strife between those who volunteered and those who didn’t.¹⁴⁵

Abbott’s response to the concerns raised by Pearkes was brusque to the point of being dismissive. He confirmed that he had received a similar telegram and that the men of *Uganda* had been offered the same option of volunteering for Pacific service as had the men serving in the army and the air force. He then went on to dismiss Pearkes’ concerns about the reputation of the crew of *Uganda*, remarking that he felt “sure that the majority of the people of this country [were] under no illusions as to the status of the crew of *Uganda* or as to their suffering from any alleged slurs which may have been cast with respect to the nature of their service.”¹⁴⁶ Abbott’s failure to defend the reputation of the crew of *Uganda* in more forceful terms was telling, and indicated the extent to which Abbott, as the Minister in charge of the RCN was displeased with the embarrassment that its conduct had caused him.

Neither the Halifax riots nor the *Uganda* incident alone was sufficient to significantly damage the RCN in the long-term. All else being equal they would have eventually been forgotten and remained as interesting footnotes to the history of the RCN. In the post-war period, however, all else was far from equal and the combination of the two events served as the first small erosions at the foundation of the post-war

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 26 October 1945, p. 1525.

¹⁴⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, 11 August, 1945.

¹⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 26 October 1945, p. 1525; *The Globe and Mail*, 27 October, 1945.

RCN. They would eventually, in combination with other factors, leave the service vulnerable to challenge in 1949, but incapable of defending itself against increasing attempts to bring it to heel as the servant of Government policy.

One of these other factors occurred completely outside the control of the RCN, but would serve as the motive power behind the establishment of the Mainguy Commission. It, too, began in September 1945 when Igor Gouzenko, a cipher clerk with the Soviet embassy in Ottawa, defected. He revealed the existence of a Soviet-based espionage ring involving a number of government employees, some of them quite senior, operating in Ottawa, who had been spying on the Government of Canada throughout the Second World War.¹⁴⁷ The Gouzenko affair triggered a wave of anti-Communist hysteria in Canada.¹⁴⁸

Anti-Communist thinking was not, of course, new to the post-war period. As Reg Whitaker has shown, the Government of Canada had been actively engaged against the political left in Canada since the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and continued its campaign through the 1920s and 1930s. During the Second World War the preoccupation of the Government with Communist subversion continued. This was at variance with propaganda that portrayed the conflict as a united front with the Soviet Union against the Nazi menace. Communist supporters were interned, and publications sympathetic to Communist ideas were banned under increasingly powerful regulations. In fact, Canada was the only nation to legally ban the Communist Party throughout the wartime alliance

¹⁴⁷ David Bercuson, True Patriot: The Life of Brooke Claxton, 1898-1960, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 141-142.

¹⁴⁸ Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 221.

with the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁹ The Gouzenko affair, however, proved the fears that had motivated the repression of Communists to have been well founded and ratcheted up anti-Communist sentiment to levels that had not previously been seen in Canada.

One of the major foci of the anti-Communist sentiment in the post-war period was organised labour. Since the 1930s some unions had become increasingly influenced by members who were also members of the Communist Party of Canada either as such or the Labour Progressive Party.¹⁵⁰ During the Second World War many of these unions made significant gains for their membership in both wages and working conditions. The heavy demand for war production placed them in a very advantageous bargaining position which they did not fail to exploit. The post-war period, however, saw a number of strikes as the same unions tried to defend the gains they had made against the employers in the face of returning servicemen and an expanded labour pool and in the face of stiff opposition from employers, who took every opportunity to try to break the back of organised labour and reverse the gains that had been made.¹⁵¹

It would, of course, be incorrect to brand all union members as Communists or even sympathetic to communist ideas. The presence and influence of communist members in trade unions, and in senior trade union leadership positions was, however, well known to employers, judges and government officials and in the post-war period became a major difficulty facing organised labour as a movement.¹⁵² In the context of the growing fear of the Communist menace, the presence of any Communist influence,

¹⁴⁹ Reg Whitaker, "Official Repression of Communism During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), pp. 135-166. The Labour Progressive Party was not banned, however.

¹⁵⁰ Jim Green, *Against the Tide. The Story of the Canadian Seamen's Union*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1986), p. 217.

¹⁵¹ William Kaplan, "How Justice Rand Devised His Famous Formula," in Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker eds., *Work on Trial. Canadian Labour Law Struggles*, (Toronto: The Osgoode Society, 2010), pp. 77-106.

¹⁵² Abella, p. 66.

particularly in union leadership, would serve to make an organisation the target of prosecution, regulation and investigation.

One of the occupations most heavily involved in labour unrest during the post-war period, and the one most relevant to the present inquiry, was Canada's merchant navy. This group included almost all sailors who worked on merchant ships, both on the Great Lakes and on ocean-going vessels, and had a history of labour militancy. Collective action by merchant seamen had begun in earnest in 1935 in a series of disputes to reduce the length of the working day and to combat a steady decline in wages during the Depression. These disputes culminated in an acrimonious strike and violent confrontations between striking seamen and replacement crews. The strike ended very quickly due to the almost complete absence of effective union organisation, but the merchant seamen had learned their lesson.¹⁵³ In 1936 the National Seamen's Union and the Marine Worker's Union of the Great Lakes amalgamated to form the Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU),¹⁵⁴ which it was hoped would prove, in time, to be a much more effective vehicle for promoting the interests of the seamen and provide them with the leadership that the earlier disputes demonstrated that they needed.

The conflict between the CSU and the ship owners continued after the amalgamation. In October 1937 the Maurice Duplessis government in Québec shut down the Searchlight, the magazine published by the CSU under that province's "padlock law." This law allowed the provincial government to shut down any "operation suspected of advocating communism."¹⁵⁵ Since the law itself only required suspicion of advocacy, it

¹⁵³ Green, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

was a valuable weapon in combating both the rising spectre of communism, and the trend towards organized labour and it was a weapon that Duplessis was not shy about using.

In 1938 another series of strikes took place. This time the merchant seamen were much better organised, and presented a more unified front than they had in prior disputes. The improved organisation in turn led to more success for the striking seamen in terms of collective agreements reached with the company owners. The success, however, proved to be a mixed blessing. The radical improvement in unity and organisation of the seamen led the owners to suspect that an outside communist influence was responsible and more pervasive than they had previously believed. What had been a suspicion prior to the 1938 strikes had now become a certainty in the minds of the owners, and the CSU would remain firmly in the cross-hairs of the Government and owners into the post-war period as a hotbed of communist activity.¹⁵⁶

During the war years the labour unrest in the merchant navy seemed to abate to a considerable degree. There was certainly no shortage of work for merchant seamen, and both the owners and the seamen put aside their acrimonious relationship in the interest of working towards the common goal of winning the war. In spite of this, however, low grade conflict continued and several of the CSU leaders were jailed under the Defence of Canada Regulations, ostensibly due to their membership in the Communist Party.¹⁵⁷ In addition there were some instances of “job action” strikes aboard Canadian merchant vessels in which crews refused to perform their tasks until specific grievances were

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 36-41.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 74-85. Green argues that this was part of a more generalized crackdown on organized labour designed to “cripple the Canadian left general and the trade union movement in particular” but his evidence does not support a conclusion that general.

met.¹⁵⁸ None of these actions significantly impacted the ability of the merchant navy to supply war materials to Britain and her allies, but as the war progressed it became increasingly clear that any truce between the CSU and the owners of the merchant ships would be temporary.

In the aftermath of the war tensions once again began to rise and were exacerbated by government policy towards Canada's merchant navy. Firstly, merchant seamen were not recognised as veterans. This made them ineligible for veterans' pensions and for preferences given to veterans in post war employment, particularly in the civil service, and for subsidised training and education opportunities.¹⁵⁹ Thus, while merchant seamen had fought and died alongside their RCN counterparts, they were to be treated, in their minds, as second class citizens when it came to their place in post-war Canadian society.

To make matters worse, the Government of Canada, which had constructed a large fleet of "Park" class merchant vessels during the war, decided to get out of the merchant shipping business. The ships were sold off for a fraction of their value, mainly to non-Canadian concerns. The Canadian shipbuilding industry was essentially shut down. The government had decided that, in the post-war world, Canadian merchant shipping could not compete effectively with foreign bottoms due to higher Canadian wages and a shorter work week for Canadian merchant seamen.¹⁶⁰ Regardless of the reasons, however, the decision meant impending if not actual unemployment for a large number of Canadian merchant seamen.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 102-104.

¹⁵⁹ Doug Fraser, *Postwar Casualty. Canada's Merchant Navy*, (Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1997), p. 28; 130-131.

¹⁶⁰ Kaplan, pp. 58-61.

The post-war tensions came to a head in what were essentially two interwoven strikes, one by the Great Lakes seamen which began in 1948 and a second by the deep sea seamen which began in March of 1949.¹⁶¹ By this time the Communist influence in the CSU had been well established in the minds of the Canadian government and people. In 1947 Pat Sullivan, the CSU president, had announced after years of denial that he was, in fact, a member of the Labour Progressive Party (in essence the Communist Party with a different name) and revealed to the public the extent to which Communists had taken over the leadership of the CSU.¹⁶² Both the strikes and Sullivan's revelation played into the anti-Communist sentiment and ensured that the strikes, particularly the 1949 deep sea strike, would attract a great deal of attention. Stories in the press rarely failed to mention the Communist affiliations of the CSU when the strike was reported on.¹⁶³

The strike in Canada was broken relatively quickly. In April of 1949 the Canadian Government began to assist ship owners in escorting strike-breakers onto ships.¹⁶⁴ The power of the CSU as a representative of Canadian merchant seamen was broken, and it was replaced by the Seamen's International Union, a far less radical organisation without Communist ties.¹⁶⁵

By the time the strike was broken in Canada, however, it had assumed an international dimension. A number of related unions, primarily in Britain, had declared their support for the CSU and actively supported the strike. The Dockworkers union, for example, refused to unload any ships manned by strike breakers and essentially shut

¹⁶¹ Green pp. 186-222.

¹⁶² Kaplan, p. 49.

¹⁶³ See, for example, The Toronto Daily Star, July 18, 1949, p. 4; The Toronto Daily Star, July 20, 1939, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

down the docks at several of Britain's major sea ports. The situation in Britain became so serious that on 11 July 1949 the British Government under Clement Attlee declared a state of emergency due directly to the dockworkers' support of the CSU.¹⁶⁶ Similar sympathetic labour disruptions took place in other nations as well, notably Holland, Belgium and Norway.¹⁶⁷ The response of the Attlee government was out of all proportion to the magnitude of the strike in Canada but by then the strike by the CSU had been re-cast as an attempt by the international forces of Communism to disrupt shipping and hinder the relief of the blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸

The global nature of the 1949 deep sea strike served to make labour unrest in Canada and the Communist influence on the trade union movement appear to be much more serious and much more dangerous than they actually were. In its convention of August 1949 the Trades and Labour Congress, demonstrating the extent to which anti-Communist sentiment had penetrated even the bastion of organised labour, expelled the CSU from its membership based on the Communist affiliations of its leaders.¹⁶⁹ While this move by the TLC may have been simple self-preservation in the face of increasing anti-Communist sentiment,¹⁷⁰ its effect was to cut the very foundations out from under the CSU and to deny it the support it so desperately needed. Having lost its major ally in the Trades and Labour Congress, the strike limped along until it finally ended on 15 October 1949. With the end of the strike, the CSU functionally ceased to exist and Canadian merchant seamen would be forced to look elsewhere for representation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹⁶⁷ Green, pp. 248-262.

¹⁶⁸ Kaplan p. 70.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ The Toronto Daily Star, March 26, 1949, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Kaplan., p. 287.

Regardless of its ultimate failure, however, the CSU deep sea strike would have implications far beyond the lot of the merchant seamen themselves.

In light of the deep sea strike, and the allegations of Communist control levelled at the CSU, the "incidents" aboard *Magnificent*, *Crescent* and *Athabaskan* could not have come at a worse time for the RCN. The association between the "incidents" and Communist subversion in the minds of Canadians, both in and outside of government, was all but guaranteed. In the minds of civilians the differences between merchant seamen and members of the RCN were difficult to see and it did not require a great stretch of the imagination to conclude that if the merchant seamen were not politically reliable then neither were the RCN sailors.¹⁷²

In the House of Commons, while no overt connection was made between the "incidents" and communist subversion, questions were asked in the midst of bouts of soaring anti-communist rhetoric, made worse by the first testing of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union and the fall of China to Mao's communists, both of which also took place in 1949. Brooke Claxton, then acting under-secretary of state reported to cabinet that the CSU had begun using sit-down strikes to support its demands both in Canada and overseas.¹⁷³ Mr. Diefenbaker, then Member of Parliament for Lake Centre, for example, saw the threat of communism on all sides and opined on 26 April 1949 that it was "undermining our nation in various places."¹⁷⁴ Solon E. Low, the MP for Peace River, went him one better, describing the spread of communism in the post-war period as a "red tidal wave," and predicting a dire future for the world if the spread were allowed to

¹⁷² See for example *The Globe and Mail*, March 28, 1949, p. 2; *The Globe and Mail*, April 11, 1949, p. 7.

¹⁷³ Richard H. Gimblett, "Gunboat Diplomacy, Mutiny and National Identity in the Postwar Royal Canadian Navy: The Cruise of *HMCS Crescent* to China, 1949, unpublished, Université Laval, 2000, p. 303.

¹⁷⁴ *Hansard*, Fifth Session, Twentieth Parliament, Vol. II, 1949, p. 2594.

continue.¹⁷⁵ All of this combined to place the loyalty and reliability of the RCN in doubt¹⁷⁶, and in this atmosphere it was imperative for the government to put a quick end to discussion of the "incidents" lest it be perceived as being "soft" on communism.

To make matters worse for the RCN they could not, in the wake of the riots in Halifax and the refusal of the crew of *Uganda* to serve in the Pacific, make use of a reputation of staunch reliability to brand the "incidents" as absurd and thereby deflect public scrutiny. What was an absolute certainty by the summer of 1949 was that the RCN would not be permitted to conduct its own investigation into the "incidents" and to address whatever problems were revealed within normal service channels and away from political scrutiny.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 2077.

¹⁷⁶ Gimblett, "Gunboat Diplomacy," p. 303.

CHAPTER 2

Challenges From Within

A rapid reduction in the size of the RCN combined with government parsimony, poor working conditions, changing rank and pay structures and changing governmental policy served to bring the navy, by 1949, to a state of crisis. The crisis had been building for four years and the RCN had already weathered one storm following a series of similar ‘incidents’ aboard its vessels in 1947. Positive change, however, was slow in coming and morale in the RCN continued to worsen. By the spring of 1949 the RCN’s internal vulnerability matched its external vulnerability, and again placed it in a position in which it would be unable to effectively defend itself against its critics. It was, in short, not a happy fleet.

The first major postwar challenge for the RCN was, ironically, exactly the opposite of the one which it faced in 1939. When the war began the RCN had to expand as quickly as possible in order to meet the wartime demands for warships to escort convoys to Britain. It had done this with remarkable success and by the end of the war comprised very nearly 100,000 personnel manning 250 seagoing warships, hundreds of smaller warships and auxiliary vessels and a large number of shore establishments. Almost immediately following the cessation of hostilities the RCN was directed by the Government of Canada to reduce its personnel complement almost as dramatically as it had increased it. Simultaneously the purpose of the RCN changed and the number of ships was also to be dramatically reduced.

Hopes for a smooth transition into the post-war period almost immediately ran into considerable difficulties, and from a somewhat unexpected quarter. In formulating the post-war vision for the RCN, the Naval Staff had estimated that manning two battle groups would require approximately 20,000 personnel of all ranks, including crews for the ships and logistical and support personnel. Admiral Percy Nelles, during his tenure as Chief of the Naval Staff (1934-1944), had sought to secure for the RCN a significant place in the post-war world as an instrument of the government's international policy. He was motivated by a fear that, as had happened after the First World War, the RCN would rapidly sink into obscurity once again.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, it appeared that Nelles had been correct in his fears of history repeating. Mackenzie King issued instructions to Douglas Abbott, who replaced Angus MacDonald as the minister responsible for the RCN, to pare the three military services to the bone. King was anxious to get back to what he considered to be the traditional Liberal principles of “economy, reduction of taxation and anti-militarism.”¹⁷⁷ The RCN was virtually excluded from the policy making process as External Affairs, which had forged a close partnership with the leadership of all of the armed services during the war, proved a fickle collaborator, and saw the post-war period as an opportunity to pursue its own vision for Canada and its place in the world.¹⁷⁸ It was clear that the bad old days had returned and that the naval staff would have to fight to preserve the post-war vision that it had formulated.

¹⁷⁷ King Diary quoted in Wilfrid G.D. Lund, “Vice-Admiral Howard Emmerson Reid and vice-Admiral Taylor Wood Grant: Forging the New “Canadian” Navy,” in Michael Whitby, Richard H. Gimblett and Peter Haydon eds., *The Admirals. Canada’s Senior Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), p. 158.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 158-159.

The vision itself had been in existence for as long as there had been an RCN. As early as 1909, Admiral Sir John Fisher, then the First Sea Lord at Britain's Admiralty, advanced a vision for the participation of Britain's dominions in the imperial defence system. Using the protection of Britain's Pacific dominions as the primary justification, Fisher advocated the direct participation of the dominions in the naval defence. He advocated the creation by each of the self-governing dominions of small multi-purpose navies based on the battle cruiser as the primary vessel. This would not only allow the dominions to become local powers through the creation of high-seas fleets, but would also provide Britain with a reserve of powerful naval units that were trained together and operationally ready to meet any contingency.¹⁷⁹

Fisher's proposals were in fact attuned to Britain's self-governing Pacific dominions, Australia and New Zealand, and were instrumental in the creation of the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal New Zealand Navy. In Canada, however, they proved considerably less convincing. The perception in some quarters was that Fisher was offering his vision based on a very narrow reading of British interests, and not those of Canada. While the Government of Canada managed to succeed in the creation of the Royal Canadian Navy as a national service, the political divisions threatened even that meagre achievement, and certainly could not support the acquisition of powerful surface units and the budgets needed to sustain them. There was also considerable fear that the creation of such naval units would draw Canada into Britain's imperial

¹⁷⁹ Roger Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fisher and Jellicoe. The Royal Canadian Navy and the Quebec Conferences," in David B. Woolner ed., The Second Quebec Conference revisited. Waging War, Formulating Peace: Canada, Great Britain, and the United States in 1944-1945, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp 143-144.

entanglements.¹⁸⁰ As a result, the RCN at its foundation became a small coastal defence force.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Britain again attempted to promote its vision of imperial defence. Earl Jellicoe of Scapa, on a visit to Canada in 1919, repeated Fisher's vision of the composition of dominion navies. Jellicoe, like Fisher, promoted the need for the dominions to participate in the defence of Britain's Pacific possessions, this time using the spectre of Japan as a motivating factor. In addition, Jellicoe sweetened the deal, and in 1919-1920 Britain gave to Canada one six-inch gun cruiser, two destroyers and two submarines, to form the basis for the development of a Canadian high-seas fleet. Even this largesse, however, failed to sway the Canadian Government. When Mackenzie King became prime minister in 1921, he slashed naval budgets so thoroughly that the RCN could not even afford to man the British gift ships. All save the two destroyers were paid off and laid up.¹⁸¹ It became clear to the Canadian naval leadership at that time that they would have to continue to scramble for the foreseeable future simply to continue to exist. Expansion and the creation of a serviceable fleet did not enter into the planning process in the interwar years, only survival did.¹⁸²

The outbreak of the Second World War provided an opportunity for the Canadian naval leadership to rectify the years of neglect that it had endured during the interwar period, although it did not appear that way at first blush. Mackenzie King's initial position regarding Canada's role in the conflict was based on participation as an

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Norman Hillmer, "Defence and Ideology: The Anglo-Canadian Military 'alliance' in the 1930s," 1978, *International Journal* 33(3), (Sage Publications Ltd., Canadian International Council), pp. 588-612.

economic support for Britain, but fell short of a significant commitment of military force. While King was prepared in the late 1930s to allow British and Canadian naval officers to engage in joint planning for the defence of the heavy British and international shipping off Canada's shores, he refused to allocate the resources to the RCN that would be necessary to allow it to assume a significant role in naval operations against Germany. For his part, Admiral Percy Nelles, who had been named Chief of the Naval Staff in 1934, did not operate under the illusion that the government which had left the RCN to languish in obscurity throughout the interwar period would suddenly be converted to a big-ship vision of the RCN. He began, therefore, by proposing a modest expansion of the RCN by a number of smaller vessels designed for the support of Britain, but focused mainly on coastal operations in North American waters. King was pleased with this plan as it focused on North American defence and would be unlikely to drag Canada into a global naval conflict.¹⁸³

In spite of this rather inauspicious beginning, Nelles dedicated himself to reviving and achieving the vision for the RCN first put forward by Fisher. While Nelles lacked “the deft touch and supple intellect needed to win the sympathy and confidence of those who wielded influence and power,”¹⁸⁴ he was diligent and dedicated and managed in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the Second World War to convince the Canadian Government to open the coffers and allow him to implement some moderate expansion of Canada’s naval capacity. The expansion consisted of the acquisition of

¹⁸³Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fischer and Jellicoe," pp. 145-146.

¹⁸⁴Roger Sarty, “Admiral Percy W. Nelles: Diligent Guardian of the Vision,” in Michael Whitby, Richard H. Gimblett and Peter Haydon eds. The Admirals. Canada’s Senior Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006) p. 69.

seven modern destroyers, and was modest by any measure.¹⁸⁵ It was, however, a step in the right direction, and the outbreak of hostilities with Germany was, in this context, an incredible stroke of luck for Nelles. Persuading the decision makers to spend money on the RCN was no longer an issue, and the purse strings loosened exponentially.¹⁸⁶ For the first time since the inception of the RCN, the naval staff found itself in a position to give life to the long standing vision of a blue water fleet for Canada.

Crucial to the successful implementation of Nelles' vision was the support of Angus MacDonald, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services. MacDonald, himself from Nova Scotia, was a strong supporter of the "policy of 1910," and the creation of cruiser squadrons capable of operations on the high seas. In an address to the House of Commons in November of 1940, MacDonald clearly indicated his unstinting support for a strong and independent Canadian navy, stating that "the dignity of Canada demands that we should have a navy worthy of our importance in the world of nations, adequate to the needs of the great trading nation which Canada now is, and which she is bound to become in greater measure after the war; a navy sufficient to meet the obligations which rest upon us as members of the British commonwealth [sic], and as a country in close association with the United States in the matter of joint defence of this continent."¹⁸⁷ This statement is important both for its support of the RCN in the Battle of the Atlantic, and perhaps more significantly for its support of the long term vision of the RCN. With such support in the government, Nelles felt understandably confident in advancing and promoting his post-war plans for the RN.

¹⁸⁵ Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fisher and Jellicoe," p. 145.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 147

Throughout the Second World War Nelles and his colleagues on the naval staff remained committed to making the most of the opportunity that the war presented, and used whatever means were to hand to pursue Canadian naval interests. Nelles remained determined to make it clear that the RCN was a national service, and not merely an adjunct of the Royal Navy. He was instrumental, for example, in the creation of Newfoundland as a separate Canadian naval command. As the U-boats moved west and began operations against allied shipping in the area of the Grand Banks, the Royal Navy pressed Nelles to assume a greater responsibility for the protection of convoys between St. John's and Iceland. Nelles agreed to do this and to commit a significant portion of Canada's escort strength to this task. In return, however, he insisted that the new Newfoundland command be, firstly, separate from Halifax (where a British admiral directed major RN warships based there to support convoys), and, secondly, that there be a Canadian in charge. The British acquiesced, and in June of 1941, Commander L.W. Murray took command of the Newfoundland Escort Force. Murray enjoyed the confidence of both the RCN and the Royal Navy, and proved to be a very effective commander. His force received the ships that the Canadian government chose to assign to it, and was therefore secure from undue influence by the Royal Navy's Western Approaches command, based in Liverpool, as well as the British admiral at Halifax.¹⁸⁸

In addition to securing the operational independence of the RCN, Nelles took several major strides towards securing the resources necessary to allow it to play a significant role in the post-war world. Well aware of King's views on military spending,

¹⁸⁸ Sarty, "Admiral Percy W. Nelles," p. 84; Marc Milner, "Rear-Admiral Leonard W. Murray: Canada's Most Important Operational Commander," in Michael Whitby, Richard H. Gimblett and Peter Haydon eds. The Admirals. Canada's Senior Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006) pp. 104-105.

and perhaps attempting to forestall the inevitable arguments about expense, Nelles showed considerable determination and political cunning in convincing Britain, on several occasions, to offer to provide the warships necessary to put the RCN in an advantageous position in the post-war period. By the middle of 1943 Nelles realised that the RCN held a card that could be played to its advantage. The Royal Navy had begun an ambitious building program early in the war and by 1943 had a large number of ships coming into Commission at the same time. Due to this timing, and wartime losses, it was desperately short of trained crews with which to man them. This problem would become more acute, to the point of desperation, if a seaborne invasion of Europe was planned. This played directly into the hands of the Canadian naval staff which, through a near miracle of development, was in the position of having a manpower surplus. The answer, to Nelles, seemed clear and would serve to satisfy both the Royal Navy's needs and the vision of the naval staff for a blue-water post-war fleet.¹⁸⁹

The QUADRANT conference in August 1943 provided Nelles with a golden opportunity to pursue his idea. On 11 August he and Captain H. G. DeWolf, the RCN's Director of Plans, met with Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sea Lord, and Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Chief of Combined Operations, to discuss how the British surplus of ships and the Canadian surplus of manpower could be combined to the mutual advantage of the two navies. The meeting occurred in some secrecy. The British, for their part, did not want the other services to know what they were up to for various reasons. Nelles and the Canadians were anxious to hide their activities from their Government. Nelles knew, from past experience, that King would resist both the acquisition by the RCN of any ships larger than destroyers and the use of Canadian

¹⁸⁹ Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fisher and Jellicoe," p. 151.

manpower for other than Canadian purposes. He also knew, however, that King had a history of acceding to requests that came from Churchill directly rather than through military staffs. The parties quickly agreed, then, that any agreement negotiated would come from Churchill as a British plea for assistance and not through the Royal Navy.¹⁹⁰

On 31 August a naval understanding was finalised and presented to Mackenzie King as a British plea for assistance. In addition to the two cruisers to be manned by Canadians, mentioned in the last chapter, the RCN was also to provide personnel to man several flotillas of landing craft and at least two light fleet carriers. At the cessation of hostilities with Germany, the ships manned by Canadians would be turned over to the RCN together with two modern destroyers. While it was to appear that the arrangements made were designed to help the Royal Navy meet the increasingly heavy demands of convoy escort and orchestrating an amphibious landing of Europe, and while they undoubtedly would serve that purpose, they also set the RCN firmly on the path to a balanced post-war fleet capable of a variety of operational tasks.¹⁹¹

As expected, King, reluctantly, agreed to the arrangements. He was not without his suspicions, however, and indicated to Nelles that he found the arrangements terribly convenient for the RCN's long-term plans. At a meeting of the Cabinet War Committee on 8 September, King questioned Nelles about when and how much Nelles and Captain H.G. De Wolf, the director of plans at Naval Service Headquarters, had known of the British requests. Nelles admitted to preliminary discussions with the Royal Navy early on at the QUARANT conference, which was true as far as it went, but when Nelles

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 152-153.

¹⁹¹ Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fisher and Jellicoe," pp 151-153; Douglas et al. *A Blue Water Navy*, pp 166-176.

advised King that he had not known of specific proposals to be brought forward, he was being, to put it mildly, disingenuous.¹⁹²

By October of 1943 King was becoming even more suspicious than he had been at the end of the conference. Admiralty representatives at a number of meetings seemed to know more than they ought to about Canadian post-war naval planning. When he confronted Nelles on the issue he saw his suspicions confirmed. He was, perhaps understandably, furious with Nelles and the naval staff, and viewed their machinations as an attempt to direct naval policy without government involvement. While he was unable to go back on the agreement without losing face, someone had to pay for what he viewed as a deception. True to form, he had Nelles removed as Chief of the Naval Staff and posted to London in a liaison capacity. In January 1945, Nelles was retired, at least in part due to his deception at QUADRANT. To add insult to injury, King had Nelles promoted to full admiral, but dated the promotion after the date of his retirement, so that his pension wouldn't increase.¹⁹³ Nelles had certainly paid dearly for his promotion of the post-war vision of the RCN.

Even before the war ended, however, it had become quite clear that the post-war period would be characterised by economy and that the post-war complement of 20,000 personnel would not be immediately realised. Instead, the Naval Staff was forced to accept the government's allowance for an "Interim Force" of 10,000 personnel of all

¹⁹² Douglas et al., *A Blue Water Navy*, pp 172-173.

¹⁹³ Sarty, "The Ghosts of Fisher and Jellicoe", pp 154-163. While the QUADRANT conference was not the only reason for the removal of Nelles as Chief of the Naval Staff, it was certainly a significant contributing factor.

ranks in the immediate post-war period.¹⁹⁴ The balance of the personnel serving in the RCN would be demobilised at the end of hostilities.

The personnel ceiling of 10,000 did not cause immediate panic among the members of the Naval Staff. It was, logically, assumed that the main problem facing the RCN at the conclusion of hostilities would be demobilising ninety per cent of the RCN, not retaining ten per cent for post-war service. The 10,000 personnel remaining in the RCN would form an effective nucleus on which the full post-war naval complement could be built. While this would, the Naval Staff estimated, take ten years to achieve, it would leave the RCN in good shape moving forward and would be able to achieve the Naval Staff's vision within a relatively short period of time.¹⁹⁵

The dropping of the atomic bombs in August of 1945 ended the war in the Pacific sooner than had been anticipated by the naval staff, and the groundwork for the construction for the post-war fleet was incomplete.¹⁹⁶ The process of demobilisation began before the RCN had had time to fully formulate policies by which serving personnel were to be induced to continue their service in the post-war period or to put into place any active campaigns to encourage such a continuation of service. This situation was exacerbated by the speed at which demobilisation occurred. Douglas C. Abbott, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, reported to the House of Commons that the reduction in strength of the RCN from nearly 100,000 personnel to 10,000 personnel would be complete by the end of March of 1946. To achieve this remarkable goal, 10,000 RCN personnel were being demobilised a month, and one major and two minor ships were being deCommissioned, de-stored and laid up per day, a

¹⁹⁴ Gimblett, "Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Seamen," p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

process which had begun shortly after V-J day.¹⁹⁷ The pace of demobilisation left the RCN scrambling to retain personnel in the absence of any real opportunity to plan for the numbers and technical specialties that would be required to run the post-war fleet.

While the RCN may have been disappointed with the required compromise on its post-war strength, the reality of demobilisation was to prove more disappointing still. As of 1 April 1946, the number of personnel had dropped to 696 officers and 4,111 ratings. This represented less than half of the authorised "Interim Force." To make matters worse, the vast majority of the experienced personnel who had been trained during the Second World War and had seen combat elected to leave the service rather than remain. For some the lure of post-war employment opportunities was just too much to resist.¹⁹⁸ For many of the officers, particularly those of the Volunteer Reserve, the war had been a temporary interlude in their chosen career paths. The vast majority of them had, before the war, been either engaged in or training for professional careers in, for example, education, medicine, law and business. These officers were also overwhelmingly (71.5%) well educated, most having attended or completed university prior to enlistment.¹⁹⁹ A career in the post-war RCN would have held very little appeal to them, and they would have been anxious to return to the careers to which they had dedicated so much time and effort. Having done their duty, these officers were understandably

¹⁹⁷ Hansard, First Session, Twentieth Parliament, October 2, 1945, p. 704; Gilbert Tucker, The Naval Service of Canada. Volume II Activities on Shore During the Second World War, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1953), chapter 17.

¹⁹⁸ Gimblett, "Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Seamen," p. 8; Tucker chapter 17.

¹⁹⁹ David Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data," in Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crichard eds. A Nation's Navy. In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity. (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 271-272. While Zimmerman's study is based on a relatively small sample size (only 1/3 of the records for Volunteer Reserve officers contained educational information (p. 258)) the numbers for education are so high as to render them, in all probability, representative.

determined to return to civilian life and to carve out for themselves a place in the post-war world.

Although the reasons for leaving the service were understandable, the departure of so many experienced personnel caused a grave problem for the RCN. The training of a seaman, even the most junior of ratings, was a process that took three or four years.²⁰⁰ To train the increasing number of technical specialists, particularly electricians and engine room personnel, took considerably longer.²⁰¹ The departure of so many experienced personnel meant that not only was the RCN desperately short of the number of personnel necessary to man its post-war fleet, but that it also lacked a cadre of trained and experienced men to train the new entries. To make matters worse, the higher pay grades for technical specialists in the supply, communication and engineering branches meant that new recruits tended to gravitate towards these branches and retained personnel tended to be members of these same branches. The main shortage of personnel, therefore was in the seaman's branch, that is the personnel responsible for many of the daily chores involved in operating a warship and the maintenance of its weapons and detection systems.²⁰² For a navy about to embark on its post-war mission, whatever that was to be, this was a completely untenable situation.

Some efforts were made to solve the problem, but they proved counter-productive in the long run. When the extent of the personnel loss became apparent, the RCN postponed the demobilisation of some trade groups past the February 1946 end date for the process. It was also decided to refuse to release from service those personnel who had enlisted in 1940 and 1941 for a seven year engagement. At the time of enlistment, of

²⁰⁰ Gimblett, "Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Seamen," p. 8.

²⁰¹ Tucker, chapter 17.

²⁰² Gimblett, "Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Seamen," p. 8.

course, those who had joined the RCN for a seven year engagement had assumed that, if hostilities ceased before the seven year period was up, they would be granted their release from service, in essence making the seven year enlistment the equal of the 'hostilities only' enlistments offered later in the war. They were to be sorely disappointed by the decision to require them to serve the full seven years, and due to both of these measures, morale in the RCN suffered. While the measures did slow down the haemorrhaging, they did nothing but postpone the issue. When the seven year enlistments eventually expired the vast majority of sailors left the service. In the mean time the bad feelings and poor morale that the steps had created spread throughout the fleet.²⁰³

In the midst of the internal and external challenges confronting the RCN in the post-war period, it was also faced with another major change in the form of a new Minister of National Defence. Brooke Claxton took over the Defence portfolio in early December 1946. With the exception of an excellent biography of Claxton written by David Bercuson, he has remained largely in the shadows of Canadian history. In his tenure as Minister of National Defence, however, Claxton would leave his indelible stamp on Canada's armed services and usher in a view that continues to influence Canadian defence policy.²⁰⁴

Brooke Claxton was born on 23 August 1898, the only son of A.G.B. Claxton and Blanche (née Simpson). A.G.B. Claxton was a reasonably successful Montreal lawyer and both he and Blanche were well connected in Montreal society. Due to his parents' position and his father's profession, Claxton's early life was not one characterised by privation, and by all accounts both of his parents were doting and involved. Claxton

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ David Jay Bercuson, True Patriot. The Life of Brooke Claxton, 1898-1960, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

attended the best schools, including Lower Canada College (then St. John the Evangelist's School) and McGill University.²⁰⁵

Claxton's studies, like those of many of his contemporaries, were interrupted by the First World War. In April of 1916, at the age of 17, he left McGill, where he had completed one year of his five year program in law, to take a Commission in the Victoria Rifles of Canada.²⁰⁶ After spending some time essentially on guard duty, Claxton began to despair of reaching the front before the war ended, and in January of 1917 he resigned his Commission in the Victoria Rifles and joined the Siege Artillery Draft (McGill University) as a ranker, eventually serving with the 13th Canadian Siege Battery (re-designated 10th Canadian Siege Battery in January 1918). Claxton arrived in France in March 1918, and he saw combat with the Battery until the conclusion of the war the following November. By all accounts Claxton was a good soldier, and he was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal for 'meritorious service.'²⁰⁷

While Claxton's active service lasted only approximately nine months, the First World War had a significant impact on his outlook both about Canada and about the Canadian military more specifically. The most profound impact of the war on Claxton was its instillation in him of a strong sense of Canadian nationalism. He very rapidly came to see Canada not as a pale image of Britain but rather as a proud and independent country which was different from Britain in definite but difficult to describe ways. In his memoirs he would comment that "it has always been, I believe, a demonstrable fact that those who put Britain before Canada in their hearts were [sic] doing a disservice not only

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-20.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 22-43.

to Canada but also to Britain.”²⁰⁸ His sense of Canadian nationalism, however, was based on a unique, and uniquely Canadian, destiny. It was not as such either anti or pro British or American.²⁰⁹ In his subsequent career Claxton would show himself to be a Canadian patriot, placing Canadian interests foremost in his decisions, and remaining sensitive to anything that smacked of subservience to British interests or the aping of British attitudes and institutions.

Claxton also formed a less than glowing opinion of military discipline as a result of his service. He noted that many of the officers seemed to relish the idea of catching the men committing minor offences and administering the punishments permitted by military law. On one occasion while the battery was training at Witley, when Claxton was corporal of the guard, he noted that there were 43 men in the cells at the beginning of his watch, but 54 when he completed it with no discernible reason for the increase other than a string of petty offences against the minutia of military discipline. His opinion of Canadian officers suffered a further setback at the end of the war. After the armistice, and having been engaged in heavy fighting during the last hundred days of the war Claxton received orders to put the enlisted men through gun drill for four hours every day, in order to “correct the faulty drill caused by service conditions.” The enlisted men balked at this order, as all that they really wanted to do was to go home. To defuse the problem, Claxton advised the enlisted men to fall in for drill and then advised the other NCOs to simply march the men off of the parade ground without mentioning or performing any gun drill. He assumed, correctly as it turned out, that the officers who had ordered the drill had no interest in observing its performance and would not notice if

²⁰⁸ Claxton Papers, Memoirs, MG32B5, Vol. 220, File 3, p. 282.

²⁰⁹ Bercuson, p. 59.

it was not carried out.²¹⁰ While in the latter case Claxton's actions averted a possible mutiny by the enlisted men, he must have viewed the order to perform gun drill after the cessation of hostilities as a particularly foolish one.

Claxton's experiences during the First World War would inevitably colour his views during the post-war period. For the remainder of his life he remained a committed Canadian nationalist and fought tirelessly to promote his view of Canadian interests and Canada's unique characteristics and position on the world stage. In Claxton's view this required the severance of the last institutional ties to Britain, and focusing on the unity and independence of Canada and her people.²¹¹ He also remained critical of military officers, particularly those of the naval variety, who believed that being officers made them leaders. Claxton held the view that being good leaders made men good officers. These attitudes would come into sharp focus in his dealings with the RCN and the Mainguy Commission decades later.

In the immediate post-war period Claxton began his journey into public service, seeing it as his duty to do so, given his education, background and participation in the First World War.²¹² He began this journey slowly, contenting himself with participation in what became known as the "Canadian movement." He was an active member of the Association of Canadian Clubs, the Canadian League, the League of Nations Society and the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. All of these groups met and discussed Canadian issues such as Canada's place in the world, French-English relations, and a variety of other subjects.²¹³ These activities satisfied his desire to participate in public

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 27-39.

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 8.

²¹² Ibid., p. 58.

²¹³ Ibid., chapter 4.

life while he concentrated his efforts on building up a successful law practice in Montreal and providing for his new and expanding family.

In both his professional life and through the clubs in which he was a member, Claxton came, by the late 1930s, to know a number of senior bureaucrats. Though his law practice, for example, he became acquainted with Arnold Heeney, and through Heeney he met, and eventually became very friendly with, J.W. Pickersgill, both of whom would eventually work in the Prime Minister's Office and provide Claxton with a conduit to Prime Minister Mackenzie King himself. Through his interest in the possibility of radio as a national unifying force, he met and got to know Leonard Brockington, who would become the first Chairman of the CBC, and would play a significant role in the Mainguy Commission.²¹⁴ When Claxton decided to formally enter federal politics in 1940 he was a successful and well connected man both socially and politically. These connections would serve him well for the remainder of his career in public life.

Claxton's rise to prominence in Canadian politics was rapid once he secured a victory in the 1940 general election for the riding of St. Lawrence-St. George in Montreal.²¹⁵ On 6 May 1943, as a rookie MP, he was appointed parliamentary assistant to the Privy Council (i.e. King),²¹⁶ and on 13 October 1944 he was named the Minister of National Health and Welfare, becoming the youngest member of cabinet.²¹⁷ Entering the post-war period, Claxton's political star was clearly on the rise, a fact that is more surprising given Claxton's tendency to be "extremely impatient, intolerant and

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 92-94.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 90.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

judgemental with those he either disagreed with or thought of as less principled than he.”²¹⁸ His political success was a tribute to his drive and ability if not his charisma.

Following a re-election victory in the 1945 general election, Claxton’s political prominence continued to grow. He attended the Paris Peace Conference as a Canadian delegate and came face to face for the first time with the leaders of the Soviet Union. Through his observations at the peace conference, he became convinced that the Communist Bloc and the West were destined to be irretrievably at odds. He became further convinced that the Soviet Union was not particularly interested in establishing and promoting a lasting peace in the post-war period.²¹⁹ These views would inform Claxton’s position throughout his career when it came to communists and the threat that they posed to Canadian society.

In December 1946 Claxton was named Minister of National Defence, replacing D.C. Abbott.²²⁰ Under Abbott, National Defence had begun the process of demobilisation with the end of hostilities. By default the goal of demobilisation was to create three smaller services capable of performing a number of different roles. As they had been during the war, however, the three services remained rivals for scant resources rather than partners in a common enterprise.²²¹ Given the unexpectedly sudden end of the war against Japan, it is hardly surprising that the planning process was somewhat ad hoc in nature. It would be Claxton’s task to bring some order to the chaos of demobilisation.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 150.

²²⁰ Abbott had replaced J.L. Ralston as minister in 1944 when Ralston resigned his position. The resignation is somewhat questionable as Ralston had supplied a letter of resignation earlier which had not been acted upon but was suddenly accepted long after its initial proffer when King and Ralston disagreed on the conscription issue. (Milner, *Canada's Navy*, p. 160).

²²¹ Ibid., pp. 159-160.

The Department of National Defence would be a very different place under Caxton than it had been during the Second World War, when each of the services had been represented by its own Minister. These Ministers, Angus Macdonald in the case of the RCN, represented the interests of their respective services in the competition for the resources needed to fight the war. In the case of the RCN, then, Angus Macdonald was very much the navy's minister in government and to a great extent allowed the Naval Staff to dictate naval policy. While the relationship was far from perfect, the RCN could count on MacDonald to lobby on its behalf and to protect its interests.²²²

When Claxton took over the defence portfolio, he came to the job with a very different mandate. Mackenzie King had decided in the aftermath of the war to emulate the approach being taken by the British government and appoint one minister responsible for national defence overall, and do away with service-based ministries. King also gave Claxton, as the new minister, specific directions as to what was expected of him. He was to "reassert government control" over the military, integrate the three services where possible, and save money as much as possible without sacrificing Canada's security. King also made Claxton aware of his strident opposition to aircraft carriers and his view that the RCN should be primarily a coastal defence force.²²³ With his marching orders in hand, Claxton proceeded to his new post determined to carry them out to the best of his ability.

While the budgets for the services had been, for all practical purposes, unlimited during the war years, in the post-war period austerity became the new focus. Claxton's

²²² Douglas et. al., No Higher Purpose, pp.144-150; Stephen T. Henderson, Angus L. Macdonald: A Provincial Liberal (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 95-121.

²²³ Captain (N) William Dolphin Gourlay Lund, "The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1945-1964," University of Victoria, unpublished PhD Dissertation, 1999, pp. 116-117.

first order of business was to cut the budgets of all three services as part of the overall government program to reduce military spending and increase spending on social programs designed to move Canada into a post-war society. D.C. Abbott, who had become the Minister of Finance after being replaced by Claxton at National Defence, demanded an immediate reduction of more than fifty per cent in defence expenditures for the 1947-1948 budget year. While there had been competition for resources during the war, the competition would become much more serious in the post-war period as the budgets allocated to the military became much more finite.²²⁴

Claxton's first order of business was to impose the stamp of his personality on the services and their chiefs, particularly those of the RCN. To accomplish this, his first act as Minister was to move his office into Naval Service Headquarters, which at the time was located in several temporary buildings on Elgin Street in Ottawa.²²⁵ By doing so, Claxton clearly indicated that, unlike Angus MacDonald, he would be directly involved in the daily operations of the RCN headquarters, and not simply a conduit for naval policies and requests. He also sought to impress on the RCN leadership the fact that he was arriving as a leader, and would not visit them as a supplicant, a position that must have been very clear to the RCN leadership as Claxton became a daily presence in their lives.

The process of moving itself was also revealing. While his presence in the building was not openly objected to, and he described his welcome as "warm," his recollection of the event in his memoirs is telling. When he arrived at his new offices, he was congratulated on "joining the Navy." Upon suggesting that the move could be

²²⁴ Lund, p. 117.

²²⁵ Claxton Papers, Memoirs, MG32 B5, Vol. 221, pp. 837-838.

accomplished with minimal disruption by “moving a few ‘partitions’” he recalled that “the naval brass fainted at the use of such a land-lubbery word as ‘partition.’ When they recovered they rose saluting in their quaint naval way saying ‘Bulkheads, sir, bulkheads.’”²²⁶ By his own admission, this demonstrated that the “Navy was in a different world from the army.”²²⁷ The description of the event, however, also indicates that while Claxton was prepared to acknowledge the unique culture and traditions of the RCN, he had a reasonably low opinion of them, and would not permit himself to be bullied by the naval chiefs. He would, in his subsequent career as Minister of National Defence, make this abundantly clear on numerous occasions and particularly in his handling of the 1949 "incidents."

With a new minister came new policies. While the RCN had been dreaming of a balanced post-war fleet capable of a variety of operations, Claxton had a very different view of what the post-war RCN would look like. Given the budgetary constraints that he faced in the aftermath of the Second World War, Claxton saw the RCN as more of a training organisation rather than as an operational fleet. The simple reality of the post-war budgetary allocation process was that there simply were not sufficient funds available to the RCN to upgrade its training and living facilities and to crew and maintain the post-war fleet that the naval staff had envisioned. Mackenzie King and his successors as Prime Minister, quite understandably, were anxious to switch their spending priorities from the military to social programs in order to speed recovery from the privations of

²²⁶ It is interesting to note that, as Lund points out, Claxton was being “theatrical for the benefit of posterity” in his description of these events. Naval personnel did not salute in buildings or while “undercover.” It is easy to read too much into this, but it can be seen as indicative of Claxton’s refusal to take the senior naval personnel and their unique culture seriously. (Lund, “The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy,” p. 150, note 34.

²²⁷ Claxton Papers, Memoirs, p. 838.

war. All of Canada's armed services would be affected by this decision, but none more than the RCN.²²⁸

The most immediate and obvious impact of the post-war budgetary constraints was, of course, in the size of the fleet that the government deemed sustainable. The extent of the new limitations became apparent in the preparation of the naval estimates for 1947. From the balanced fleet envisioned in the immediate post-war period, the RCN would be reduced to a "rump" of its former self. It would now consist of one light fleet carrier (HMCS *Magnificent* acquired in March of 1948), one cruiser and fewer than five destroyers. From Claxton's perspective this force would be sufficient to fulfil the RCN's new primary role as a training fleet. From an operational perspective, the RCN would occupy largely the same function that it had during the war, and would be specialised in anti-submarine, coastal defence and escort functions.²²⁹ The grumbling from the naval staff was loud both over the size reductions and over the absence of any clear operational mission beyond training reserves and escort duties.²³⁰ What was clear, however, was that there was new leadership in the RCN and that changes were going to come.

Claxton's changes did not end with a smaller fleet and a new mission. In an effort to make Canada's military more efficient, he also continued the process of unifying the command structures of the navy, army and air force and in rationalising the rank structures of all three, as King had instructed. This process had been started by Abbott and continued apace under Claxton's watch. Although the army and air force had quite closely harmonised their non-Commissioned rank structure in the immediate post-war period in line with the army's seven-tier rank structure, the navy had resisted this change

²²⁸ Bercuson pp. 151-154.

²²⁹ Lund, "The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy," p. 118.

²³⁰ Bercuson, pp. 167-179.

and retained its five-tier system. The chief difference between the two structures was that the army/air force had two levels for the sergeant (petty-officer) rank and two for the warrant (chief petty-officer) ranks. The navy initially resisted harmonising its rank structure as the naval staff believed that the traditional five-tier rank structure provided their personnel with the training and skill that produced good leaders. The naval staff felt that by having fewer non-Commissioned ranks, those promoted to them would have had the opportunity to develop the skills they would need to perform effectively in them.²³¹

The post-war changes in the military budgeting structure, however, caused the naval staff to reconsider its position. During the war each service had submitted its own budget for consideration by the government. The post-war move including all three services under the overall umbrella of the Ministry of National Defence meant that only one budgetary estimate would be submitted for all three services. Each service would then receive a share of the total amount granted. In terms of budgeting for personnel, however, this created an inequity. The three services would submit one estimate for the costs of personnel salaries and benefits. The amount eventually approved by the government, almost always less than the amount requested, would be then divided between the three services. With a larger number of non-Commissioned ranks, and consequently of non-Commissioned personnel, the army and air force received, at least in the view of the naval staff, a disproportionately large share of the budget for paying salaries as the army and air force would require more of the available funds just to maintain their existing structure. This realisation led the naval staff to move to an adoption of the seven-tier rank structure for non-Commissioned personnel in the 1946-1947 budgeting year. While there is no evidence that this change of mind resulted from

²³¹ Lund, "The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy," chapter 4.

Claxton's direct involvement, he would certainly have approved of and been pleased with the decision, as the navy thereby moved one step closer to unification with the other two services.²³²

While the decision to move to the seven-tier structure made sense in the short term, it had longer term ramifications that would prove significant over the long run. Unlike the army and air force, naval vessels had a finite personnel capacity. In short, there are only so many men that can effectively fit on a ship before they begin to get in one another's way. The institution of the new rank structure led to the promotion of a large number of leading and able seamen to the new junior non-Commissioned ranks, and the corresponding promotion of existing non-Commissioned personnel to more senior ranks. This combined with a dearth in new recruits entering the navy created a situation in which there were far too many non-Commissioned officers aboard RCN ships, and not nearly enough able and ordinary seamen. Given the crucial role of the able and ordinary seamen in performing many of the daily mundane tasks required in the running of a ship, this was not a tenable situation.²³³ To make matters worse, many of the personnel newly promoted to supervisory roles lacked the training and experience necessary to make them effective supervisors.

Another area in which Claxton's influence was keenly felt was in the area of naval education. Claxton believed that the traditional methods by which naval officers were educated was poorly suited for the post-war RCN. While undoubtedly well intentioned, Claxton was directly challenging the way in which the senior naval

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Gimblett, in his analysis of the situation aboard *HMCS Crescent*, demonstrates that by 1949 there were no leading or able seamen aboard *Crescent* and a huge surplus of junior non-Commissioned officers. Thus while there were more than enough supervisors, there were not nearly enough personnel aboard to do any of the actual work. (Gimblett, "Too Many Chiefs")

leadership had been trained and educated. It was, he believed, inadequate and in need of address.²³⁴

Since its inception the RCN had enjoyed a somewhat complicated relationship with the issue of the formal education of its officers, more particularly in terms of how much was required. The Naval Service Act, which founded the RCN as an institution in 1911, required the establishment of a naval college in Canada for the training of Canadian naval officers which was to be similar in structure and function to the Royal Naval College in England. The Royal Naval College of Canada (RNCC) was duly established and began its task of training future naval officers in 1918.²³⁵

The curriculum at the RNCC was designed to be completed in two years to be followed by service aboard RN ships to round out the training. It featured a variety of subjects including history, English, French and German in addition to mathematics and navigation. The most important course taught was seamanship, as the primary purpose of the RNCC was the training of naval officers who would serve afloat. Given the fact that the fledgling RCN was designed to parallel the RN, it is not surprising that RN methods and traditions dominated the RNCC. Following the formal portion of the training, the prospective naval officers would complete their education through a lengthy apprenticeship served aboard an active ship.²³⁶

The RNCC continued to operate until 1922. In that year, due to severe budget cuts, the government made the decision to close the facility and once again to rely on the

²³⁴ Bercuson, p. 181; William A. March, "A Canadian Departure: The Evolution of HMCS *Royal Roads*, 1942-1948," in Crickard, Huebert and Hadley eds. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 297-299; Claxton Speech to Senior Naval Officer's Conference, 1 November, 1949, MG32 B5 Vol. 199.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 299-300.

RN to be solely responsible for the education of Canadian naval officers. During its existence the RNCC trained one hundred fifty-eight officers. Of these sixty were still serving at the outbreak of war in 1939. They provided the nucleus around which the rapid expansion of the RCN was based, and it is hard to see how it would have been possible without them.²³⁷

In 1940, with the wartime expansion of the RCN, Admiral Nelles and the naval staff decided that the time was right to open a new naval college. The motivation behind this decision was largely based on self-preservation. Having witnessed first-hand the near extinction of the RCN, Nelles realised that in order to ensure survival after the war the RCN would have to remain a larger force with more ships and more shore establishments. Well trained officers would be needed to run them and Nelles and his colleagues believed that a naval college was necessary to achieve an appropriate level of training for Canadian officers. The war meant that the RCN could no longer rely on overburdened RN facilities for training and would have to conduct it domestically.²³⁸

As a result of Nelles' lobbying and Angus Macdonald's willingness to listen, HMCS *Royal Roads* was Commissioned in October of 1942. The new training establishment was to function much like the RNCC and would by necessity and by design be based on the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. Macdonald and the naval staff hoped that *Royal Roads* would continue to train Canadian naval officers for the foreseeable future.²³⁹

By 1945, however, problems began to arise. In October of that year questions were raised in Parliament concerning, among other things, the degree to which the RCN

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 300.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 301.

acted in conformity with the RN in matters of tradition and discipline.²⁴⁰ Since discipline and particularly tradition were learned in the naval college, the criticism was aimed directly at the system of naval education.

As a result of continual pressure, and because it meshed with his goals of creating a tri-service structure for the Canadian military, Claxton changed the orientation of *Royal Roads* away from its naval roots and towards a more general educational function for military officers. To this end, then, it was re-opened in September of 1947 as a combined RCN-RCAF training facility. Both the navy and air force supported the idea of getting trainees into service conditions as quickly as possible in order to maximise their useful service career. Both services therefore resisted the requirement of a university degree as a prerequisite for non-technical officers. By 1948 *Royal Roads* had again been transformed into a combined services college and was offering cadets, who were entering at a much later age than they had at the RNCC, an education that was the equivalent to that available at a university. Only cadets who had selected the executive branch for their service went to sea after two years.²⁴¹

Resistance to a formal educational structure and to the university degree as the base standard for education was not to say, however, that the RCN was in any way anti-intellectual. It is also an error to view the training structure as a mindless parroting of the RN. The reality is, of course, much more nuanced. In resisting the requirement of a university education for all officer cadets the RN was focusing its attention on the practical problem of manning an operational fleet as quickly and efficiently as possible.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 304.

²⁴¹ Both services were prepared to concede the point that officers in technically specialised branches like engineering would require more formal education and in many cases an undergraduate university degree. Ibid., pp. 307-309.

The cadre of experienced personnel that it had been relying on had not materialised as reserve officers re-entered civilian life. New officers were going to have to be trained from scratch, and for officers in non-technical areas the naval staff felt that the best way to learn how to run a ship was to run a ship. Thus, for non-technical personnel, senior officers felt that advanced formal education made little sense. The decision was made to focus on sea time over classroom time. In the circumstances this decision was rational and made considerable sense.²⁴²

²⁴² Commander Brian A. Costello, "Research in the Library vs. 'Two Years Before the Mast.' Reconciling the Navy, Formal Education and Officer Professional Development," (Unpublished Research Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

Soul Searching

In addition to the internal and external challenges in perception and policy which faced the RCN in the aftermath of the Second World War, there was mounting evidence in the immediate post-war period to suggest that morale within the RCN itself was failing rapidly. A critical manifestation was difficulty in recruiting and retaining personnel. It was also clear that the problems would have to be addressed if the RCN was going to remain combat ready and able to perform even the more limited role as a training cadre envisioned by Claxton. The manner in which Canada's senior naval leadership responded to these challenges would set the stage for the 'incidents' of 1949 and the Mainguy Commission that followed.

The first hint of trouble initially seemed to be reasonably innocuous. On 8 July 1947 Commander E.W. Finch-Noyes, the commanding officer of HMCS *Stadacona*, which was the main east-coast training establishment, reported a surprising reluctance of instructional personnel to attend a gunnery course offered in Britain: four of the six petty officers and chief petty officers eligible for the course had expressed a desire to withdraw from it. On 25 July 1947 a similar report was sent by Acting Captain D. L. Raymond, the Director of Weapons and Tactics, regarding the withdrawal of three of the six eligible

candidates for a gunnery course on the west coast.²⁴³ The officers involved were understandably alarmed that a course that was, in the words of Captain Raymond, "at one time...considered the peak of the seamen profession and was the goal of all gunnery personnel -- now...is not sufficiently compelling to draw 50% of the eligible candidates."²⁴⁴ This posed a serious problem for the RCN, as the instructors who refused the course had acquired their knowledge of gunnery during the war and it had since become considerably outdated with advances in technology. To compound the problem, the demands on instructors meant that they did not have time to upgrade their skills. To make matters worse, the shortage of gunnery instructors was symptomatic of an acute shortage of trained instructors in all branches of the navy.²⁴⁵

The reasons provided by the participants themselves for refusing the course were telling. Commander Finch-Noyes, who appears to have spoken to the men involved, identified three main reasons for the withdrawals. First, the gunnery course was scheduled to last at least one full year, and yet no arrangements were made to allow for the dependents of the married men attending the course to accompany them. Secondly, upon completion of the course, the candidates would enjoy considerably greater responsibilities in training and supervising their comrades, but would only receive a modest (\$8 per month) increase in pay, making the effort in taking the course hardly worth the financial reward. The final reason for the withdrawals was linked to the creation of armourers, who maintained rather than operated weapons, as a trade group

²⁴³ "Memorandum from C.O. HMCS Stadacona to Naval Secretary, 8 July 1947;" Memorandum from A/Captain D.L. Raymond to ACNS, CNP, D/CNP and OISCP, 25 July, 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

²⁴⁴ "Memorandum from A/Captain D.L. Raymond to ACNS, CNP, D/CNP and OISCP, 25 July, 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

²⁴⁵ "Memorandum from C.O. HMCS Stadacona to Naval Secretary, 8 July 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

within the RCN. Armourers had considerably less responsibility than gunner specialists, a higher trade group pay structure and were trained in Canada. Considering the circumstances it is no surprise that senior members of the lower deck chose that branch as a path of advancement.²⁴⁶ While the lack of enthusiasm for the gunnery course was not in itself a major crisis for the RCN, the senior naval leadership correctly interpreted it, when combined with the poor recruitment and retention numbers, as the harbinger of very serious difficulties.

In fact the memoranda written by Raymond and Finch-Noyes had sparked a flurry of activity at Naval Service Headquarters. Captain H.F. Pullen, the Director of the Naval Reserve, expressed his alarm in a memorandum of his own to the Chief of Naval Personnel dated 11 August 1947. He fixed the blame for the morale problems that appeared to be plaguing the RCN squarely on the new pay structure which had been recently introduced. In Pullen's view the new pay structure, with its differentiation between the "user" branch (i.e. those personnel who actually used the equipment) and the "maintainer" branch (i.e. the technical specialists who ensured that the equipment worked as it was intended) placed far too much emphasis on the "maintainers" by rewarding them with higher pay based on their technical ability. This was done at the expense of the "user" branch which was responsible for leadership and actually fighting the ship.²⁴⁷

On the same date Lt. Commander W.H. Wilson, the officer in charge of seamen personnel, penned his own memorandum to the Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel concerning the "low morale known to exist" in the RCN. While he did not specifically

²⁴⁶ "Memorandum from C.O. HMCS Stadacona to Naval Secretary, 8 July 1947"; "Memorandum from A/Captain D.L. Raymond to ACNS, CNP, D/CNP and OISCP, 25 July, 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

²⁴⁷ "Memorandum from Capt. Pullen to CNP, 11 August 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

identify the new pay structure as the problem, he argued that pay and working conditions were behind the problems both in maintaining morale and in recruiting personnel to fill the RCN's requirements. According to Wilson, the pay and working conditions in the RCN did not compare favourably with civilian jobs. Navy pay had not kept up with the high cost of living on both coasts, where conditions were still more difficult because of an acute housing shortage and the lack of naval quarters for married personnel.²⁴⁸ The loss of special allowances and badge pay and the lack of any travel assistance for personnel traveling home on leave, left the average sailor in a position at or near the poverty line. Wilson was prescient in pointing out that, because of the efforts by the men to earn more money, the structure of the RCN had trended towards a large number of higher rates, which left fewer people to perform the seamen's and domestic duties aboard ship. Thus, while the amount of work necessary for the maintenance and upkeep of the ship had remained the same, it was being shared by fewer and fewer of the junior personnel. This, Wilson suggested, was bound to be the source of problems.²⁴⁹

Commander William Strange, the Director of Naval Information, also weighed in on the morale issue. Strange, tasked with maintaining the public image of the RCN, was concerned with the potential impact of a collapse in morale on the RCN's recruiting efforts and more broadly on the general perception of the RCN as an institution. In a memorandum dated 12 August 1947, he correctly argued that maintaining a positive public image of the RCN was more difficult in the post-war world than it had previously been. During the war the purpose of the RCN was clear and the need to spend money on

²⁴⁸ James Frank Edward White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War," (unpublished PhD Dissertation, McMaster University, 1995).

²⁴⁹ "Memorandum to DCNP from Lt. Cmdr W.H. Wilson, 11 August, 1947," RG 24 Add 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

defence was unquestioned, but there was no obvious need for a capable navy post-war, not least because of the need to slash defence expenditures for economic recovery from the war.²⁵⁰ As there had been essentially no RCN to speak of in the inter-war years, the challenges of maintaining a public and institutional sense of purpose for the RCN and of encouraging spending on the naval defence of Canada were beyond the practical experience of Canada's post-war naval leadership.

What Commander Strange's memorandum made abundantly clear was that from a public relations perspective, the morale issue had to be addressed immediately. He pointed out that the "present condition of brittle, if not actually low, morale [could] not be concealed indefinitely," and expressed concern that the morale conditions in the RCN would become widely known. The *Montreal Standard* had, he warned, had written an article on the state of morale in the RCN but had been persuaded not to print it. He held out little hope that disclosure could be delayed indefinitely, and correctly cautioned that once the morale problems in the RCN became public knowledge, it would no longer be a matter of whether the reports could be refuted: irreparable damage would have been done by the reports themselves.²⁵¹

Commander Strange suggested that the RCN stop recruiting publicity based on a comparison between navy careers and civilian jobs. He argued that such a comparison was both impossible and unrealistic. Instead, he advocated placing more emphasis on patriotic duty and the sense of purpose that being a member of the RCN could provide. He noted that both the Royal Navy and the United States Navy used this approach with some success and that both of them experienced increased resilience as a result. He also

²⁵⁰ "Memorandum from D.N. Inf. to ACNS dated 12 August, 1947," RG Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

urged the production of an indoctrination booklet for new recruits which would both give the recruits an idea of what to expect from their officers and would reinforce for the officers their responsibility for the welfare of the men under their command.²⁵²

Strange further recommended that ongoing communication between the naval leadership and the lower deck be improved.²⁵³ He suggested the production of a monthly magazine for the lower deck. This magazine would include information from the naval leadership, presumably through the Office of Naval Information, concerning efforts being made to improve the living and working conditions in the navy. In addition the magazine would include news releases from smaller regional newspapers to allow the men of the lower deck to remain connected to their home-towns. In doing so, Strange believed, the sense of isolation experienced by men far from home would be alleviated.²⁵⁴

Lt. Cmdr. P.D. Taylor, the former Executive Officer of HMCS *Givenchy*, weighed in on the morale problems in a memorandum of 22 August 1947.²⁵⁵ Lt. Cmdr. Taylor's comments are of particular interest given his recent exposure to shipboard conditions and the views of the lower deck aboard *Givenchy*. He identified a number of causes of discontent among the members of the lower deck, agreeing with the comments made by his staff colleagues. Substandard living conditions, particularly aboard ship, the removal of the bonus pay for good conduct badges and the lack of travel concessions for personnel going on leave all combined, in his view, to create an overall decline in the

²⁵² "Memorandum from D.N. Inf. to ACNS dated 12 August, 1947," RG Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

²⁵³ In addressing the communication issue Strange's recommendations are in line with those made by Captain Pullen, who had recommended that information be provided to the fleet regarding efforts being made to improve service conditions, and saw the lower deck being kept in the dark as one of the causes of the morale crisis. ("Memorandum from Capt. Pullen to CNP, 11 August 1947" RG 24 Acc 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.)

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ HMCS *Givenchy* was an armed trawler that had seen service in the first world war and then been re-acquired by the RCN and served as an accommodation ship during the second world war.

morale of RCN personnel. This decline was exacerbated by the poor communication of naval policy to the sailors of the lower deck, so that even if steps were being taken to alleviate the problems, the members of the lower deck remained completely unaware of them. Interestingly pay issues, according to Taylor, were not an immediate issue.²⁵⁶

The failure to address the issues which concerned the men of the lower deck, or at the very least to keep them posted about the efforts being made, were having a grievous impact on the lower deck, in Taylor's view. The failures of the naval staff had led to a fear that the RCN was being permitted to lapse back into the doldrums of the inter-war period. The fear among the ordinary sailors was that the failures were symptomatic of governmental indifference to the RCN and that they were in the initial stages of a long slow slide into obscurity and irrelevance. This made it difficult for the RCN to both recruit new personnel and to retain those personnel who had either remained in the RCN or joined it after the war. If they were destined to be unemployed five or ten years down the road, then the pursuit of a naval career increasingly seemed to the men of the lower deck to be a waste of time.²⁵⁷ In the long run this situation would lead to the loss of trained and experienced personnel who could form a cadre on which a larger navy could be based if necessary. It would also limit the quality and ability of new recruits to whom a naval career would appear attractive.

One of the most comprehensive of the early reports was that prepared by Acting Captain D.L. Raymond, the Director of Weapons and Tactics, in response to instructions that had been sent to each staff director to comment on the possible causes of wastage in the RCN. He divided his report into eleven separate sections and provided comments and

²⁵⁶ "Morale in the Royal Canadian Navy" "Memorandum to DNPI, ACNS and CNP, 22 August, 1947," RG24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

recommendations on each. He also went so far as to include comments by his officers, who he had canvassed for their views, even in cases where he did not agree with them. All of this, Raymond hoped, would foster discussion and allow for the improvement of the "present critical situation."²⁵⁸

The first area addressed by Raymond, living conditions aboard ship, was one which had not been raised by any of the previous memoranda. Describing living conditions both ashore and afloat as being "of a low standard," and acknowledging that redesigning and modifying the ships currently in service was impractical, he argued that there were a number of things that could be done to improve the habitability of the ships. Given the general good health of the naval personnel serving afloat, these changes were not critical to the physical wellbeing of the crews, but were "serious...in as far as they affect morale [emphasis in original]. " The simple fact was, in Raymond's view, that the average rating was unable to maintain the level of cleanliness and enjoyed less appetizing food than he received at home. This had a corresponding negative impact on morale. "If the conditions of living are right ashore and afloat [however] the sailor will be happy in his lot."²⁵⁹

The solutions that Raymond proposed to improve the habitability of the ships started with a recommendation that requests for Alterations and Additions (As and As, that is changes to the equipment and structure of the ships) regarding habitability be more efficiently and positively considered. As it was, such requests invariably ran into a

²⁵⁸ "Memorandum from D.L. Raymond A/Capt. to ACNS, 5 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596, (14 pp.).

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

miasma of bureaucratic red tape and were never approved. This amounted to effectively ignoring habitability issues.²⁶⁰

Raymond recommended a number of minor alterations immediately be made to the ships which would pay dividends in morale improvement that would render any expense worthwhile. The bathroom facilities, for example, should be modernized to include stainless steel or porcelain wash basins with running water, replacing the tin basins to which hot and cold water had to be carried for every use. More adequate laundry facilities should be provided to replace the one washing machine and one dryer currently provided on cruisers for a crew of 700 men.²⁶¹ He recommended that efforts be made to improve kit stowage arrangements so that wet clothing (a common occurrence at sea), and particularly great coats, could dry properly and would not need to be replaced as often, at the expense of the rating. Finally, he argued for the provision of free movies to the men serving aboard, perhaps with the insertion of a short training film at the beginning to provide the maximum benefit to the RCN.²⁶² All of these recommendations were reasonably minor in nature in the grand scheme of things, but would render the life of the ordinary seaman much more bearable.

In a similar vein, Raymond suggested improving the communication of orders and instructions, which "pour out at a speed beyond most limits of understanding," to allow for a simpler communication of them to the officers and men they affected.²⁶³ He also recommended an expansion of the existing canteen system, both ashore and afloat, to increase the range of goods offered at prices affordable to the average Canadian sailor. In

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 1-3.

²⁶¹ It is safe to assume that the laundry facilities as described by Raymond would prove inadequate for a ship's company of any size.

²⁶² "Memorandum from D.L. Raymond," pp. 1-3.

²⁶³ Ibid., "Section G," p. 9.

this he looked to the American PX system as an example.²⁶⁴ Both of these measures were designed to make life in the navy a more affordable, less confusing, and generally more positive experience.

On a broader level, Raymond also addressed changes in the duties of the seaman which he felt made the position unattractive to new recruits. In addition to his ordinary duties in working the ship, the seaman also was required to act as the messman for the senior ratings, officers and others, to act as messenger when required, to perform most of the sweeping duties for the heads and bathrooms, and to perform other duties that he categorized as "dogs' body" work. While these duties had always existed aboard ship, the increase in number of the technical complement, who did not share in these duties, had grown in proportion to the seamen, leaving the vast majority of such duties to a small portion of the ship's complement. As Raymond eloquently summarized the problem: "it is difficult to explain to seamen and stokers that they are the only men in the complement possessed of the correct lack of intelligence, qualifying them for these duties." If morale were to be maintained, Raymond recommended that such duties be shared reasonably by all branches.²⁶⁵

Raymond's memorandum was the first of the early analyses to focus on the leadership issues confronting the RCN. In his own words:

Officers receive their training during their first five years of naval service and then are branded as good officers (meaning to a certain extent good leaders), promising officers (meaning they will become good leaders), or poor officers who will never be anything very much. The last group, the bad ones remain (no matter how bad) in positions of leadership until they reach the age of forty five [sic] at least. In this way the service may have poor leaders in positions where good leaders are required for as long as twenty years.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., "Section K," p. 12.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., "Section C," p. 4. Raymond was also in agreement with Denny's report recommending a review and restructure of the pay scale to achieve more parity between branches of the service.

His recommendation for those officers who lacked leadership ability was, not surprisingly, that they be removed from the RCN, or at the very least moved to positions where they would do no harm to the morale of the men.²⁶⁶ He further recommended that more be done to track the progress of new entries into the seaman branch in order to identify those men who possessed the leadership and other qualities required of an officer, with a view to regularising the promotion of men from the lower deck into positions of increasing responsibility. In suggesting this he advocated the view that every new entrant be considered as a potential officer until he proved himself incapable of being one.²⁶⁷ These ideas, while sensible from a morale point of view, were bound to be seen as revolutionary in some quarters.

Coincidentally, Raymond's views received immediate support from a number of first-hand observers of service conditions. On 5 September 1947, the Commanding Officer of the destroyer HMCS *Nootka*, Lieutenant-Commander L.G. Stirling, forwarded to the Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast (Rear-Admiral Taylor) reports from three individuals who had recently been at sea either aboard HMCS *Nootka* or her sister ship HMCS *Haida*. These men were Lt. R.W. Timbrell and Chaplain J.L. Graham, both in *Nootka*, and Surgeon-Lieutenant Robinson in *Haida*. Graham's report pointed out that the major problems affecting morale in the lower deck were the living conditions (including cramped quarters, the low quality and poor presentation of the food and the lack of a drying area for wet gear), the lack of travel warrants (meaning that the men could not afford to go home on leave) and inadequate married quarters ashore.²⁶⁸ These

²⁶⁶ Ibid., "Section E", p. 7.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., "Section F", p. 8.

²⁶⁸ "Report of Chaplain John Lorne Graham, RCNR, 20 August, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

concerns were echoed by Robinson, who included in his report the recommendation that dependents of naval personnel receive medical and dental care, and that a Post Exchange system be instituted.²⁶⁹ Lt. Timbrell also identified the poor living conditions as the chief issue for the men serving afloat, but added the lack of information about future plans and insufficient training in the "traditions, pride and responsibilities" of the RCN to the list.²⁷⁰ Thus, the first recommendations based on actual conversations with serving ratings matched very closely the problems identified by Raymond.

Of even more interest in the reports of Graham, Robinson and Timbrell are their comments on the effects of officer leadership on the morale of the men. Both Graham and Robinson were emphatic in stating that the officers aboard *Nootka* and *Haida* were not the source of any morale problems.²⁷¹ Timbrell in his letter is entirely silent on the issue of the officers' attitudes. For his part, Rear-Admiral C.R.H. Taylor, commanding officer, Atlantic coast, in a memorandum to the Naval Secretary in January 1948 dismissed the comments of both Graham and Robinson, finding both men to be "unqualified to offer any meaningful comment." It can, however, be argued that, when it came to commenting on the ships' officers, they may have in fact been the most qualified. It is highly unlikely that the men of the lower deck would have spoken to Lt. Timbrell, a serving RCN officer, freely and openly about the conduct of his colleagues. Surgeon-

²⁶⁹ "Memorandum from CO "Nootka" to COAC, 5 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁷⁰ "Letter from Lt. R.W. Timbrell to C.O. Nootka, undated," RG24 Acc. 83-84/167 Vol. 1596. While undated the letter itself refers to a cruise aboard *Nootka* from 30 July to 11 August, 1947 which allows it to be dated with reasonable accuracy.

²⁷¹ "Report of Chaplain John Lorne Graham, RCNR, 20 August, 1947;" "Memorandum from CO "Nootka" to COAC, 5 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596. This is particularly interesting, if not surprising, in the case of *HMCS Nootka*, because in May of 1947 she had experienced her own 'incident' when de-ammunitioning in the Bedford Basin. One box of .22 ammunition was found to be missing, and the C.O. Commander Rayner had ordered all leave stopped until it was found. The junior ratings, feeling, presumably, that this was unfair, locked themselves in their mess-decks and refused to emerge until the Executive Officer Lt.-Cmdr. D.L. "Tuffy" Macknight quickly talked them out of it. The incident was viewed as minor and never reported. (Lund, p. 134.) Apparently four months later there were no hard feelings aboard *Nootka* over the incident.

Lieutenant Robinson and Chaplain Graham, on the other hand, would have been viewed, because of their specialised positions, as almost outsiders. The men of the lower deck, then, would in all probability have been more comfortable speaking openly to Graham and Robinson about their grievances, regardless of Rear-Admiral Taylor's views of their qualifications.

The initial reaction of the RCN's senior leadership to the crisis in wastage was well intentioned but scattered and disorganised. Each of the various department heads and senior officers had their own ideas about what lay behind the morale crisis and how to solve it. While there were some disagreements on minor points, and while some sought to blame lack of discipline in the home or the wives of serving personnel,²⁷² what was clear was that considerable effort was being made to address the issues.

The chief difficulty in solving the problems was, however, the simple fact that nobody had really asked the men of the lower deck what they thought the problems were. As Acting Captain G.A. Worth, the Director of Signals, pointed out in a memorandum of 16 September 1947, the Naval Staff was out of touch with conditions afloat, with no effective way of gaining the information they needed about the living conditions aboard ship. His recommendation of the appointment of an Inspector General of the Navy,²⁷³ while unquestionably a good idea in the long term, was not something that would help to solve the immediate problem.

While a detailed survey of the lower deck may not have been possible, some of the confusion was alleviated by a detailed memorandum prepared by Rear-Admiral Houghton who was the vice-chief of the Naval Staff. This memorandum distilled the

²⁷² "Memorandum by DCNP to CNS, 9 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁷³ "Memorandum to ACNS from A/Capt. G.A. Worth, 16 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596, (3 pages).

recommendations made by the various division chiefs and was designed to provide a starting point for solutions. In his handwritten notes accompanying the memorandum, Vice-Admiral Houghton emphasised the urgent nature of the problem. He acknowledged that "action in the matter [of morale improvement] has been very slow" and hoped that the collation of the various reports would help to hasten a solution.²⁷⁴

Houghton's report was as comprehensive as it was possible to make it without soliciting a direct contribution of the men of the lower deck, and incorporated many of the recommendations made by the senior naval staff through their various memoranda. There are, however, a number of additions which are Houghton's alone and which either expand upon the recommendations of others or are new ideas that had not previously been raised. In presenting his findings, Houghton divided his comments into four broad sections: (i) instability in the service as part of the "normal aftermath of war;" (ii) pay and allowances; (iii) post-war changes in service conditions; and (iv) the training of officers and men.²⁷⁵ It is worth considering each of these in some detail.

One of the problems arising with the end of hostilities was a shortage of decent housing for married ratings. In many cases "ratings and their families are living in upstairs garrets with bathroom privileges and no culinary facilities other than a hot plate." This, combined with the frequency of postings of personnel to different areas of the country, led to pressure being exerted on naval ratings to obtain their discharge from the service. While he acknowledged that the service could do nothing directly to alleviate

²⁷⁴ "Letter to CNS from VCNS, 29 September, 1947," RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596, (1 page).

²⁷⁵ "The Morale of the Navy" RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596, pp. 1-2.

the dissatisfaction of these "young wives," he recommended an increase in the housing allowance for married ratings as an effective measure to address the problem.²⁷⁶

In a similar vein, Houghton emphasised the poor living conditions throughout the RCN , both ashore and afloat, which he argued was a particular difficulty given that the ratings had been "repeatedly" assured that they had been brought into line with civilian conditions.²⁷⁷ The cheerfulness with which the men of the lower deck were prepared to put up with privations in time of war no longer appertained in the post-war period, and some urgent action was necessary if the dissatisfaction was to be contained.²⁷⁸ Failure to do so would not only reduce the morale of the serving sailors, it would also exacerbate the retention and recruiting problems the RCN was experiencing.

One of the areas in which Houghton's memorandum was in accord with those of the department heads was in the area of messing facilities. He strongly favoured the cafeteria-style messing arrangements used by the United States Navy. While this was impractical in the ships as they were configured at the time, he recommended that it be incorporated in future construction. While the change represented a break from the tradition of the Royal Navy, Houghton was not wedded to that tradition and argued that the cafeteria system was more suited to the expectations and tastes of Canadian ratings. He also pointed out that such a system had been successfully implemented in the RCN's larger shore establishments and to a limited extent aboard HMCS *Warrior*.²⁷⁹ Houghton at least, who as a senior officer had received his early training with the Royal Navy, was prepared to consider changes to the RCN's way of doing things that defied RN tradition.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3. See also White "Conscripted City," particularly chapter 8.

²⁷⁷ Houghton did not specify the source of these "repeated" assurances.

²⁷⁸ "The Morale of the Navy" RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596, p. 4.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

Houghton agreed with earlier recommendations concerning laundry facilities and facilities for the stowage of kit, particularly greatcoats. He also agreed with the comments made concerning the washing and bathing facilities for the men. He expressed frustration that requests for improvements in that area had "been turned down consistently for reasons unknown through apparently some curious theory of economy." He recommended the immediate provision of tiled washrooms with hot and cold running water. It was unreasonable to expect the ratings, he argued, to take pride in their appearance and their uniform when it was virtually impossible to keep both themselves and their kit adequately cleaned.²⁸⁰

Overall Houghton's report is a model of objective synthesis. While there were a number of questionable conclusions and recommendations made in the various reports he considered, he included them regardless of his personal views. What the report most clearly demonstrates, however, is the desire of the RCN to identify and address the growing morale crisis which was manifesting itself in the failure of serving personnel to continue their service after their enlistments expired and to seek opportunities for advancement in the RCN. In a system which lacked a centralised structure designed to address service conditions, the exercise was by necessity scattered and at times barely coherent. What is clear is that an effort to identify the issues was clearly and energetically being made.

The response of Vice-Admiral Horace Grant, the CNS, was cautiously supportive. In his handwritten notations, Grant indicated his agreement with most of the recommendations made. Prior to passing them on up the line to the minister, however,

²⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Grant indicated his desire to first pass on his own preliminary paper.²⁸¹ While this appears to be a curious statement given the completeness of Houghton's report, a reading of the 'preliminary report' in question immediately clears up Grant's motives.

Grant's report of 8 October, 1947, received by Claxton's office the next day, began innocuously enough. It identified the chief causes of discontent, including issues with pay and the trade group structure, the quality of accommodation and the travel cost issues. The report also confirmed the construction of new and improved accommodation ashore in the 1948-1949 naval estimates. He also acknowledged that habitability afloat would have to await new construction, which while appearing reasonable, did clearly indicate that new ship construction was something that the RCN would request and sooner rather than later.²⁸²

At this point, however, Grant's memorandum becomes significantly more sinister. Grant characterised the crowded conditions aboard RCN ships and lack of amenities as a good breeding ground for discontent, "particularly if fostered, as there is reason to believe, by paid agents." He went on to argue that the elimination of said paid agents could only be achieved by the "loyalty of the men themselves and in the absence of a higher living wage it [was] essential to consider other amenities."²⁸³ Grant's reference to 'paid agents' was, of course, a thinly veiled reference to communists and was designed, given Claxton's well known anti-communist position, to get the Minister's attention, and perhaps to frighten him into loosening the purse strings.

²⁸¹ "The Morale of the Navy," 29 September, 1947, RG24, Acc 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁸² "Memorandum from HTW Grant, CNS, to Brooke Claxton, Minister of National Defence," 8 October, 1947, RG24, Acc 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁸³ Ibid

The most curious thing about Grant's 'paid agent' argument is that he appears to have created it out of thin air and with no supporting evidence. The idea that paid agents were somehow responsible for sowing discontent appears only in Grant's memorandum and is never mentioned in the hundreds of other pages of notes, letters, memoranda and documents concerning morale in the RCN. It appears that the idea had completely failed to occur to any other senior naval officer. While it is impossible to assess why Grant included the argument in his memorandum to Claxton, some reasonable speculation is possible.

Grant, like the rest of the naval staff, dreamed of a blue-water navy for the post-war period. Achieving this dream would, of necessity, require the construction of new vessels which, with declining military budgets, had become increasingly unlikely. By linking habitability to morale, and indirectly to new construction, Grant hoped that Claxton would be sufficiently alarmed to cause him to view the construction requests that the Naval Staff was going to propose more favourably. In these circumstances it made perfect sense that Grant send his own 'preliminary' report to Claxton before forwarding Houghton's report, which made no mention whatsoever of 'paid agents.' Apparently the lesson of Percy Nelles' attempt to end-run the political leadership had not been properly learned by the Naval Staff.

Perhaps to bolster their position the Naval Staff, in November of 1947, Commissioned another report on morale issues affecting the RCN. Unlike prior reports which had been submitted on an ad-hoc basis by well-meaning officers acting on their own initiative, the new report would be a comprehensive study of morale issues and would be closely directed by the Naval Staff. Commodore A.M. Hope, the commanding

officer of HMCS *Stadacona*, was chosen to prepare the report, which was to be submitted to the Naval Staff for consideration rather than being widely circulated.²⁸⁴

The terms of reference under which Commodore Hope was to operate were extremely broad. First he was to examine all of the reports that had been prepared to date and to make recommendations as to the improvement of the morale and welfare of the officers and men. Second he was to examine the trade structure and recommend alterations which would be acceptable, although not applicable, to the Army and the Air Force. In undertaking his investigations, Commodore Hope was authorised to visit any naval establishment, and interview any personnel he thought necessary, and co-opt the services of any officer that he believed would be helpful.²⁸⁵ Unlike his colleagues, then, Commodore Hope was to be given the broadest possible mandate in getting to the bottom of the morale issues plaguing the RCN.²⁸⁶

After what can only have been an extremely busy two months, Commodore Hope submitted his completed report to Vice-Admiral Grant on 12 January 1948. The report provided the first direct evidence of input from both junior and senior ratings and officers on both coasts. Hope also provided a useful synthesis of prior reports and, perhaps most importantly, an objective pair of fresh eyes. Hope had just returned from a two-year

²⁸⁴ "Terms of Reference for Commodore A.M. Hope," 24 November, 1947, RG24, Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ In the interim a further report had been submitted to the Naval Staff by Lt. Crone, the Personnel Selection Officer at *HMCS Naden*, which was critical of both the selection process for new entries and the training received by Divisional Officers. In both cases he believed that more rigorous selection processes should be employed to ensure that personnel were not permitted to either enter the RCN or to become Divisional Officers. Instructor Lieutenant Crone, "An Analysis of Morale in the Royal Canadian Navy," RG24, Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

secondment with the Royal Navy²⁸⁷ and was new to the issues he was investigating. As such he had no particular ideas or solutions to advocate.

Hope divided his findings into three broad sections: officers, senior ratings and junior ratings. With regard to the officers, he began with the assertion that the backbone of the service was the cadre of senior officers who had served in the pre-war navy. Their small numbers had, however, drawn the vast majority of them into administrative positions, which, he argued, operated to the detriment of the service. While the group of junior officers who had entered the service during the war and the immediate post-war period were gradually being absorbed into the naval culture and learning their responsibilities with regard to the ratings under their command, they received too little guidance from more senior officers. The senior officers in turn were too buried in paperwork to mentor the junior lieutenants.²⁸⁸ In Hope's view, then, the problem was not that the junior officers were callous as to the welfare of the lower deck, but rather that they had too few senior officers to provide guidance about how the welfare of the ratings could be protected and promoted effectively.

Among the senior ratings (able seamen and leading seamen) the two main problems that arose were pay and living conditions. Hope focused on the almost universal dissatisfaction with the extant trade group structure and support for its abolition. The problems caused by the reorganisation of trade groups had, he found, been exacerbated by the withdrawal of travel concessions and pay for good conduct badges. This combination left many senior ratings, particularly married ones, having to work

²⁸⁷ "Morale, Welfare and Trade Grouping in The Royal Canadian Navy," 12 January 1948, RG 24, Acc 83-84/167, Vol. 1596. He commented that morale in the RCN, while poor, was better than it was in the RN, as the RCN was entirely voluntary and had an easier time adapting to the post-war reality than the RN, which still had conscripts. This must have made Grant feel at least a little better about himself.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

second jobs simply to make ends meet. Similarly, for ratings on sea duty, there was a taxable benefit for their living allowance, which seemed absurd to the ratings, given that their living space consisted of eighteen inches of hammock space and a place at a table.²⁸⁹

In terms of living conditions, two findings stand out in Hope's report. First the majority of senior ratings complained about overcrowding and cramped living spaces aboard ship. Hope concluded that this was due to an increase in the amount of technical equipment being carried in hulls never designed to carry it, combined with the increasing number of technical specialists aboard to operate the new equipment. The overcrowding issue, in Hope's view, was urgent and needed to be addressed immediately.²⁹⁰

The other major complaint from the senior ratings was, predictably, the food. While the quality of the ingredients was good, the quality and quantity of the meals was, in Hope's words, "far from popular." It was so unpopular that many of the senior ratings he interviewed gave credence to the "unsubstantiated" rumour that the food was better in the Halifax jail than in the RCN.²⁹¹ It appeared that navies did in fact sail on their stomachs.

The morale issues raised by the junior ratings were, for the most part, similar to those of their seniors, but Hope did find some unique elements particular to the junior ratings. Many of the junior ratings, particularly new entries, came from "war-broken homes," and were unused to discipline generally, let alone service discipline. They therefore resented taking orders from officers and petty officers that they viewed as incompetent, and tended to express that resentment more openly than the senior

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

ratings.²⁹² The senior ratings had learned, through experience, how to deal with bad officers, the juniors had not.

The other issue for the junior ratings was, not surprisingly, pay. Again, however, there were qualitative differences in the complaints of the junior and senior ratings. For the junior ratings the chief problem with the pay scale in the RCN was that it did not compare favourably with the pay for similar jobs in ‘civvy street.’ While the pension and job security options of a naval career were superior to those in the civilian market,²⁹³ the junior ratings were concerned with the more immediate differences in pay between the RCN and similar jobs in a prosperous and expanding civilian marketplace.²⁹⁴

For married personnel across all three groups Hope discovered another set of issues that undermined morale. Hope found that the quality of accommodation for married personnel was poor and expensive compared to the accommodations provided both in general and when compared with the married quarters available for personnel in the army and air force. To make matters worse, there were not enough married quarters available to meet the demand, leaving many service families at the mercy of civilian landlords who charged exorbitant rates for what could generously be called substandard accommodation. To make matters worse no medical care was provided for the dependents of service personnel and they were forced to shop for groceries in an expensive marketplace. The failure of the government and the RCN to deal with these

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ This is something that older senior ratings would have appreciated more than the younger junior ones.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

issues led to the pervasive sense that the RCN did not care about the welfare of its married personnel.²⁹⁵

Hope's examination of the trade group structure made plain its universal unpopularity among service personnel, particularly in the seamen's branch. The poor pay scales led many senior ratings to move to the newer trade groups where the pay was better, as the highest trade group rating was only available to technical and artisanal specialists and was not available to seamen.²⁹⁶ This movement led to a shortage of experienced ratings in the seamen's branch, and therefore fewer people to teach new entries the seamanship skills necessary to effectively operate the RCN's ships.

To make matters worse, the trade group structure was having a negative impact on the division of labour aboard ship. Members of the technical and artisanal branches were increasingly occupied with the specific and specialised tasks and performing fewer and fewer of the routine tasks, such as painting and general maintenance. The general maintenance of the ships, then, fell increasingly to the seamen's branch, out of all proportion to its numbers. If the situation was not addressed, Hope feared, the seamen's branch would become nothing more than "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the technical branches.²⁹⁷ This would further deepen the resentment already felt by the men of the seamen's branch and would make recruitment of new members into this branch increasingly difficult.

The discontent caused by the trade grouping system was, Hope found, so serious that he believed that breaking "away from the present inter-service system...[was] a **must**

²⁹⁵ Hope notes that there was no discontent with accommodations evident at the Dartmouth Air Station which, due to the exigencies of geography, had married quarters which were abundant and newly constructed. Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

"[emphasis in original]. There were, as he saw it, two possible alternatives. First was a revision to the traditional system of pay and allowances, including the wartime rank and pay structure. The second alternative was to adopt a system similar to the one used by the United States Navy. Under that system all recruits entered as ordinary seamen and were trained for technical specialisation based on interest and aptitude, but only after they had learned the seamanship and daily tasks of the seamen's branch. The recruits were not divided at that point based on trade group, nor was pay calculated on that basis. Pay and other compensation were only based on the substantive rates. Hope himself favoured the second alternative as one that was "safe, sure and popular and achieves the object with the minimum of paperwork."²⁹⁸

Attached to Hope's report as an appendix was a report prepared by Admiral M.M. Denny of the Royal Navy. Denny had also been charged with investigating morale and service conditions and Hope had become familiar with his report while on secondment to the RN. Hope saw a great deal of similarity between the morale issues of the RN and those of the RCN. He believed that the RCN was dealing with them comparatively well, but that there was much to be learned from the experience of the RN.²⁹⁹

Denny's report was, like those prepared by Canadian naval officers, an unsolicited report. It was widely distributed to the RCN's senior leadership.³⁰⁰ The comments were so detailed that it would come to be widely referred to as the "Denny Report" by senior naval leadership; a designation ordinarily only used for studies specifically requested by the Naval Staff. The fact that Denny would spend the time and

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ "Morale, Welfare and Trade Grouping in the Royal Canadian Navy," 12 January, 1948, RG 24 Acc.83-84/167 Vol. 1596, pp. 8-18.

³⁰⁰ "Reconstruction of Naval Personnel," 29 August, 1947, RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

energy required to prepare a memorandum of such size and scope was indicative of the importance he placed on the morale crisis. His concern was not unfounded.

Denny began with a general criticism of the way personnel decisions had been made by the naval staff in the immediate post-war period. He correctly pointed out that during the process of demobilisation, personnel issues in the RN had been dealt with on a crisis by crisis basis. Policy decisions were made quickly and without adequate consideration of their overall impact on the efficiency of the RN as a whole. No effort had been made to get to the root of the difficulties being experienced in attracting and retaining personnel, at least in part due to the departmental system of naval staff organisation. Policy directives were not responded to in a coordinated and rational way, in Denny's view. There was no central body that dealt with the implementation of personnel policy and ensuring that the implementation of personnel policy did not collide with the implementation of other policy directives.³⁰¹ The result was the creation and implementation of policies on an ad hoc, and frequently contradictory, basis.

Very little time was spent by Denny discussing things like living conditions and travel allowances, which he seems to have viewed as peripheral to the problem. He argued, instead, that the cause of the morale problems was the pay code. At its core, Denny believed that the changes to the pay code for naval personnel, and the concomitant creation of new trade groupings to match those in the army and air force, was an attempt to balance "two fundamentally antagonistic views."³⁰² These views boiled down to the question of whether the pay code should drive the structure of the fighting organisation in the name of harmonisation, or whether the pay code and service structure should function

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

as the servant of fighting efficiency. Denny came down squarely on the side of fighting efficiency as the primary concern of the RN, and called for a review of the pay code to make it more reflective of the naval organisation which was necessary to ensure a fleet that was at maximum efficiency as a fighting force.³⁰³ By abandoning the traditional pay structure, the RN had been forced into a position in which the pay structure left it short of personnel necessary to adequately fight and maintain its ships.

Denny saw no sense in the distinction being drawn in the pay code and the organisational structure aboard ship between users of equipment and maintainers. The distinction between the two functions led to many ratings, by virtue of technical specialisation, being exempt from participating in the daily work routine about ship. He argued that the user/maintainer distinction should be eliminated and that all ratings should participate in the daily chores and tasks required in running a ship. This would create a more efficient fighting organisation and eliminate artificial distinctions between ratings. In addition he recommended the creation of the Quartermaster's Branch to focus on seamanship and leadership as distinct specialisations. He referred with approval to the practice prevalent at the time in the United States Navy, in which the pay received by the sailor was based only on the substantive rate of the individual, with the aim being the creation of equal conditions of service and prospects in every branch of the service.³⁰⁴

The similarities between the issues described by Admiral Denny as confronting the Royal Navy and those being experienced by the RCN are remarkable. At any point in his report Denny could have been writing about the RCN and Denny's observations were certainly relevant to the RCN's situation.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

Vice-Admiral Grant saw in Hope's report the opportunity to revisit the rank and trade group structure that had rankled for so long. On 24 January 1948 he fired off a memorandum to Brooke Claxton requesting his "concurrence" to the appointment of Captain Peers to strike a committee to examine the issue of pay and advancement and to reorganise the extant structure if necessary. It was clear, Grant argued, that the attempt to have a parallel pay and advancement system for all three services had failed after a twelve month trial. Morale was suffering. Grant proposed the inclusion of a representative of the USN on the committee, as well as a Treasury Board member. He further proposed that the USN approach to pay structure be used as a model for discussion.³⁰⁵ Grant believed that he had to move quickly to address a problem that was becoming serious both in terms of both morale and operational capability. Grant's response was no simple knee-jerk defence of naval tradition, as is evident from his willingness to consider American alternatives, but was driven by his concern for the RCN as a whole and for its future effectiveness.

The ministerial response to Grant's proposal was cool at best. The Deputy Minister of National Defence, Charles Mills Drury, recommended the outright rejection of Grant's "request" for a committee to "explore" naval pay and advancement, arguing that the government had only just finished harmonising the pay structures, and that there was no point reconsidering the principle of harmonisation unless the government was willing to do so as a matter of policy. He also argued that it was "impractical" for one service to act alone and that the Army and Air Force were fine with the structure.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Memorandum to Minister from Vice-Admiral Grant, 24 January, 1948. RG24, Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

³⁰⁶ Memorandum from Deputy Minister of National Defence to Minister of National Defence, 31 January, 1948. RG24 Acc. 83-84/167, Vol. 1596.

In fact, Grant had not made a "request" at all and had definitely not asked for permission to form a committee, but rather for Claxton's "concurrence" in its formation. Similarly the proposed committee was not, if Grant's memorandum is read carefully, to explore re-structuring; it was to achieve it. Given that both the Minister and Deputy Minister had been lawyers, a profession in which concise and precise language is valued, the differences in phrasing between Grant's memorandum and their response were in all probability deliberate. While the differences appear minor on the surface they are indicative of a running battle being fought between the Naval Staff and the Department of National Defence over the political control of the navy and its future. Grant would have to continue to fight this battle in addition to dealing with the myriad other issues that appeared to be plaguing the RCN. His position was not one to be envied and neither Grant nor the Naval Staff, it appeared, was prepared to go down without a fight.

As a mark of the man, and regardless of the cool reception that his memorandum had received, Grant persisted. At a 27 January 1948 meeting of the Naval Board received their agreement to the terms of reference for the formation of a committee to review advancement and conditions of service in the RCN. The mandate of the committee was to report as to why the extant Trade Group system was unsatisfactory to the RCN; to report on whether the service would be best served by a system which "facilitated" equality of pay and advancement to men of all branches of the RCN; and whether a system similar to that employed by the USN would be an appropriate model. The guiding principles that the committee was to rely on included the desire to increase the specialisation of the seamen's branch, and that the 'user' duties aboard ship should be more equitably shared between the technical and seaman's branches. The committee was

to be established and chaired by Commander Peers.³⁰⁷ The establishment of the committee was a clear signal to the Department of National Defence, and Claxton in particular, that in this instance Grant and the Naval Staff were not prepared to take 'no' for an answer.

By March, Peers' committee³⁰⁸ had already prepared its first interim report. The Committee concluded that the dissatisfaction with the system was the result of three main factors. Firstly the navy was more rigid in its application of substantive rates and trades than were the Army and Air Force. Secondly, the system did not recognize certain groups, such as Able Seamen, in the trades structuring. Thirdly, the trade group structure did not account for particular naval specialisations. The third factor led to situations in which some naval personnel would have qualified for two or more trade groups under the Army and Air Force structures, but were only paid for one.³⁰⁹ The speed with which the Committee apparently investigated and arrived at these preliminary conclusions is indicative of their long familiarity with the issues. A suspicious mind would argue the conclusions were the ones that they were expected to draw.

Identifying the problems and solving them, however, proved to be two entirely different things. The trick was going to be to make changes that would fit into Claxton's mandate of inter-service harmonisation of pay scales. Peers and his colleagues did this very cleverly, arguing in their second report that the problem was not that the naval pay scales needed to be in some way unique, but rather that the initial harmonisation in 1946

³⁰⁷ Minutes of the 237th meeting of the Naval Board, 27 January, 1948. DHH 81/520/1000-100/2, Box 27 File 4.

³⁰⁸ The committee consisted of Captain A.F. Peers, Captain (S) R.A. Wright, Commander (E) J.B. Caldwell, Lieutenant-Commander R.C. Hennessy and Lieutenant-Commander B.E. Gaynor ("Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Advancement and Conditions of Service Committee," 23 February 1948, RG 24 Vol. 8091, File 1279-17.)

³⁰⁹ "Interim Report: Committee on Advancement and Conditions of Service," 1 March, 1948, RG 24 Vol. 8091, File 1279-17.

had been done incorrectly, leading to the RCN becoming the lowest paid service. The essence of the argument was that the Army and Air Force simply had more ranks, particularly among the non-Commissioned officer ranks, than the Navy. Thus when the systems were harmonised a number of naval ratings who were filling the same functions as Army and Air Force non-Commissioned officers, were left out of the calculation. The Committee recommended the implementation of an eight rank structure by creating, essentially, additional grades of seaman and petty officer to bring the naval system more into line with the realities of the Army and Air Force.³¹⁰ This conclusion would allow Claxton to make the changes required while remaining true to his policy of inter-service consistency. It appears that the idea of replicating the practice of the US Navy had fallen overboard, as it was not a factor in Peers' interim reports.

The Committee's recommendations were sent for comment and approval to the senior officers on both coasts and to the C.O. of HMCS *Magnificent*. They were also sent to Claxton for his views.³¹¹ All three senior naval officers approved the changes, but all three recommended caution in advising naval personnel of the proposed changes until all of the details had been worked out and all of the enabling regulations had been drafted.³¹² This would, in hindsight, prove to be an unfortunate recommendation.

Claxton, however, was not prepared to wait for the comments of the senior members of the RCN, perhaps reflective of his position that, while he was prepared to take advice from the Naval Staff, all decisions would be his. In June of 1948 he

³¹⁰ Committee of Advancement and Conditions of Service Interim Report No. 2, 19 April, 1948. RG 24 Vol. 8091, File 1279-17.

³¹¹ Memorandum Re: Organisation of RCN Personnel and Pay Structure from Naval Secretary to FOAC, FOPC and C.O. HMCS *Magnificent*, 12 June, 1948. RG 24 Vol. 8091, File 1279-17.

³¹² Memorandum "Reorganization of the RCN Personnel and Pay Structure," 19 July, 1948 from FOPC (Mainguy) to Naval Secretary; Memorandum "Re: Organization of the RCN Personnel and Pay Structure" from FOAC (per Hope) to Naval Secretary. RG 24 Vol. 8091, File 1279-17.

requested formal approval of the new rating structure.³¹³ In October the changes were approved by the Treasury Board.³¹⁴ The senior naval officers were advised of the changes a few days later.

While this appeared to meet the requirements of the Naval Staff, there was a catch. For 'administrative reasons' the implementation of the new structure was to be delayed until 1 February 1949 with pay adjusted to 1 July 1948.³¹⁵ Unfortunately it was promulgation of the new structure, rather than just implementation as had been suggested by the naval staff, which was delayed until February of 1949.³¹⁶ The reason for this change is unclear and could have been the result of a simple misunderstanding. What is clear is that, as a result, the men of the fleet, and particularly those of the lower deck, were unaware of the pending changes to the pay structure at a time when morale in the fleet continued to decline. While the 'administrative reasons' for the delay were no doubt legitimate, the failure to promulgate the changes at the earliest possible date meant that progress being made in resolving the pay issue was to be kept secret from the very men who would be most interested in knowing about it, allowing a festering problem to grow even worse.

An examination of the records makes it abundantly clear that throughout the immediate post-war period the RCN was acutely aware of its morale problems, and was making a concerted effort to address them. In doing so they were faced with a number of difficulties that would make the solutions difficult if not impossible. Perhaps the greatest

³¹³ Letter from Brooke Claxton to His Excellency the Governor General in Council, 26 June 1948. RG 24 Vol. 8091 File 1279-17.

³¹⁴ Letter from P. Heeney, Clerk of the Privy Council, 13 October 1948. RG 24 Vol. 8091 File 1279-17.

³¹⁵ Naval Message, 18 October 1948. RG24 Vol. 8091 File 1279-17.

³¹⁶ Naval Message from Commander H.A. McCandless, Director of Naval Pay and Advancement, 18 January 1949; Naval Message from Commodore W.B. Creerey, Chief of Naval Personnel, 25 January 1949. RG 24 Vol. 8091 File 1279-17.

challenge facing the officers of the post-war RCN, and the Naval Staff in particular, was their inexperience in dealing with the particular requirements of a peacetime navy any larger than the handful of destroyers and auxiliary vessels of the 1920s-30s. This inexperience, combined with the requirements of shrinking a large wartime navy into a smaller peacetime one proved too much for a Naval Staff with no practical experience.

The inexperience was exacerbated by the absence in the RCN of an Inspector-General. Inspectors-General were common in older and more experienced navies and provided a vital conduit between the fleet and the naval staff, particularly in the areas of morale and conditions of service. Between the exigencies of the Battle of the Atlantic and the astonishing growth during the war years, the RCN had not appointed anyone to fill that function. In the post-war period the appointment of an Inspector-General was recommended by one senior officer as early as September of 1947,³¹⁷ but the suggestion appears to have been lost in the flurry of reports and studies. While there were Directorates of Service Conditions and Welfare and of Pay and Advancement, neither had the necessary comprehensive authority to deal with all of the issues. There was no central repository for reports and memoranda and, as can be seen from the number of reports, memoranda and studies that were produced, the issue of morale was dealt with on an ad-hoc basis. An Inspectorate-General would have had the necessary authority to act on the reports generated and address the issues.

Some progress was, however, being made in addressing the issues raised in the various reports. Commander A.F. Pickard, the Director of Service Conditions and

³¹⁷ Memorandum to ACNS from G.A. Worth (A/Captain - Director of Signals Division), 16 September, 1947. RG 24 Acc. 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

Welfare,³¹⁸ for instance, reported that progress was being made towards the completion of 3,210 additional units of accommodation ashore, particularly for married personnel. Similarly some movement had been made in the reimbursement of travel costs, with fifty per cent of the annual costs being reimbursed. While this was not nearly sufficient to ease the financial burdens of the lower deck, it was progress. The same could be said of the improved recreation facilities for the men, on-base grocery stores (similar to the Post Exchange system used by the U.S. Navy), the creation of a Quarter-Master's branch to focus on seamanship issues³¹⁹ and, of course, the review of the pay structure.³²⁰ All were progress, but none by themselves would prove sufficient.

The period between 1945 and 1949 was not one characterised by ignorance or lassitude on the part of the Naval Staff. The number and variety of reports, papers and memoranda produced during this period demonstrates clearly that the senior leadership of the RCN made earnest efforts to discover the causes of the discontent in the RCN and to address them, although they have been largely overlooked in the historical analysis.

Tony German and more recently Marc Milner, for example, draw a straight line between the memoirs prepared by participants in the war, such as Eastman, and the report of the Mainguy Commission. The report was taken at face value and it was assumed that the problem with the RCN was that it was too British and rigid in its discipline.³²¹ This made

³¹⁸ Again, while Pickard's title would seem to incorporate some of the functions of an Inspector-General, his role was to implement policies approved by the Naval Staff rather than to investigate conditions of service and formulate policy.

³¹⁹ Seamanship issues included anything not covered by the technical specialist branches of gunnery, engineering and communications. Seamen were therefore responsible for the daily operation of the ship including cleaning and maintaining the common areas, the posting of sentries while in port, the management of the ship's boats, the of docking the ship and the fuelling of the ship. The quarter-master's branch was intended to provide instruction in these areas and to increase the professionalism of the seamen.

³²⁰ Memorandum to D/C ND from A.F. Pickard, Commander, Director of Service Conditions and Welfare, 20 June 1949. RG 24 Add. 83-84/167 Vol. 1596.

³²¹ See, for example, Milner, Canada's Navy, chapters 9 and 10.

sense in light of the memoirs written by Easton, Lamb and Lawrence, among other participants in the Battle of the Atlantic, which portrayed the corvette crews as rough and ready and inimical to British discipline, and somehow uniquely Canadian. The reality was that, as Lund has established, by 1949 most of the men who had participated in the Battle of the Atlantic had either left the RCN or had moved into more senior positions. They were not the ones involved in the "incidents" so the intervening investigations into morale conducted by the RCN become critical in establishing the context for the Mainguy report. The reality of the situation was that, unfortunately, the creation of a stable and happy peacetime fleet was not something that had ever been done before in Canada, nor was it an issue that the naval leadership had had the luxury of contemplating during the Battle of the Atlantic. By the time the Naval Staff had begun to get a firm grip on the problems and their possible solutions events had overtaken them. The "incidents" do not represent a failure of the senior naval leadership, as Glover argues,³²² as much as a basic lack of experience and the absence of any inspectorate designed to deal with the general happiness of the men. The naval staff certainly attempted to come to grips with the morale issues facing the RCN, but they lacked the experience necessary to do so effectively.

³²² Glover, pp. 89-90.

CHAPTER 4

Choices

By the spring of 1949 time had run out on the RCN's efforts to address the growing morale crisis in the fleet. The "incidents" aboard HMCS *Athabaskan*, *Crescent* and *Magnificent* had demonstrated that whatever the causes of the morale issues plaguing the RCN, the solution would not wait for further study. The morale issue had moved into the realm of the political and would be dealt with as a political, rather than strictly military, or naval, issue.

The prime mover behind the political involvement in the resolution of the morale problems came in the form of a letter, penned anonymously by one of the sailors aboard HMCS *Athabaskan*, which outlined the 'incident' aboard that ship. This letter was sent to the *Vancouver Sun* and reported on in the 5 March 1949 issue on the front page above the fold.³²³ Further coverage appeared on the front page of the *Sun* on 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 March.³²⁴ All of the stories downplayed the incident and treated it as a bit of a "family upset." Commander M.A. Medland, the commanding officer of *Athabaskan*, was almost dismissive, summing up the incident as "the men asked some questions and I answered them."³²⁵ The story was picked up by the *Globe and Mail*³²⁶ and even the *New York*

³²³ *The Vancouver Sun*, 5 March, 1949.

³²⁴ *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 March, 8 March, 9 March, 10 March, 11 March and 14 March, 1949. All of these articles appeared on the front page save for that of 11 March, which appeared on p. 9.

³²⁵ *The Vancouver Sun*, 10 March, 1949; *The New York Times*, 11 March, 1949, p. 28.

³²⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, 7 March, 1949, p. 10.

Times carried a small article on the incident.³²⁷ By 21 March the *Sun* was reporting that Admiral Grant had declared the incident "closed" and that no further action would be taken.³²⁸ By this time, of course, Grant would have been aware of the *Crescent* incident and must have known that *Athabaskan* could not be passed off as an isolated incident or "family squabble."

A mere five days after the "closure" of the *Athabaskan* incident, the incident aboard *Magnificent* hit the press. In an article entitled "Trouble Reported on Another Warship" the *Vancouver Sun* linked the *Athabaskan*, *Crescent* and *Magnificent* and again the story was picked up by the *Globe and Mail*.³²⁹ While the press coverage outside of Vancouver was not extensive, Claxton was forced to address questions by the media and more particularly, to address the issue of subversive Communist influence in the RCN.³³⁰ While he managed to deflect the attention of the media to a degree and denied categorically that any subversive elements were operating in the Navy, the Canadian people were becoming aware that something was wrong with the RCN.

To make matters worse, Claxton was also facing questions about the incidents in the House of Commons. On 7 March 1949 he was questioned in the House about the *Athabaskan* incident by Mr. John Probe, the CCF member for Regina City. Claxton characterised it as a "minor incident" which had been successfully dealt with.³³¹ He took a similar position with regard to the *Crescent* incident two weeks later.³³² By 29 March, however, it had become clear that attempting to deflect attention from the incidents was

³²⁷ The New York Times, 7 March, 1949, p. 9.

³²⁸ The Vancouver Sun, 21 March, 1949, p. 3.

³²⁹ The Vancouver Sun, 26 March, 1949; The Globe and Mail, 23 March, 1949.

³³⁰ The Vancouver Sun, 28 March, 1949.

³³¹ Hansard, 7 March, 1949, p. 1203;

³³² Hansard, 23 March, 1949, p. 1888.

not going to work, and Claxton, again in response to a question from Mr. Probe, promised the formation of a committee to investigate the incidents. He ruled out, however, the formation of a Parliamentary Committee as "inappropriate" and indicated instead that the committee would be formed of members outside the service³³³ and by implication the government.

The urgent need for a resolution was exacerbated by the ongoing discussions surrounding the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In the post-war period a number of new political realities became clear to the Government of Canada. Firstly it was apparent that British power was waning, and doing so quickly. The war had exhausted Britain both politically and economically to the point where the British Government was forced to call on Canada and other members of the Empire to assist in post-war occupation duties. This became even more important when the British were in effect forced out of India in 1947.³³⁴ The decline of Britain as a world power meant that Canada would have to look elsewhere for support and would have to take responsibility for the development of its own defence policy if it wished to remain a significant player on the world stage.

The second new reality faced by the Canadian Government was the rise of the Soviet Union as a major military power. The division of the world into two armed camps, together with the decline in British military and political influence left the Government in a difficult position. While Canada had inarguably punched above its weight during the Second World War, simple economic reality dictated that this would not be possible indefinitely. To ensure security against an increasing Soviet threat

³³³ Ibid., 29 March, 1949, p. 2107.

³³⁴ Robert Bothwell, Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World 1945-1984, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2007), chapter 3.

defence partnerships were essential. No longer able to rely on Britain to provide this security, the Canadian Government had no alternative but to look to the United States to provide it and to focus more on a North American defensive plan than on an imperial one.³³⁵

Drawing closer to the United States was not a difficult decision for the Canadian Government. Many of the cabinet ministers were staunch Canadian nationalists, and part of their nationalism involved severing economic, military and cultural dependency on Britain. They were also, however, pragmatists and were not eager to trade one unequal partnership for another. Moving forward, then, the Canadian Government would conceptualise its defence requirements both in terms of North American and North Atlantic security. It was under these conditions that talks began in 1947 about the creation of a North Atlantic alliance to provide collective security against the perceived Soviet menace. The challenge from a Canadian perspective was to negotiate an alliance that allowed it to remain relevant and involved in the military decision making process, while making a contribution to defence that would, by necessity, be smaller than that being made by the United States.³³⁶

For Claxton the negotiations which would lead to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in April of 1949 required a re-assessment of Canada's post-war military role. Claxton had been in favour of closer military cooperation with the United States since 1940, when he was a member of the "Committee of Twenty," an informal group of well connected individuals from both inside and outside of government who met to discuss the future of Canada's national defence. They all advocated closer

³³⁵ Ibid., chapter 4.

³³⁶ Ibid.

military ties with the United States and a North-American perspective on defence issues. They also believed, however, that Canada must participate in the leadership of any North-American defensive arrangement to preserve Canadian national identity and avoid being subsumed by American interests.³³⁷ From a legislative perspective the process of drawing away from Britain militarily had already begun. With the passage of the Naval Service Act of 1945, the RCN became the first of Canada's three military services to have its disciplinary provisions brought wholly under exclusively Canadian legislation.³³⁸

As NATO came closer to becoming a reality, Claxton had to decide what Canada's military position was going to be in the new alliance. From a naval perspective, the Americans wanted to focus on anti-submarine warfare and the protection of communications as an area of specialised interest. This meshed with Claxton's view of naval development as part of the burden of North-American defence in which Canada could participate.³³⁹ If Canada were to take a lead role in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) it would mean an end to the naval staff visions of a balanced fleet with large fleet units like cruisers and a switch to smaller, faster ships capable of hunting and if necessary killing submarines. While the Naval Staff was generally in favour of closer cooperation with the United States³⁴⁰ it would have seemed unlikely to Claxton that they would willingly accept the change in focus that it would require. All of this, however, would

³³⁷ Nicholas Tracy, A Two-Edged Sword. The Navy as an Instrument of Canadian Foreign Policy, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), pp. 92-94.

³³⁸ Chris Madsen, Another Kind of Justice. Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1999), p. 90.

³³⁹ Tracy, pp. 92-94.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100; Jan Drent, "A Good Workable Little Fleet: Canadian Naval Policy, 1945-1950," in Michael Hadley et al. eds. A Nation's Navy. While aircraft carriers could still have formed part of the plan, it was probable that the Americans could provide ASW air cover from their extant carrier force, rendering it unnecessary for the RCN to have its own.

have been rendered moot if the Americans came to view the RCN as unreliable, so the incidents had to be dealt with quickly and effectively.

One of the options that Claxton had in dealing with the "incidents" was to make use of military laws and regulations to discipline those involved. The most obvious solution of this sort to the problems raised by the "incidents" was to charge the ringleaders and those involved aboard the three vessels with the crime of mutiny. The offence of mutiny was set out in the Naval Discipline Act, which was incorporated into use by the RCN through the Naval Service Act of 1910³⁴¹ and reiterated in the Naval Service Act of 1944.³⁴² Sections 57 and 58 of the Naval Service Act outlined mutiny as a punishable offence, both when it occurred with violence and when it occurred without violence. Section 61 made incitement to mutiny and the holding of 'mutinous assemblies' punishable offences.³⁴³ The sentence for the ringleaders of mutinies was death if the mutiny were treasonous, imprisonment if it was the result of cowardice and dismissal from the service if the mutiny was the result of negligence.³⁴⁴ The Act, however, is silent on determining the motivation behind the mutiny.

Section fourteen extended the punishment for mutiny to any personnel who attempted "to make or endeavour to make any mutinous Assembly." Section fifteen, in something closely resembling an accessory provision in civilian criminal law, rendered liable to punishment any individual who knew of a mutiny and "wilfully concealed it."³⁴⁵ Ironically, this latter provision could have rendered any of the three captains, each of

³⁴¹ Naval Service Act, RSC 1927, c. 139, s. 45.

³⁴² Naval Service Act, S.C. 1944-45, 8-9 Geo. VI, c. 23, proclaimed in force 15 October 1945.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* s. 61.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 57.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ss. 14-15.

whom entered into informal discussions with the putative mutineers, guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment.

While the prosecution of those involved in the "incidents" on a charge of mutiny was certainly an option available to Claxton and the Naval Staff, there were some serious difficulties with its exercise. The most glaring problem was the absence in the Naval Service Act, or any of its predecessor legislation, of any workable definition of what constituted a mutiny. The Act seemed to rely on a sense of common understanding of the term amongst sailors. To paraphrase Justice Stewart of the United States Supreme Court³⁴⁶, the Act relied on the fact that while it could not (or did not) tell sailors what mutiny was, they would know it when they saw it.

The common understanding that the Act relied upon, however, was undermined by the inclusion of insubordination as a separate offence. The Act did define insubordination to include, among other things, the willful refusal to follow an order and made it quite clear that it was an offence separate from mutiny.³⁴⁷ It is a long-standing canon of statutory interpretation that Parliament, in drafting any piece of legislation, does not repeat itself and, therefore, that each provision in a given statute has a distinct meaning. In practical terms this meant that mutiny had to be something beyond a simple failure to obey an order and had to include some other component. The Act, unfortunately, gave no assistance in determining what this additional component was.

The failure to define the term 'mutiny' left the RCN's incidents somewhere between a minor failure to obey an order and the situation facing the RN at Invergordon

³⁴⁶ *Jacobellis v Ohio* 378 U.S. 184 (1964). Justice Stewart was discussing his inability to define in any realistic way what hard-core pornography was, but was certain that it was not protected by the provisions granting individuals freedom of speech in the United States Constitution.

³⁴⁷ Naval Service Act, Victoria 29-30, c. 139, s. 17.

in 1931. In that situation a substantial number of Royal Navy sailors, while at anchor at Invergordon in Scotland, had refused to put to sea unless issues surrounding their pay were met. In that instance the British Government had, as part of its austerity measures during the Great Depression, cut the pay of British sailors by twenty-five per cent. The outraged sailors on a few of His Majesty's ships took matters into their own hands and simply refused orders to put to sea until their grievances had been addressed. There was no report of violence, and by all accounts the officers aboard the affected ships had been treated well and with all courtesy due their ranks, except of course the following of their orders. The dissent rapidly spread to seven ships at anchor at the time, including some of the best known and most powerful ships in the RN. The subsequent inquiry into the actions of the sailors discovered that there was some communist influence at work at Invergordon, and as a result several of the ringleaders behind the uprising were dismissed from the service.³⁴⁸

The second significant issue with the use of the mutiny provisions of the Naval Discipline Act was over the burden of proof required. Again the Act provides very little guidance on the issue, but given that the punishment for mutiny, either with or without violence, was death, it is reasonable to assume that in pressing the charge of mutiny, it would have to be proven to the standard of beyond reasonable doubt or something close to it. It is also reasonable to assume, although again the Act is of very little assistance, that *mens rea* would also have to be established. This meant that it would have to be proven not only that the ratings involved in the "incidents" refused to obey orders, but also that they did so with full knowledge that their actions constituted a mutiny. Since

³⁴⁸ Anthony Carew, The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39, The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), passim.

the Act did not define mutiny it would be a very ironic argument for the Judge Advocate of the Fleet to have to argue that the ordinary rating was expected to know more about naval discipline and regulations than he did. In the public spotlight that would accompany any trials connected to the "incidents," failure, as the saying goes, was not an option for the RCN.

The final difficulty with using the Act to address the incidents is closely related to the other two, and was one of precedent. Rather than being a set of isolated occurrences, the "incidents" of 1949 were, in fact, part of a much larger mutinous tradition in both the RCN and the RN. The first example of a mess-deck refusing en masse to fall in when piped occurred aboard HMCS *Skeena* in 1936. The issue in that case was the delay on the part of the captain in adopting the tropical work routine. This routine was common to ships operating in southern latitudes and essentially started and ended the work-day significantly earlier, leaving the men free during the hottest part of the day. At the time of the incident aboard *Skeena* she was alongside in Acapulco. The *Skeena* trouble was followed by a similar action by the men of the lower deck aboard HMCS *Assiniboine* in the late spring of 1940, the causes of which have unfortunately been lost.³⁴⁹

The intensification of hostilities, as the RCN became fully engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic, did not seem to stop the junior ratings from expressing themselves through lock-ins. In November 1942 there was a similar action taken aboard the armed yacht HMCS *Reindeer* over the increasing mental instability of her captain.³⁵⁰ In July 1943 approximately 190 sailors aboard HMCS *Iroquois* barricaded themselves in the

³⁴⁹ Richard H. Gimblett, "What the Mainguy Report Never Told Us: The Tradition of "mutiny" in the Royal Canadian Navy Before 1949," *Canadian Military Journal*, Summer 2000, p. 87.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Given the nature of the vessel this incident would have taken place in Canadian coastal waters and not on the high seas or in a foreign port. Armed yachts were employed more for observation than for active combat operations and were not generally seaworthy enough to operate in the open ocean against U-Boats.

mess decks and refused to report for ordinary duties. In that case the putative cause of the disturbance was the cancellation of shore leave until a uniform crest 'liberated' from a German prisoner had been returned by the rating who had taken it. The real root cause, however, was a rigid and harsh captain who was unpopular with the ratings. At the time of the lock-in *Iroquois* was returning to England after escorting a Gibraltar convoy and was very much on active service in the face of the enemy.³⁵¹ In July of 1944 a lock-in occurred aboard HMCS *Chebogue*, although little is known of the details, and on 10 January 1945 the crew of HMCS *Riviere-Du-Loup* failed to obey orders to fall in when they learned that due to the illness of her captain, she would be taken to sea by her executive officer, in whose competence they had no faith.³⁵²

In the immediate post-war the occurrences of mass disobedience continued. Aboard HMCS *Micmac*, on 5 December 1946, one of the leading seamen, after a dispute with the executive officer over shore leave, attempted to encourage other junior ratings to refuse to report for duty. The object of the exercise was to force a "make and mend"³⁵³ out of the executive officer. While it remains unclear as to how successful he was, the sailor in question maintains the dubious distinction of being the only sailor of the RCN to have faced court-martial for anything close to mutiny. He was sentenced to ninety days' confinement for his actions.³⁵⁴ Given the range of sentences available for mutinous actions, which included death, the relatively light sentence is indicative of the lack of seriousness with which his offence was perceived by the officers.

³⁵¹ Micheal J. Whitby, "Matelots, Martinets and Mutineers: The Mutiny in HMCS *Iroquois* 19 July, 1943," *Journal of Military History* 65 (January 2001), pp. 77-103.

³⁵² Gimblett, p. 87.

³⁵³ This was essentially an afternoon off. Traditionally it was designed as an opportunity for the sailors to repair and make new clothing for wear about the ship. By the twentieth century it had become essentially free time for the hands.

³⁵⁴ Gimblett, p. 89.

The final major incident to occur prior to those of 1949 took place in June of 1947 and involved sailors aboard HMCS *Ontario*.³⁵⁵ The junior ratings in that instance were all new to the ship, and most were new to the service. They had become aware of recent signals from Naval Service Headquarters regarding the formation of Welfare Committees aboard RCN ships and restricting early releases from the service, which had "provoked much mess deck discussion."³⁵⁶ While *Ontario* lay at anchor preparing for further crew training, a number of the junior ratings requested an interview with the ship's Executive Officer, Commander J.V. Brock, to discuss a number of issues with him, including the ship's routine and the wearing of more formal uniforms for work details, rather than dungarees. The junior ratings seem to have taken the instructions regarding Welfare Committees as indicative of their right to engage in discussions on such matters. Commander Brock apparently vehemently disagreed. After the interview the junior ratings in question locked themselves in their mess decks and added the removal of Commander Brock to the list of items that they wished to discuss.³⁵⁷ While no clear record exists of exactly what Commander Brock said to the men, it clearly wasn't to their liking as it precipitated the lock-in.

Captain J.C. Hibbard, *Ontario's* commanding officer, on hearing of the action, reacted quickly and intelligently. Rather than order the "out pipe," which would have placed the ratings involved in a clear state of mass insubordination, if not mutiny, he first addressed them over the ship's loud-speaker system. While his exact words are lost to history, the upshot of them was to ensure obedience to the order 'clear lower decks' when it was given a short time later. Within a few days Commander Brock was transferred off

³⁵⁵ HMCS *Ontario* had recently replaced HMCS *Uganda* as the New Entry Training Cruiser.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

of *Ontario*, with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the then Flag Officer Pacific Coast, Admiral Rollo Mainguy.³⁵⁸

The series of "incidents" similar to those which took place in 1949 is remarkable in both frequency and timing. What they clearly demonstrate is that, throughout the war years and into the post-war period, the collective refusal to obey orders was seen as a legitimate method by which members of the lower deck exercised some degree of agency over their surroundings, working conditions and superiors. Bill Rawlings has argued, with considerable success, that the use of the lock-in as a vehicle of protest was accepted as legitimate by the officers and men of both the Royal Navy and the RCN.³⁵⁹ This is in line with the conclusion drawn by Richard Gimblett who argues, however, that rather than being an inheritance from the RN, the use of lock-ins as a vehicle of protest was more likely the product of traditions of liberal democracy shared by both Britain and Canada.³⁶⁰ What is clear is that some degree of collective protest had historical antecedents and was considered a legitimate method by which the lower deck could exercise some degree of agency. The view of the protest as legitimate was, of course, contingent on it being done without appearing organised. Thus, on *Ontario* for example, the commanding officer was careful not to put the ratings in a position of wilful disobedience to orders, as to have done so would, together with the obvious organisation of the ratings involved, have placed them beyond the pale of what constituted an acceptable protest.

³⁵⁸ Mainguy admitted some time after the incident that the transfer of Brock without further investigation had been precipitous and unfair to Brock. Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Bill Rawlings, "Only 'A Foolish Escapade by Young Ratings?'" Case Studies of Mutiny in the Wartime Royal Canadian Navy," *The Northern Mariner*, X, No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 59-70.

³⁶⁰ Richard Gimblett, "What the Mainguy Report Never Told Us: The Tradition of 'Mutiny' in the Royal Canadian Navy Before 1949," *Canadian Military Journal*, Summer 2000, pp. 91-92.

It is, however, possible to give too much weight to the conclusions drawn by Rawlings and Gimblett. In gathering together the incidents of disobedience they tend to make them appear more ubiquitous and powerful than they actually were. There was no evidence presented in any of the hearings that, outside of the *Ontario* incident the ratings were aware of prior instances of lock-ins. The instances relied on by both Gimblett and Rawlings in fact took place over a relatively long period of time and were not necessarily something that the average rating would have been aware of. They were, rather, part of the lore of the RCN, of which the ratings were aware but which was not discussed consciously and the prior "incidents" had much more of an impact on Claxton's decision making than they did on the decisions made by the men of the lower deck.

For Claxton, in whom the ultimate response to the 1949 incidents rested, the tradition of collective disobedience all but completely ruled out the use of the Naval Discipline Act in addressing the actions of the ratings. To prosecute the men involved would have drawn attention to the conditions of the service in a way that may well have drawn considerable sympathy from the Canadian public. To punish young men for appearing only to demand what ordinary Canadian civilians would have considered basic rights, such as decent food and accommodation, may well have had a considerable political cost. It could also have led to a clamor for further spending, particularly in upgrading ships, which King, and by extension Claxton, were reluctant to engage in.

The second and far more dangerous potential consequence of punishing the ratings involved was the potential for establishing a precedent. A series of courts martial under the Naval Discipline Act would, by necessity, be administered by the RCN. Claxton would have no control over either the process or result of the proceedings.

Given the tradition of the lock-in, and particularly the relatively light punishment handed down in the *Micmac* incident it could certainly have been argued that the RCN had traditionally condoned mass disobedience as a form of protest. There was the reasonable possibility that the courts martial would have either dismissed the cases or handed down similarly light punishments. The legal approval of collective disobedience as a valid vehicle of protest was the last thing that the Minister of National Defence would have wanted to take place on his watch.

With the military justice system unavailable in any practical sense, Claxton was left with a public hearing as the only viable means of addressing the "incidents." While a formal Royal Commission was certainly a possibility, it could not have been a particularly attractive one for Claxton. In addition to being expensive and time consuming, a Royal Commission would, by necessity, have been overseen by a sitting or retired judge. The difficulty with judges, particularly retired ones, was (and is) that they can tend to be independent-minded. Claxton had been privy to the internal investigations done by the navy prior to the "incidents" and at some level knew full well that the issues confronting the RCN boiled down to money. Money for new ships with better messing and berthing facilities; money to allow for the re-vamping of the trade-group structure; money for married quarters at the bases at Halifax and Esquimalt. A Royal Commission would have made all of this a matter of public record, and stood to embarrass the Government for having allowed the RCN to get to the state it was in.

Claxton was a loyal government member, if nothing else. When he was appointed Minister of National Defence in 1946 his mandate had been to "cut the armed

forces down to size and not become a mere messenger for the military."³⁶¹ Nothing had altered his mandate and spending money flew in the face of what he believed that to be. What he needed was a method of investigating the incidents that served two purposes. Firstly, it had to be enough in the public view to satisfy concerned Canadians. Secondly, it had to at least appear to investigate the issues while allowing Claxton to control the result of the process.

In the Inquiries Act³⁶² Claxton had the ideal vehicle. Part II of the Act provided specifically for the conduct of "Departmental Investigations," which could be initiated by the minister presiding over any department of the Civil Service of Canada. The scope of the permitted investigations was extremely broad and essentially permitted the appointment of one or more commissioners to investigate any matter touching the department that the appropriate minister tasked them to.³⁶³

The commissioners, under the Act, held the power to retain counsel if they wished³⁶⁴ and to compel the attendance and testimony of witness at their discretion.³⁶⁵ There were no indications contained in the Act as to how the sweeping powers given to the commissioners were to be used or how the hearings were to be conducted. There were no procedural safeguards contained in the Act to protect witnesses, with the only exception being some protection if the witness' individual conduct was the subject of the investigation.³⁶⁶ Overall the Act provided any minister who used it with a great deal of investigative power subject to virtually no oversight.

³⁶¹ Beruson, p. 151; C.P. Stacey, Canada and the Age of Conflict. Volume 2: 1921-1948, The Mackenzie King Era, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 397.

³⁶² Inquiries Act, R.S.C. 1940, c. 99 as amended.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, s. 6.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 11.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 8.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 13.

While the language of the Act suggests that its application to the military was not in the contemplation of the drafters, Claxton would have been inclined to read it quite generously. It allowed him to investigate the Department of National Defence and section 5 of the Naval Service Act specifically brought the "control and management of the Naval Service and all matters pertaining thereto."³⁶⁷ As Claxton would have understood it, by logical extension that would include the RCN. While it could be convincingly argued that the RCN was not part of the Civil Service as it was commonly understood, the term was not defined in the Act, and in the circumstances it was unlikely that anyone would raise the objection.

With the procedure decided upon, it remained for Claxton to select the commissioners. Admiral Horace Grant, the chief of the naval staff, appears not to have objected to the process. He did, however, feel strongly that the Commission should be an entirely naval affair staffed by naval officers.³⁶⁸ Given the tradition of mutinous action in the RCN his view comes as no surprise. While disconcerting, the "incidents" must have appeared relatively minor to the Naval Staff. For all practical purposes they had been dealt with quickly and efficiently. The underlying morale issues, as has been seen, were under study and would be addressed in the normal course of events. Staffing the Commission with naval officers would allow Grant to put the "incidents" to rest quickly and quietly.

Louis Audette, who had been approached by Claxton to serve on the Commission, had quite a different view. As will be seen, Audette had his own axe to grind with the RCN, and he was adamant that the Commission of Enquiry be entirely civilian in its

³⁶⁷ Naval Service Act, s. 5.

³⁶⁸ Lund, p. 218.

composition.³⁶⁹ While his reasons for the objection are unclear from the documentation, it is likely that he felt that the inclusion of naval personnel on the Commission would turn the exercise into a defensive one. This in turn would undermine the process of discovering the truth behind the morale and other issues plaguing the RCN. What is clear is that Audette believed he knew what these problems were long before any witnesses were called.³⁷⁰

In the end, a compromise of sorts was reached. The Commission would be chaired by a serving naval officer. The other two members of the Commission would be civilians.³⁷¹ This was, for the RCN, a double-edged sword. While a presence at the hearings would allow it to save face and at least appear to have some control over its own destiny, it would also ensure that the RCN would have to support whatever conclusions the Commission reached or risk breaking ranks with the minister. Claxton's willingness to compromise was in reality a bit of a trap for the RCN, and one which it had no choice but to fall into. The alternative was to allow the Commission to continue with no input from the RCN whatsoever.

As the RCN representative and Chair of the Commission, Claxton selected Rear-Admiral E. Rollo Mainguy, the Commanding Officer Atlantic Coast. He was an interesting choice. Mainguy had enjoyed a long and distinguished career in the RCN. During the Second World War he had commanded the destroyer HMCS *Ottawa* on convoy escort operations and participated in the sinking of the Italian submarine *Faa di*

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Richard O. Mayne, Betrayed. Scandal, Politics, and Canadian Naval Leadership, (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2006), passim.

³⁷¹ Lund p. 218.

Bruno, the first submarine kill made by the RCN.³⁷² He subsequently served as Captain (D) Halifax from August to November, 1941 and Captain (D) Newfoundland³⁷³ from November 1941 to September 1942,³⁷⁴ and as the commanding officer of HMCS *Uganda* from 1944-1945. He was in fact commanding *Uganda* when her company voted to remove themselves from the Pacific Theatre.³⁷⁵ While the *Uganda* incident did not end his wartime service on a particularly high note, it did provide him with valuable experience both in administration and leadership.

After the war, he was appointed Commanding Officer Pacific Coast. In this capacity he had dealt directly with the 1947 incident aboard HMCS *Ontario*. He had also been responsible for the transfer of the Executive Officer of that ship, Commander Brock, in response to the complaints of the men. By 1949 Mainguy had established himself as a capable senior officer and was moving towards the pinnacle of any naval career, an appointment as Chief of the Naval Staff.³⁷⁶

Mainguy had a reputation as a "sailor's admiral." He was happiest while at sea and was "larger than life, charismatic [and] loved and admired by those who served under him."³⁷⁷ Illustrative of his concern for the men under his command, he had established the "Crow's Nest" while he was Captain (D) Newfoundland, a club where officers could unwind while in port. He was also behind the creation of recreation facilities for the men of the lower decks of the corvettes. While commanding *Uganda* he established a series of 'town hall meetings' during which any member of the ship's company could air any

³⁷² Sarty, *No Higher Purpose*, p. 110-118.

³⁷³ The commander of the destroyer and frigate flotillas based in Halifax and Newfoundland respectively.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 642-643.

³⁷⁵ Wilfrid G.D. Lund, "Admiral E. Rollo Mainguy: Sailor's Admiral," in *The Admirals*, Michael Whitby ed. (Kingston, Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2006), pp. 190-191.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

grievances or concerns that they had on any subject.³⁷⁸ The selection of Mainguy as the chair of the Commission ensured that any complaint by the men of the lower deck would get a sympathetic hearing and is indicative of the view that Claxton took regarding the complaints.

For Mainguy, however, the appointment was at best a mixed blessing. While on the surface it indicated a degree of confidence in his abilities, in reality it placed him in an impossible position. If he came down on the side of the naval leadership and found that the RCN bore no direct or systemic responsibility for the morale problems, he would be accused of "whitewashing" the problems. If, on the other hand, he authored a report that was critical of the RCN and its leadership, he risked being seen as a turncoat by his fellow officers. Mainguy would be faced with this dilemma throughout the hearings, and solved the predicament by remaining relatively quiet both during the hearings and in authoring the resulting report which bore his name.³⁷⁹

Joining Admiral Mainguy on the Commission were Leonard Brockington and Louis Audette. The media described them as "two Ottawa lawyers."³⁸⁰ The description was at best disingenuous. Both Audette and Brockington had long-standing connections both with the Government and with the RCN. While they were both technically civilians, they were far from disinterested in the outcome of the Commission.

Leonard Brockington was, from Claxton's perspective, a known quantity. He was a career civil servant and had worked closely with Claxton in the past. They had worked together even before Claxton's entry into politics, including during Brockington's tenure

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Audette, *Naval Recollections*, p. 227.

³⁸⁰ Globe and Mail, 11 April, 1949, p. 7.

as the first chairman of the Board of Governors of the CBC.³⁸¹ In 1947 Brockington had chaired a Commission of Inquiry into a series of strikes in the merchant marine, and while his report in the end was favourable to the Canadian Seaman's Union,³⁸² he was aware of the apparently increasing influence of communism on Canadian society.³⁸³ He was also to some degree familiar with the RCN. One of his sons had served in the RCN during the Second World War and on D-Day, 6 June 1944, Brockington had witnessed the landings from an RCN destroyer and had broadcast his experiences to the Canadian public.³⁸⁴ As a senior bureaucrat and confidant of both Mackenzie King and Claxton,³⁸⁵ Brockington would have certainly known what was expected of him as a Commissioner.

Louis Audette, the third Commissioner, was in many ways the most interesting, and was certainly the most involved of the three. Born on 7 April 1907 in Montreal, his father was the Honourable Justice L.A. Audette of the Exchequer Court of Canada. His life, therefore, was one of considerable wealth and privilege. As was expected of members of his social class, he attended the University of Ottawa for his Bachelor of Arts and the Université de Montréal for his law degree. He was called to the Bar of Québec in 1931 and practiced with the firm of Audette and O'Brien (later Audette and McEntyre).³⁸⁶ While there is little direct evidence that Audette and Claxton (who was also from Montreal) knew one another socially, they would certainly have travelled in the same

³⁸¹ Bercuson, *True Patriot*, p. 94.

³⁸² Kaplan, *Everything that Floats*, p. 50.

³⁸³ Green, *Against the Tide*, p. 155.

³⁸⁴ Untitled and undated document, MG 31 E18 Vol. 12 File 16. Possibly a draft of a press release prepared by Claxton.

³⁸⁵ Gimblett, *Gunboat Diplomacy*, p. 271.

³⁸⁶ C.I.S. Biographies, 21 March, 1947, MG 31 E 18 Vol., 14 File 5.

social and political circles before the war. It is quite likely that if they did not actually know one another, they knew of one another.

On the outbreak of the war, Audette left his practice and volunteered for service with the RCN in 1939.³⁸⁷ After initial training at Kingston's Royal Military College he proceeded to Halifax for further training. His first sea appointment was aboard HMCS *Saguenay*. As a junior officer aboard *Saguenay* he was, among other duties, responsible for acting as a censor, a job which he found "distasteful" but which provided him with insight into the lives of "distinctly lower class men."³⁸⁸ He was, in fact, aboard *Saguenay* on 1 December 1940 when, at 04:00 she was torpedoed and, in essence, blown in half with 21 dead and 18 wounded, Audette among them, having suffered a badly broken ankle.³⁸⁹

Upon his recovery, Audette proceeded to rise through the ranks of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve, ending with command of HMCS *Coaticook* from July of 1944 to the end of hostilities.³⁹⁰ Throughout his service, he received consistently excellent evaluations from his superiors. Commander Pullen (as he then was) described him in August 1941 as "loyal, capable and trustworthy" and "energetic, zealous and [demonstrating] initiative."³⁹¹ Horace Grant, as Captain (D) Newfoundland, commented that Audette was described as "capable and knows his ship's company" and "a most capable officer."³⁹² In a similar vein his assessments of 3 May and 31 October 1943 both

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Audette, *Naval Recollections*, pp. 7-12.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 15-18.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

³⁹¹ "Assessment," 19 August, 1941, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 5.

³⁹² "Assessment," 10 March, 1943, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 file 5.

point out how solicitous Audette was of the welfare of his crew.³⁹³ Overall, the official picture was of a competent officer who was concerned with the welfare of his men.

Audette's memoirs, however, paint a different picture. They reveal that this concern was heavily tinged with a paternalistic attitude towards the men of the lower deck.³⁹⁴ Although well meaning, Audette was in essence a snob. He was a firm believer in the privileges and obligations arising from his social and, by extension, educational status.

This snobbery was not restricted to the lower deck and was, if anything, more virulent when directed at his fellow officers. Throughout the war he was involved with several other RCNVR officers in active political agitation concerning a number of issues that he perceived as plaguing the RCN. There were several groups of these officers operating throughout the War. While the specific concerns of the groups varied, the one thing that they had in common was the background of the members. They tended to be university educated professionals who came from politically and socially well connected families.³⁹⁵ They were comprised, in short, of the scions of Canada's social elite and used their political connections to raise complaints outside the chain of command about how the RCN was being run by the regular officers.

The membership in the groups was fluid, and the issues that concerned them diverse, covering everything from modernisation to morale. The common issue shared by all of the various groups was dissatisfaction at their treatment at the hands of the regular RCN officers. Few were more vocal on this issue than Louis Audette. He felt, along with his RCNVR compatriots, that the regular RCN officers viewed themselves as

³⁹³ "Assessment," 3 May, 1945; "Assessment," 31 October, 1943, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 5.

³⁹⁴ Audette, *Naval Recollections*, passim.

³⁹⁵ Mayne, pp. 9-16.

the "professionals" and looked down on the RCNVR officers as nothing more than enthusiastic amateurs. The Volunteer Reserve officers understandably bridled at being treated with what they perceived as contempt.³⁹⁶

The contempt, however, flowed both ways. The Volunteer Reserve officers were almost universally possessed of more formal education than their regular RCN counterparts and tended to view them as uneducated and ignorant. Audette, in his post-war memoir, eloquently encapsulated the view of the Volunteer Reserve officers when he wrote "during the war to be in a Wardroom was intellectually to be slumming."³⁹⁷ For Audette the lack of formal education in the regular RCN officers led to failures of leadership. These failures were characterised by a lack of imagination and the inability to deal with the "great responsibilities thrust upon them" by the war.³⁹⁸ For Audette, then, any success that the RCN enjoyed during the Second World War, and there is no doubt that he was proud of his service, was enjoyed in spite of rather than because of the efforts of the regular RCN officers.³⁹⁹

As his memoirs make clear, Audette did not get over the supposed slights he received at the hands of his regular RCN colleagues. They also make clear that, in spite of his later protestations, Audette was as much of an elitist as he perceived the regular RCN officers to be. His chief difficulty was in their failure to acknowledge the superiority of Audette and his colleagues and their university education and throughout his wartime and post-war career he "maintained an attitude of contemptuous intellectual

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Audette, Naval Recollections, p. 285.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 2-5.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., passim.

snobbery" towards serving naval officers.⁴⁰⁰ The Mainguy Commission would provide him with the ideal vehicle to make clear which Canadian elite should be in charge of the RCN and to make the regular RCN officers pay for their wartime temerity.

Audette's anti-communist credentials were also excellent. During the war, when a group of "Russian" ships put into Londonderry, Audette, also in Londonderry at the time, refused to go to any of the usual parties or receptions held for their officers. He was also supportive of the denial of shore leave to the Russian sailors, with a view to preventing the "contamination" of Canadian sailors by proximity.⁴⁰¹ While on the surface this may not seem like much, it is quite telling, as the rest of his memoir suggests that he had an enormous fondness for parties and thoroughly enjoyed attending them. To give up the chance to socialise with his colleagues during an all too brief sojourn in port was, for Audette, quite a sacrifice.

In the post-war period his suspicions of communism and its influence continued apace. In 1946, a pamphlet entitled "Labour and the State," produced by the Socialist Labour Party of Canada, was delivered to his house. Audette immediately sent the pamphlet to the Security Service of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which dealt with communists and other subversives.⁴⁰² While many other people would have discarded or ignored the pamphlet, Audette was loath to allow communism to gain even the slightest toe-hold.

Also in 1946, while he was acting as commanding officer at the RCN establishment at Dow's Lake in Ottawa, a group of citizens, prominently led by self-

⁴⁰⁰ Lund, *The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy*, p. 219.

⁴⁰¹ Audette, *Naval Recollections.*, p. 173.

⁴⁰² Letter from Audette to Officer in Charge, Special Section, RCMP, 15 August, 1946, MG31 E18 Vol. 3 File 12.

professed communists, seized and occupied the buildings. During the war Dow's Lake had been a Volunteer Reserve training establishment, and it had been largely vacant since the cessation of hostilities. The seizure of the buildings was more akin to squatters finding shelter than an armed takeover of government property. Nonetheless Audette was unwavering in his demands that the occupants immediately leave the property if violence was to be avoided. While he was instrumental in ending the occupation without excessive violence, the manner in which he dealt with the occupiers of the buildings was marked by contempt for their communist values.⁴⁰³ In the end, violent action was not necessary to end the occupation. It is safe to assume, however, that Audette would not have hesitated to use force to remove the occupants had it proved necessary.

In addition to his naval service and anti-communist credentials, Audette was familiar with both the senior naval leadership and Ottawa's political establishment. He had assisted Admiral Murray in defending himself during the Kellock Commission into the Halifax V-E Day riots and while doing so had been "arrogantly snubbed" by Captains Miles and Hibbard, both of whom would be closely involved in the 1949 "incidents."⁴⁰⁴ While he remained fond of Murray personally he maintained that taking responsibility for the riots had been foolish on Murray's part. The events, Audette believed, were the result of ill-considered directives from Murray's superiors and Murray had essentially fallen on his sword to protect the senior naval leadership. Audette never forgave Murray for doing so and he did not hesitate, when Murray enquired after an ambassadorship, in refusing to provide his support and recommendation. The ostensible reason for the refusal was

⁴⁰³ Audette, "The Lower Deck," p. 238.

⁴⁰⁴ Lund, The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, p. 220.

Murray's "complete Britishness,"⁴⁰⁵ but it is probable that the real reason was Audette's belief that Murray lacked character. What can be said for certain is that Audette did not particularly like the senior naval leadership on a personal level and felt he had been treated badly by them.

In November 1945, Audette joined the Department of External Affairs as First Secretary in the legal division.⁴⁰⁶ While there he would have crossed paths with many of Ottawa's prominent political figures such as Hume Wrong, Lester Pearson,⁴⁰⁷ Arnold Heeney, and Brooke Claxton. Given his relative pre-war obscurity, Audette's appointment could only have been the result of reasonably powerful political connections of his own. While serving at External Affairs he no doubt made many more such connections, and Audette, Claxton and Brockington were all members of the Rideau Club.⁴⁰⁸ Certainly, for Claxton, Audette would have represented a known quantity.

Overall, then, Claxton had carefully selected, from his perspective, a first-rate group of commissioners. Mainguy was essentially trapped in an impossible position and if pushed would come down on the side of the lower deck. Brockington was a reliable, intelligent and experienced civil servant who was familiar with Claxton. He would know what was expected of him. He could be counted on to produce a report that stayed on topic and dealt with the items on Claxton's agenda. That left Audette, whose position on naval leadership was well known and who would be the leader of the Commission through strength of personality if for no other reason. Audette maintained that he had

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.; Audette, *Naval Recollections*, p. 270.

⁴⁰⁶ "CIS Biographies," 21 March 1947, MG31 E18 Vol. 3 File 12. Audette was simultaneously with his position at External Affairs, the Director of the Export Credits Insurance Corporation and a member of the Council to Aid the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.

⁴⁰⁷ John English, "PEARSON, LESTER BOWLES," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 20, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed March 1, 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pearson_lester_bowles_20E.html.

⁴⁰⁸ *The Canadian Who's Who* Volume V, 1949-1951, (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1951).

been Claxton's third or fourth choice for the position but that the others had refused.⁴⁰⁹ If this is indeed true, and there is no documentary evidence to suggest that it is, it was the luckiest third or fourth choice that Claxton could possibly have made.

Having selected the commissioners, it remained to set the terms under which the inquiry would take place. In setting these Terms of Reference, Claxton gave the commissioners an enormous scope within which to operate. In a memorandum sent to the commissioners, Claxton indicated that the purpose of the enquiry was two-fold. The primary purpose was to find out exactly what took place during the "incidents" aboard the three ships, and secondly to suggest any steps that should be taken to rectify the problems discovered.⁴¹⁰ No restrictions were placed on the issues into which the Commission could enquire, nor were limits placed on the recommendations that could be made. Perhaps to emphasize the point, in the event that the Terms of Reference proved to be insufficiently broad, the commissioners were specifically given leave to depart from them at their discretion and to inquire into any issue they chose.⁴¹¹ It could certainly not be argued that the inquiry would be hampered by governmental interference, and in some ways the breadth of the Terms of Reference can be seen as indicative of the confidence that Claxton reposed in his commissioners.

The wide-open nature of the subject matter of the inquiry also extended to process. The commissioners were empowered to summon any serving member of the RCN to give evidence before them. They were also given the latitude to hear from any other witness, whether or not that person was a member of the RCN, although the power to compel attendance of members of the public was never specifically granted. In

⁴⁰⁹ Audette, *Naval Recollections*, p. 280.

⁴¹⁰ "Notes on Inquiry," undated, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 3.

⁴¹¹ Drury to Audette, 8 April, 1949, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 1.

addition the commissioners were permitted, essentially, to advertise for witnesses and to consider any evidence they found helpful, whether placed before the inquiry or not.⁴¹² A broader range of sources of evidence is difficult to imagine.

Claxton did, however, provide a small measure of guidance regarding the collection of evidence. As the willing cooperation of serving naval personnel was crucial to the success of the inquiry, he suggested that the witnesses be advised at the commencement of their testimony that no charges were contemplated in connection with the "incidents." He also suggested that witnesses be advised that the testimony they provided would be treated as absolutely confidential and that nothing that was said could or would be used against them later. During questioning only the commissioners, their counsel, Commander Hurcombe the Judge-Advocate of the Fleet, Mr. Wickwire, the Commission's counsel and the stenographer were to be present as a way of further preserving the confidentiality of the testimony.⁴¹³ Claxton hoped that these measures would encourage the witnesses, particularly one imagines the men of the lower deck, to speak freely and to give their honest opinions about the incidents and more generally about what was wrong with the RCN.

As a final measure, the sources available suggest that there was to be no written record of the testimony retained beyond the publication of the written report. Destruction of the transcripts was not specifically mandated, however the direction that no person other than the commissioners should know the evidence given by any witness certainly suggests that once the findings of the hearings were made public the record would be

⁴¹² "Notes on Inquiry," undated; "Inquiry into the Incidents Involving HMS 'Magnificent,' 'Crescent,' and 'Athabaskan,'" 7 April, 1949, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 3.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

destroyed.⁴¹⁴ The anonymity of the witnesses was thereby to be ensured even in the event that direct reference was made to particular testimony in the body of the report. By taking these steps to preserve anonymity, Claxton argued that he hoped to protect the careers of junior naval officers and shield them from any repercussions their testimony might attract.⁴¹⁵ While the confidentiality protections did undoubtedly achieve Claxton's stated aim, they also ensured that the validity of the conclusions could never be tested against the evidence actually given.

Considerable care was also taken to outline the physical confines in which the hearings would take place. Again ostensibly to place the men giving evidence at ease, the physical arrangement of the hearing room was to look as little like a courtroom as possible. The commissioners and witnesses were to be seated around a table and the hearings were to be treated more as a conversation than as a formal inquiry.⁴¹⁶ While this may have put the men more at ease than they would have been in a more formal setting, it is also entirely possible that the informality of the proceedings served to detract from the seriousness of the inquiry and encourage more 'grousing' about the Navy than considered reflection and thought. In this context the presence of Admiral Mainguy, well known as a sailor's sailor, would have been encouraging.

The final, and rather unusual, step taken by Claxton was to provide the commissioners with a list of 'suggested' questions to be put to the witnesses.⁴¹⁷ In an inquiry with as broad a scope as it appeared the Commission had been given in this case,

⁴¹⁴ "Notes on Inquiry," undated, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 3. Lund has suggested, and not without some justification, that Audette's mysterious discovery of the transcripts some thirty years later and delivery of them to the Library and Archives Canada was more than a happy accident and was in fact a parting shot at Horace Grant, who he believed had ignored the recommendations of the Commission. (Lund, The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, p. 220.)

⁴¹⁵ Lund, The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, p. 220.

⁴¹⁶ "Notes on Inquiry," undated, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 3.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

this was truly an extraordinary measure. While he did not go so far as to mandate the use of his questions, the provision of a list clearly indicated to the commissioners the direction that Claxton thought the inquiry should take. Given the fact that all of the written reports produced had been provided to the commissioners, and further given their combined experience in legal and naval matters, they hardly needed Claxton's assistance. The provision of "suggested" questions was in fact an attempt to deftly and subtly control the direction in which the hearings proceeded and the findings it eventually made.

The questions themselves are interesting more for what they exclude than the questions themselves. The focus of the suggested questions was on the issue of subversion, an idea that had essentially been put in Claxton's mind by Grant,⁴¹⁸ living conditions and the effectiveness of the grievance procedure. There were no suggested questions concerning the "Canadianization" of the RCN and nationalism generally. More importantly there were no suggested questions concerning pay and pay scales. Claxton clearly did not want these dealt with by the Commission either on questions of principle or on the question of the sufficiency of the pay being received. While nothing could prevent witnesses from raising any of the issues omitted by Claxton the list itself was a clear message to the commissioners of subjects that were to be avoided if at all possible. The senior naval staff had made its position on pay and advancement in the RCN quite clear through a series of very detailed reports. The position of the Government on military spending was equally clear. There could be little doubt about the side Claxton was going to take on the issue. Money was not something that Claxton was prepared to discuss either with the senior naval leadership or with the Canadian public through a published report.

⁴¹⁸ Lund, The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy, p. 174 and see above.

While the final report would be written by the commissioners, Claxton made it very clear that the publication of the report would be done only by and through the Minister of National Defence.⁴¹⁹ Thus the final product of the inquiry would remain firmly in Claxton's hands throughout the process. The publicity surrounding the formation of the Commission had, however, made the publication of some report necessary if awkward questions were to be avoided in the press and in the House of Commons. By reserving publication of the report to himself, Claxton made sure that the final draft of the report stayed on message and contained nothing that would prove embarrassing either to himself or to the Government.

By the time the hearings started then, Claxton had created the Commission that he wanted and had, with considerable subtlety, given it its mandate. In Louis Audette he had found a clever and well educated leader who already held rather a dim view of Canada's senior naval leadership. Audette already believed he knew what the main problem was with the RCN and was unlikely to be distracted from it. In Leonard Brockington he had a loyal and able career bureaucrat with whom he had worked well in the past. Brockington knew both how to write reports and how to follow instructions, both explicit and implicit. Finally, in Rollo Mainguy he had a member of Canada's senior naval leadership who fully understood the impossible position in which he had been placed. If Mainguy wanted his career to take its natural course and retire as Chief of the Naval Staff, he knew better than to make waves.

The hearings themselves were to be private and for all practical purposes unrecorded. While this might well serve to put witnesses at ease, it would also ensure that the conclusions of the report could never be tested against the evidence presented to

⁴¹⁹ "Notes on Inquiry," undated, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 3.

the Commission. Overall, then, the Commission constituted something of a political masterstroke, allowing Claxton to appear to be doing something about the problems in the RCN and simultaneously allowing him to control the public perception of both what the problems were and the solutions that should be implemented.

CHAPTER 5

Hearings

With the preliminary matters determined, the hearings themselves began with remarkable alacrity. The hearings regarding the incident aboard *Magnificent* were set to begin on 11 April, followed by *Athabaskan* and *Crescent* through May and the early part of June. The final session was to take place in Ottawa in the middle of June 1949 and involved mainly witnesses from the Naval Staff and its various supporting departments. During the course of the hearings there appeared 238 witnesses including 34 senior officers (commander and above), thirty-six other officers, forty-four petty officers and chief petty officers and one hundred five ratings. Approximately fifty of the witnesses volunteered to appear, the remainder appearing at the "request" of the Commission.⁴²⁰ The Commission was hearing from a broad spectrum of the service personnel.

The testimony itself was far-ranging and covered disparate topics. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to outline every comment made by the witnesses, it is possible to see the emergence of several broad themes both in the testimony given and in the manner in which the questions were put to the witnesses by the commissioners. The picture that emerges is of a Commission that is trying to get to the bottom of the morale issues in the RCN but that is also, to some extent, promoting its own agenda and pre-established views as to the causes of the problems.

The first of the incidents dealt with was that aboard HMCS *Magnificent*. Ironically, this was arguably the least serious of the three as it involved the smallest

⁴²⁰ Board of Investigation Brief of Evidence, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 5, p. 2.

number of ratings; only the thirty-two aircraft handlers refused orders. The aircraft handlers were responsible for the movement of aircraft to and from the flight deck during flying operations on the *Magnificent*. As such they were required to be available whenever flying was taking place.⁴²¹

The crucial difference between the aircraft handlers and the aircraft mechanics was in their categorisation. While the two groups had the same substantive rates, the mechanics were placed in "Trade Group 1" whereas the handlers were part of the "Standard Trade Group." This had two significant implications. First the mechanics received trade group pay in addition to their substantive rate pay, while the handlers did not receive any trade group pay at all. Second, as technical specialists, the mechanics were not required to perform seaman's duties, such as cleaning the ship, while the handlers were.⁴²² The result of these differences was the presence on the flight deck of two groups of men working the same long hours but being treated very differently. This difference in treatment would prove to be one of the motivating factors behind the incident.

On the night of 19 March 1949 the men of 3G mess (the aircraft handlers) had been engaged in flying operations until approximately 2200 hours. The next morning they had to turn to very early to continue with flying exercises. At 0530 it was announced that flying operations had been cancelled and the aircraft handlers moved the aircraft back to the hangars. At 0645 the handlers were sent to breakfast with instructions to fall in at 0745 to "part ship," which required them to clean the decks around the "island." Flying stations were to resume later in the morning. This was somewhat

⁴²¹ Testimony of Commodore G.R. Miles, Captain, *HMCS Magnificent*, Naval Inquiry - Transcripts-*Magnificent* Part 1, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 6, pp. 1-27.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, Testimony of Lieutenant D.D. Peacocke RCN, Transcripts, *Magnificent* Part 1, Q. 806.

unusual according to Chief Petty Officer Green, as no cleaning beyond the mess and the heads was ordinarily required of the aircraft handlers during flying operations. When the pipe "hands fall in" was duly made at 0745, the men of 3G mess failed to report.⁴²³ There is no evidence that any other flight deck personnel were to be required to part ship.

In response to the failure of the hands to fall in as required by the pipe, Petty Officer Haspeck was sent to the 3G mess to determine what the problem was. While none of the men in the mess spoke to him or responded to his questions, he did observe them cleaning the mess and the washroom area.⁴²⁴ The decision to send P.O. Haspeck was intended to minimise the impact of the disobedience, as it was believed by Commodore G.R. Miles, *Magnificent's* commanding officer,⁴²⁵ among others that failure to obey a pipe was serious but less serious than the failure to obey a direct order from a superior officer. As a result of this decision no officer was sent to the mess deck before Commodore Miles went down himself at 0805.⁴²⁶

Upon his arrival in the mess deck Commodore Miles told the assembled ratings that concerted action in disobedience of orders was not something he was prepared to tolerate. He reminded the men of the correct procedure for lodging complaints (individually and one at a time) and told them he would see each of them individually later on to discuss any grievances that they had. He then advised them that at 0900 "flying stations" would be piped. He did not solicit any comments from the men of 3G

⁴²³ Testimony of Chief Petty Officer Green, Transcripts, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 491-513. According to the testimony of Able Seaman Harkins there was some confusion as to whether the 0745 pipe was to apply to the aircraft handlers or just to the other members of the seaman's branch, but he was the only witness that expressed any such confusion. (Transcript *Magnificent* Part 2.)

⁴²⁴ Testimony of Petty Officer Haspeck, Transcript *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 38-52.

⁴²⁵ Commodore G.R. Miles had been associated with the RCN since his appointment as a cadet in 1916. During the Second World War he gained experience both afloat and ashore, as commanding officer of HMCS *Saguenay* and HMCS *Sambro*, and ashore as director of plans in 1943. (Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1.)

⁴²⁶ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander (Air) Watson, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 220-225.

mess, nor were any offered. By doing this Miles avoided any further escalation of the situation. At 0900 "flying stations" was piped and all hands fell in as required.⁴²⁷ The entire incident lasted less than an hour and a half.

At the hearings a number of interesting points arose. There was nearly universal agreement among the witnesses that the incident was spontaneous and involved no prior discussion among the ratings. According to Able Seaman Cowie, for example, when the pipe sounded at 0745 the men of 3G mess, all of them aircraft handlers, all spontaneously decided not to respond.⁴²⁸ The idea, however, that 32 men could make an identical decision not to obey orders without any discussion either prior to or during the decision making process is simply not credible. The men knew of the hearings well in advance and had clearly discussed their testimony prior to being called as witnesses. The refusal of any of the men to identify any "ringleader" clearly indicates some trepidation on their part about giving evidence. The assurances of confidentiality do not seem to have allayed their fears completely. It is also noteworthy that this was the first time that the ratings had been asked for their input about the problems in the lower deck, so some trepidation is understandable.

It also became abundantly clear very early on that there was no underlying communist influence or subversion behind the incidents. The cause of the discontent was the requirement that the aircraft handlers wash the decks after a late night and early morning of flying operations.⁴²⁹ For the aircraft handlers this requirement was the last straw in a series of minor complaints. Some, for example, were upset that when

⁴²⁷ Testimony of Commodore Miles, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, Q. 36-46.

⁴²⁸ Testimony of Able Seaman Charles Hilmer Cowie, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 144-153.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

Magnificent put into various ports they were unable to go ashore in civilian clothes due to a lack of storage space aboard for any personal gear beyond the minimal requirements.⁴³⁰

There was also considerable discontent caused by leave arrangements when *Magnificent* put into Colon. The plan there was for all of the crew members to get shore leave. Due, however, to difficulties in transporting men ashore and a general shortage of ship's boats, only a few men managed to get ashore. The vast majority of the crew received no shore leave in Colon and many of them spent the entire afternoon waiting for boats that never arrived.⁴³¹ After some time at sea and considerable hard work the failure to get shore leave must have been a bitter disappointment.

In terms of living conditions a number of complaints, each minor in nature, arose repeatedly. One of the complaints of which Lt. D.D. Peacocke, the Divisional Officer for the aircraft handlers, was made aware concerned bedbugs in the cushions of the mess seating area. Lt. Peacocke testified that he had reported the matter to the Medical Officer and that some fumigation had been attempted. Unfortunately this did not solve the problem and the bedbug issue remained a sore point for the members of the mess.⁴³² One can see how the presence of bedbugs would, over time and in crowded conditions, assume a disproportionate importance.

The bedbug problem was made more acute by some overcrowding in the mess. There were more men assigned to the mess than there was space. As a result some of the men had to sleep on the infested seating areas. The overcrowding also led to hot water shortages in the washing areas and delay in accessing the washing facilities.⁴³³ While

⁴³⁰ Testimony of Leading Seaman Gurling, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 316-336.

⁴³¹ Testimony of Lieutenant D.D. Peacocke, pp. 45-80.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Testimony of Able Seaman Rees, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 253-266.

each of these issues would individually have been an annoyance, combined they served to magnify the overall level of discontent among the aircraft handlers. It is significant in this regard that none of the other messes were involved in the incident, as none of the other messes suffered the particular constellation of problems that affected the aircraft handlers.

In the circumstances, then, no communist subversion was necessary to foster discontent. There was however some evidence of small incidents of sabotage, most notably the appearance of a hammer and sickle painted at various places around the ship. In another instance one of the ladders was cut away and thrown over the side.⁴³⁴ When questioned directly by the Commission concerning potential "Red" influence, all witnesses dismissed the instances as a concern. Leading Seaman Gurling attributed the vandalism to "someone with a nut loose in his head,"⁴³⁵ while Chief Petty Officer Clarke indicated that the possibility of subversion had never even entered his mind in spite of the vandalism.⁴³⁶ Leading Seaman Day referred to the suggestion of subversion as "nonsense"⁴³⁷ and to Seaman Brown it was "foolishness."⁴³⁸ The Master-at-Arms, Gillis, indicated that he had gone so far as to make inquiries about subversion following the "incident" but had found nothing to suggest any "Red" influence aboard the *Magnificent*.⁴³⁹

The Commission also examined the administrative issues aboard *Magnificent* that contributed to the general level of discontent among her crew. There was a serious

⁴³⁴ Testimony of Able Seaman Gurling, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 328-329.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁴³⁶ Testimony of Chief Petty Officer Clarke, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 385-399.

⁴³⁷ Testimony of Leading Seaman Day, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 136-144.

⁴³⁸ Testimony of Able Seaman Brown, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, Q. 1025.

⁴³⁹ Testimony of Master-At-Arms Gillis, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 1-8.

manning problem. While the 3G mess was overcrowded, *Magnificent* overall was undermanned by some two hundred fifty personnel. Shortages of men in departments staffed by technical specialists were made up by loaning them men from the seaman's branch. These loaned men had to perform their seaman's duties, such as cleaning up around the ship, on top of any additional duties that they were given. The men of the seaman's branch became, in the words of *Magnificent's* Executive Officer Commander D.W. Piers,⁴⁴⁰ "the drawers of water and the hewers of wood" to a disproportionate degree.⁴⁴¹ If the aircraft handlers felt put upon and unfairly treated, it was not without some foundation in fact.

The personnel shortages were particularly acute in crucial areas. While *Magnificent* had 21 petty officers on complement, for example, there were just seven serving at the time of the "incident." Similarly, the ship's complement called for forty-four leading seamen. The actual number of experienced and properly trained leading seamen was at most twelve. The changes in the rank structure had moved some personnel to "acting" rank in the leading seamen and petty officer positions, but they lacked the training and experience to make up for what can only be described as a gross shortage of experienced senior non-Commissioned personnel.⁴⁴²

The lack of training and experience extended to the divisional officers aboard *Magnificent*. The divisional officer occupied a crucial position in the maintenance of order, discipline and morale aboard His Majesty's Canadian Ships. Each divisional

⁴⁴⁰ D.W. Piers had a distinguished career and was one of the RCN's best officers. Although his association with the RCN did not begin until 1930, he gained distinction as the commanding officer of HMCS *Restigouche* and *Algonquin*. While in command of *Restigouche* he had also enjoyed a time as the commanding officer of the Fourth Canadian Escort Group, which incidentally contained HMCS *Amherst* commanded by L.C. Audette. He was awarded the DSC for his leadership while in this position. (Douglas et al. *No Higher Purpose*, chapter 10; *A Blue Water Navy*, pp. 55-56.)

⁴⁴¹ Testimony of Commander Piers, Transcripts, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 200-225.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 190-252; Testimony of Petty Officer Haspeck, *passim*.

officer was responsible for a small group of seamen. The officer would be available to deal with problems or concerns of the men, both personal and service related. The divisional officer served as both a sounding board and problem solver for the men and as a conduit between the men of the lower deck and the captain and executive officer. A properly functioning system of divisional officers would discover and address discontent among the crew before things got out of hand.

The key to the success of the divisional system was trust. To gain the confidence of the men in his division, the officer would have to first earn their trust and respect. Unfortunately the manning shortages in the RCN in the post-war period made this virtually impossible. The junior officers given divisional officer duty had little specific training in the leadership of men and the shortage of officers generally rendered any sort of mentoring by more senior officers impractical at best.⁴⁴³ The personnel shortage also meant that the complements of the various RCN ships were in a constant state of flux. Officers in particular would be appointed to a ship for a few months and then move on to their next posting. The officers and men were not given the opportunity to know each other and the men of the lower deck were, understandably, reluctant to confide in officers they did not have the measure of.⁴⁴⁴ In these circumstances it is easy to understand how the "incident" took *Magnificent's* officers by surprise, and how the discontent of the aircraft handlers managed to fester. There was simply nobody they felt comfortable complaining to.

The problem of inexperienced divisional officers would have been alleviated by a properly functioning welfare committee aboard *Magnificent*. The idea for this type of

⁴⁴³ Testimony of Commander Piers.

⁴⁴⁴ Testimony of Earl David Kayo, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 89-98.

organisation had initially been implemented by Admiral Mainguy when he was commanding HMCS *Uganda* at the end of the Second World War. He had instituted a series of "town hall meetings" at which all members of the ship's company were present and could raise any areas of concern or issues that they had with the ship or its routine. The meetings also allowed the captain to keep the crew informed as to the mission on which the ship was engaged, expected ports of call and other similar things. This system had worked well and gave the men of the lower deck a sense of agency and of being part of a collective enterprise rather than just being cogs in a larger wheel.⁴⁴⁵

In the post-war period a naval directive was issued instructing that welfare committees be established on all RCN ships. These committees were to be in addition to other ships' committees, such as the canteen committee (which dealt exclusively with the expenditure and use of the ship's fund), and were specifically to allow members of the crew to raise concerns and air any grievances that they had. Members were to be elected, one from each mess, to represent the members of the crew. The chairman of the welfare committee was to be the ship's executive officer, who would take the appropriate minutes and take matters raised up with the captain where necessary, or act on them where possible.⁴⁴⁶

Unfortunately aboard *Magnificent* things went wrong with the welfare committee. Although Commodore Miles, the commanding officer, believed that a welfare committee existed and was functioning,⁴⁴⁷ this was not the case. As the executive officer it was Commander Piers' job to establish and run the welfare committee and his evidence was

⁴⁴⁵ Lund, "Vice-Admiral E. Rollo Mainguy: Sailor's Admiral," pp. 187-206.

⁴⁴⁶ Testimony of Commander Piers.

⁴⁴⁷ Testimony of Commodore Miles, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, pp. 190-252. His evidence was that he was given this impression by Commander Piers.

that he believed welfare committees to be a good idea. He also admitted that he had received the directive mandating the formation of welfare committees. Where things fell apart, according to Piers, was in the absence of a general order or amendment to the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions as a follow-up to the directive. In his view, then, the directive never attained the force of an order. In the absence of such an order, Piers, in spite of apparently believing them to be a good idea, did not feel it necessary to establish a welfare committee aboard *Magnificent*.⁴⁴⁸

The testimony concerning welfare committees provided one of the more interesting exchanges in the first phase of the hearings. It is clear from Louis Audette's handwritten notes on the transcript that he did not like Commander Piers. The reasons for this are unclear, although it is likely that they had come into contact with one another during the Second World War. Regardless of the reason, Audette described him as "incredibly egocentric, arrogant and self-confident -- cold -- great charmer [sic]."⁴⁴⁹ The questions put to Piers reflect this dislike. He was subjected to a rigorous cross-examination with the goal being, apparently, to have him admit that the entire incident was his fault. It was clear that the commissioners were firmly convinced that a welfare committee would have solved the problems that led to the 'incident,' and that Piers' failure to establish one for technical reasons was tantamount to gross negligence on his part.

At times, in fact, the questioning of Piers became downright unfair. He was, for example, criticised for not issuing an order to the men to fall in. When asked why he did not issue such an order he was told by the questioner, possibly Mr. Wickwire, counsel for the Commission, that there was evidence before the Commission that most of the men

⁴⁴⁸ Testimony of Commander Piers. Piers' position was confirmed as technically correct by Commander Hurcombe, the Judge-Advocate of the Fleet.

⁴⁴⁹ Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, p. 190.

would have fallen in if ordered to do so.⁴⁵⁰ This was a complete fabrication and no such evidence had been given. In fact the evidence presented indicated that an order would have made no difference whatsoever to the conduct of the men. The line of questioning was designed to embarrass Commander Piers and trick him into admitting responsibility for the incident. This type of questioning would never have been permitted during a judicial procedure or formal hearing, and both Mr. Audette and Mr. Wickwire would have been fully aware of that fact.

Admiral Mainguy, for his part, allowed this to go on without interruption or apparent objection. Commander B.S. McEwan, the Commander (Air) of *Magnificent*, had earlier testified that the response of the senior officers to the incident had been governed by signals received from Naval headquarters. These signals directed a course of action designed to contain the seriousness of the incidents and to avoid making matters worse by directly engaging the disobedient crewmen.⁴⁵¹ As Admiral Grant would subsequently explain, the failure to obey a pipe was disobedience of an order, so the issuance of subsequent orders was superfluous and would serve only to aggravate the situation.⁴⁵² As Commanding Officer Pacific Coast at the time of the incidents Mainguy would have been aware of the signals and would have known that the questions with which Piers was being peppered were in a very large measure unfair. Mainguy, however, chose to maintain his silence and to assume a passive role as chairman.

The absence of a welfare committee left the airing of grievances to the established complaint procedure. This required that complaints about service conditions, living

⁴⁵⁰ Testimony of Commander Piers, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 2, Q. 8306. Piers was not the only witness that this was done to. See, for example, the testimony of Petty Officer Haspeck, Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, Q. 4294.

⁴⁵¹ Testimony of B.S. McEwan, Commander (Air), Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 412-421.

⁴⁵² Testimony of Admiral Grant, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949, Part 1, p. 3511-3512.

conditions or any other matter be made one at a time in writing and sent by the divisional officer up the chain of command to the executive officer. If the executive officer could not address the issue adequately, it was then sent on to the captain for response. The evidence before the Commission was that this was an entirely ineffective process. Many of the witnesses believed that using the complaint procedure to raise issues about ship's routine or habitability, or to raise concerns about a particular officer would lead to retaliation or to the man in question being branded a "trouble maker."⁴⁵³ The ratings were therefore, regardless of the truth of their beliefs, reluctant to make use of the process provided to air grievances.

What is perhaps most striking about the hearings on the *Magnificent*, in hindsight, is that, with one exception, the issue of the "Canadianization" of the RCN was not raised either spontaneously or when witnesses were asked to agree with specific propositions.⁴⁵⁴ There was widespread agreement that the ordinary sailor in the RCN was better educated and more independent than his RN counterpart and that the average RN sailor was prepared to put up with more aloof and dictatorial officers because he was used to it. There was also considerable agreement that Canadian sailors were generally happier when they understood the reasons for orders given and were kept informed about the ship's operational schedule.⁴⁵⁵ What is missing from the testimony of the men of the lower deck, particularly those involved in the "incident" is any criticism of the officers or the way in which they handled the men.

⁴⁵³ See for example the testimony of Master-At-Arms Gillis.

⁴⁵⁴ The exception is Petty Officer Lovekin who testified at Q1115 that he believed the RCN should be more Canadian and that he disliked the affected English accents put on by the officers. Audette's handwritten notes describe him as "intelligent, extrovert, extremely articulate and valuable -- a breath of fresh air, very frank." This glowing review is probably related to the fact that Lovekin had expressed ideas that Audette already believed were true. (Transcript, *Magnificent* Part 1)

⁴⁵⁵ See testimony of Lieutenant Peacocke, Commander McEwan and Lieutenant-Commander (Air) Watson (Transcript *Magnificent* Part 1, pp. 200-225.)

Overall, then, it is apparent from the transcripts and the evidence given that the "incident" aboard *Magnificent* was the result of a number of small, ordinary complaints about ship's routine and living conditions. While none of these complaints would by itself have been sufficient to trigger mass disobedience the combination of them all was. This combined with an inefficient and ineffective communication network between the ratings and their officers to drive the men of 3G mess past their breaking point. There was nothing more sinister behind the actions of the men than a desire to have their voices heard.

One week after the first round of hearings ended, on 27 April, the second round began on 4 May at Esquimalt. The focus shifted to the "incident" aboard HMCS *Athabaskan*. There were also a number of witnesses who appeared voluntarily, as had been the case during the first round of hearings.

The "incident" aboard *Athabaskan* was significantly more serious than *Magnificent's* had been. Where events on *Magnificent* involved approximately thirty-two men, all from one mess, on *Athabaskan* there was collective action by ninety ratings from all parts of the ship. This number represented nearly half of *Athabaskan's* full complement of one hundred ninety-six officers and ratings, and all of her personnel under the rate of leading seaman.⁴⁵⁶

At the time of the "incident" *Athabaskan* was on a southern training cruise as part of a larger task group led by HMCS *Ontario*. The cruise had begun on 28 January and the first stops had been at San Diego and Magdalena Bay, the latter to facilitate the painting of the ship. On 25 February, following some training exercises, *Athabaskan* was detached from the task group to allow her to put in at Manzanillo, Mexico, to take on

⁴⁵⁶ Naval Inquiry Brief of Evidence, p. 39.

fuel. She was to rejoin the remainder of the group the following day and proceed in company with *Ontario* and the other ships of the task group to Acapulco.⁴⁵⁷

Upon arriving in Manzanillo *Athabaskan* went alongside the fueling jetty. As it was, at this point, close to mid-day, the crew were sent to lunch to fall in again at 1315 hours. When the pipe was duly sounded to fall in, as had been the case with *Magnificent*, virtually none of the seamen responded. The duty petty officer was sent to investigate and found that the crew had locked themselves in the forward upper mess deck. When he enquired why they had not responded to the pipe, the men indicated that they would only speak to the captain.⁴⁵⁸

Commander M.A. Medland,⁴⁵⁹ the captain, accompanied by the coxwain then went to the mess deck to speak to the men. While there he noticed a piece of paper on one of the tables which appeared to contain a list of demands. He placed his cap over the paper and pretended that he had not seen it. He then advised the men of the proper method of stating a grievance and asked them what the problems were. He was told that the men did not understand why they had not gone into tropical routine and why they were constantly being told by the executive officer to straighten their caps. Medland told the men that he would see them individually later on to discuss the issues but that they would be piped to fall in in ten minutes. He made it clear to the men that he expected them to obey the pipe, and that if they did not, he would consider the matter to be a mutiny and would clear the lower decks by force. He was careful not to issue any direct

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Commander Medland had an enormous amount of staff experience, and had spent most of the Second World War ashore. Of particular note is his time on the staff of the Directorate of Warfare and Training in 1943 and as director of warfare and training and assistant chief of naval personnel both in 1943. Given that he had only entered the RCN in 1930 his rapid rise to positions of considerable authority is indicative of his capabilities as a staff officer. (<http://www.nauticapedia.ca> retrieved 18 April 2016.)

orders to the men and ten minutes later, at 1420 hours, "hands fall in" was piped. All of the recalcitrant crewmen responded.⁴⁶⁰ The entire "incident" had lasted a little over an hour.

The number of men involved, while apparently large, is deceptive. Unlike the case on *Magnificent*, the men involved on *Athabaskan* came from all areas of the ship. This should not, however, be interpreted as widespread discontent. Throughout the testimony it became clear that the seamen were the driving force behind the "incident." Ratings from the specialised departments, such as the stokers and the electricians, overwhelmingly testified that they were involved in the "incident" as a show of solidarity with their shipmates and not as a result of any complaints of their own. Several of the witnesses also testified that they were involved more or less by accident. Following the lunch break several went to the mess deck, one of the largest on the ship, to rest, read or take a nap. When they became aware of the large gathering it was too late, they felt, to get out. If these witnesses are to be believed the level of discontent aboard *Athabaskan* was not as serious or as general as the numbers involved would suggest.

Similarly the list of demands poses a bit of an evidentiary problem. None of the witnesses admitted to taking part in its creation. In a similar vein while many of the witnesses testified that they were aware that there was a paper circulating, none of them admitted to having read it. Given the time the incident took to resolve itself and the number of men involved, it is reasonable to assume that the list itself was created by a small sub-set of the men present and was not representative of the concerns of the majority.

⁴⁶⁰ Testimony of Commander M.A. Medland, Transcripts, Esquimalt Vol I, p. 107 and ff.

In covering up the list Commander Medland acted with prudence and successfully avoided aggravating the problem. A meeting at which grievances were aired could be seen as ordinary, if concerted, griping. Given the uncertainty surrounding what constituted a mutiny and the history of similar actions, this was a relatively minor event. Written demands, however, constituted an entirely different situation and looked more like an attempt to take some degree of control over the ship by coercion. This would, by necessity, have required a swift and decisive response by the captain. By acting as he did, and recognising the situation for what it was, Medland allowed the men the opportunity to extricate themselves from the situation they found themselves in and thereby avoided even worse damage to the perception and reputation of the RCN.

As with *Magnificent*, the Commission was unable to uncover any evidence that the lock-in was planned in advance. There were no leading seamen or petty officers on the mess deck at the time of the "incident," but the evidence was that this was a coincidence and not the result of their having been warned in advance. No testimony contradicted this view.⁴⁶¹ Once again the men of the lower deck closed ranks to protect the ringleaders behind the lock-in.

On *Athabaskan*, as on *Magnificent*, the proximate causes of the lock-in were relatively minor and mundane. There were essentially two things that pushed the men beyond the limits of what they were prepared to accept with equanimity. The first was a failure on the part of the officers to put the ship into tropical routine. It was common practice in tropical climes for the ship's routine to change. The day would begin earlier for the ratings, with breakfast at 0530 rather than at 0700. Work would be performed in the early hours of the morning and then end at mid-day for several hours. Ordinary

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

duties would commence again late in the afternoon. This was designed to avoid having the men working during the hottest part of the day.

When *Athabaskan* put into Manzanillo tropical routine had not yet been instituted. As a result the men had to perform the refuelling during the hottest part of the day. Refuelling was hard, hot and dirty work at the best of times, and under a tropical sun would be doubly so. The failure to go into tropical routine, which the veteran members of the crew were expecting, struck the ratings as unfair and careless of their welfare. They placed the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of the executive officer, Lieutenant-Commander C.R. Parker, who they believed was responsible for setting the routine.⁴⁶² In reality the ship's routine was set by the senior ship in the group, in this case HMCS *Ontario*, and not by the individual ships so, while he was blamed for the failure to change to tropical routine, it was beyond Lieutenant-Commander Parker's authority to make any changes to it. *Athabaskan* would go to tropical routine when *Ontario* did and no sooner.⁴⁶³

Lieutenant-Commander Parker was also squarely the focus of the second general complaint. Many of the ratings testified that he was distant with them and condescending to them. There was widespread agreement that he did not speak to them "like men" and brooked no questions about his orders. He was also, apparently, a stickler for detail. Matters came to a head on the cruise when he repeatedly told the men to straighten their caps and do up their shirts while they were working about the ship in the tropical heat. It

⁴⁶² See for example the testimony of Able Seaman Leinweber, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. I, pp. 234-252.

⁴⁶³ Testimony of Lt. W. Onysko, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, p. 997.

was too much for the men and one of the demands placed before the captain was for the removal of Lieutenant-Commander Parker.⁴⁶⁴

The witnesses raised a number of other concerns as well. The ship's routine generally, for example, was an issue. While the general routine was set by the senior ship, there was a considerable difference between ships in how strictly it was enforced. *Ontario*, for instance, had ordered that no smoking be permitted on the upper deck. This was enforced strictly on *Athabaskan* but was not enforced aboard HMCS *Cayuga* which was also in company on the cruise. The men aboard *Athabaskan* could see *Cayuga's* men smoking, and while they were aware that they could not, had no idea why the differences existed. This caused discontent among *Athabaskan's* hands, and in the absence of an explanation, they fixed the blame on Lieutenant-Commander Parker.⁴⁶⁵

Commander Medland, for his part, came to the defence of his executive officer. He characterised Parker as inexperienced, as it was his first appointment as executive officer. He also described Parker as naturally quite shy, which came across to the men as distant. Given the personnel shortages, particularly among experienced sea-going officers, there was insufficient time, according to Medland, to mentor him closely. The demand for his removal was the first indication to Medland that there were problems. There was widespread agreement among the witnesses that the way in which Lieutenant-Commander Parker executed his duties improved considerably after the incident and that complaints about his conduct had stopped altogether.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Testimony of Able Seaman Leinweber, pp. 234-252.

⁴⁶⁵ See, for example, the testimony of Lieutenant Hind, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, p. 756 and the testimony of Lieutenant Onysko, *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ Testimony of Commander Medland, pp. 330-335.

Lieutenant-Commander Parker's situation was made worse by the frequent changes in personnel that *Athabaskan* had experienced. He was, according to Captain K.F. Adams of the personnel department, the fourth executive officer on *Athabaskan* in the previous twelve months. While Parker had achieved the appropriate rank for appointment as an executive officer, he had done so with only one year of total sea time.⁴⁶⁷ This would have been barely enough time for Parker to become a competent divisional officer,⁴⁶⁸ and was completely insufficient time to train him to be responsible for the conduct and welfare of over a hundred men. Unfortunately, according to Captain Adams, this was not an uncommon problem in the RCN.⁴⁶⁹

The Commission also dealt with the issue of subversive "red" influence in much the same perfunctory way that they had done in the case of *Magnificent*. In fact, in *Athabaskan's* case even fewer witnesses were asked about it. Of the three who testified that there was a subversive influence operative, the most thorough discussion was in the testimony of Lieutenant-Commander G.R. Tottenham, who had worked in the intelligence department at Naval Headquarters until 1947. He testified that he believed RCN personnel were heavily influenced by the "Commercial [sic] Seaman's Union in a sort of "brotherhood of the sea." Because the CSU was heavily influenced by communist ideology, his argument went, it stood to reason that the RCN must be as well. The problem, however, according to Tottenham, was that the communists who had infiltrated the RCN were too well trained to be discovered. He admitted that he had no

⁴⁶⁷ Testimony of Captain Adams, Transcripts, Ottawa June 1949 Part 1, p. 30.

⁴⁶⁸ The crew of a warship were subdivided into smaller units known as divisions. Each division was assigned a particular junior officer who would be responsible for their welfare and for the administration discipline for minor offences. The divisional officer was someone to whom the men would go with any minor complaints and so it was important that the men and their divisional officer have the time to get to know and trust one another.

⁴⁶⁹ Testimony of Captain Adams, Transcripts, Ottawa June 1949, p. 30.

actual proof of communist agents in the RCN.⁴⁷⁰ Thus, in a remarkable feat of circular reasoning, the proof of communist subversion in the RCN was, in fact, the absence of any such proof.

In the absence of communists, some of the witnesses offered a novel alternative as the cause of the discontent. A number of the most vocal complainers among *Athabaskan's* crew were men who wanted to get out of the RCN for various reasons. There was some agreement among the witnesses that recruiting material painted far too rosy a picture of life in the RCN, particularly in its amenities and living conditions. Lack of resources, regrettably, made it impossible for the RCN to live up to the promises. This combined with a tendency in the recruiting material to understate the hardships of life in the navy and led to discontent among some of the ratings, who felt they had been misled.⁴⁷¹ When men became aware of the hardships it was too late for them to get out of the service and a general level of resentment grew. This resentment was exacerbated by the abundance of lucrative civilian jobs available during the post-war period.⁴⁷² The affected ratings, who felt stuck in their position for the duration of their enlistments, were more likely to complain about life in the navy, and were bound to be less tolerant of minor irritations.

During the *Athabaskan* hearings the word mutiny first reared its ugly head. For the first time the Commission clearly indicated that its members believed that the actions of the crews of the three ships involved constituted a mutiny in each case. They did

⁴⁷⁰ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander Tottenham, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. III, pp. 1361-1368. Neither Able Seamen Broughton or Lieutenant Crone, the only other witnesses who believed that a subversive element existed, could offer any proof either.

⁴⁷¹ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander Pratt, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. III, pp. 1225-1229. Pratt was the Training Officer at *HMCS Naden*, the West-Coast naval establishment.

⁴⁷² Testimony of Coxwain Bennett, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, pp. 631-633. Note that Audette, in his handwritten notes, corrected the name of the witness to Bennish.

concede, however, that the failure of the regulations to define the term was problematic and there was some sort of qualitative difference between mutinies with and without violence.⁴⁷³ Commander P. Hurcombe, the Judge-Advocate of the Fleet and the man who could clear the matter up if anyone could, was conspicuous by his silence on the issue.

The serving officers asked about the issue of mutiny were of no greater assistance. Commander Medland, who one would assume would be in a position to know, was under the impression that mutiny required violence combined with disobedience.⁴⁷⁴ Lieutenant-Commander Parker testified that in his view a mutiny could only be classified as such if the participants intended it to be one. As none of the men of the *Athabaskan* had manifested this intent, in his view no mutiny had occurred.⁴⁷⁵ In the face of this uncertainty the commissioners abandoned their exploration of the nuances of a mutiny with the officer witnesses, although when the ratings were questioned, the term continued to be used.

For their part, the ratings demonstrated very little knowledge as to what did or did not constitute a mutiny. Those questioned about it were, however, unanimous in their position that at the time of the "incident" they did not view their actions as being in any way mutinous. They felt, rather, that they were merely voicing complaints through legitimate, if extreme, means.⁴⁷⁶ This belief was bolstered by the presence on *Athabaskan* of some thirty-five ratings who had served on *Ontario* at the time of her "incident." The absence of any disciplinary action against them and the apparent success

⁴⁷³ Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, pp. 870-871.

⁴⁷⁴ Testimony of Commander Medland, p. 586.

⁴⁷⁵ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander Parker, *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ See for example Testimony of Able Seaman Rowan, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, pp. 974-976.

of their efforts in removing *Ontario's* executive officer had led to the general belief that collective action by the ratings was a legitimate method of expressing themselves and bringing about change.⁴⁷⁷ In fact the failure of the senior officers to take disciplinary action in the case of *Ontario* may well have led the ratings to conclude that not only were their actions legitimate, but that they may also have been tacitly sanctioned by the RCN.

In the *Athabaskan* hearings, the Commission intensified its inquiry into the issue of the Canadianization of the RCN. There was widespread agreement among the senior officers heard from that there was a fundamental difference between the ratings of the RN and the RCN. Canadian ratings tended to be better educated than their British counterparts, and required more explanation as to why things were being done.⁴⁷⁸

Captain W. Ogle, the commander of the tri-service college Royal Roads, saw this difference as being related to a superior education for Canadian youth, and argued that the supposed deference of the British sailor had nothing to do with any social distance between the rating and his officers in the Royal Navy.⁴⁷⁹ Captain H. Rayner agreed with Captain Ogle and was firm in his testimony that the training of Canadian officers in British ships caused Canadian officers no subsequent difficulties in commanding Canadian sailors.⁴⁸⁰ The senior officers were clear in their evidence that perceived national characteristics of the RCN had nothing to do with the 'incidents.'

Receiving no joy on the issue of national character, the Commission turned its attention to the absence of Canadian identification on the uniforms. Among the witnesses

⁴⁷⁷ Testimony of Leading Seaman Eastman, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, pp. 774-775.

⁴⁷⁸ Testimony of J.C. Hibbard, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. I; Testimony of Captain H. Rayner, Transcript Esquimalt Vol. III, pp. 1313-1314; Testimony of Captain Ogle, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. III, pp. 1337-1338.

⁴⁷⁹ Testimony of Captain Ogle, *ibid.* In making this point he was specifically disagreeing with the Commission, which had suggested that the deference was entirely related to the difference in social class between the British officer and rating.

⁴⁸⁰ Testimony of Captain Rayner, pp. 1313-1314.

who testified on this issue, there was almost universal agreement that such markings would be desirable. The reasons given, however, had little to do with a spontaneous desire to be identified as Canadian for its own sake. It appears from the evidence given by the ratings that the real desire for Canadian identifiers stemmed from a desire not to be confused with British sailors. The similarity in uniform between the RN and the RCN led to Canadian ratings being verbally abused by American sailors while they were ashore. They were called "juicers" and "limeys." Occasionally the animosity went so far as to lead to brawls between American and Canadian sailors.⁴⁸¹

Although some of the witnesses raised the issue of Canadian identifiers without prompting from the Commission,⁴⁸² the vast majority did so only when asked. These prompts came out of the blue and often under somewhat false pretenses. Typically it would be suggested to the witness that "a number of the men,"⁴⁸³ or in one extreme case "practically every rating"⁴⁸⁴ had indicated that they favoured 'Canada' markings, thus encouraging the witnesses to agree. These statements were, however, patently false and no such preponderance of evidence at any point existed. The questions were designed to encourage agreement with ideas put forward by the Commission itself and played on the desire of the individual witnesses not to stand out. This type of questioning would never have been allowed in a more formal hearing as the questions assumed facts not in evidence and were legally improper.

⁴⁸¹ See for example the testimony of Able Seaman Broughton, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. I, who described the American sailors as "an awful ignorant race of people," demonstrating that the animus was at least to some degree mutual.

⁴⁸² There were four witnesses in this category; Able Seaman Christen and Petty Officers Rainstern, Martin and Walker. (Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. III, pp. 1049, 1056 and 1080.

⁴⁸³ Testimony of Chief Boatswain's Mate Stevenson, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, p. 936.

⁴⁸⁴ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander Shergold, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. II, p. 699.

The issue of welfare committees also received attention in the case of *Athabaskan*. Whereas on *Magnificent* it had become clear that no welfare committee had existed at the time of the 'incident,' on *Athabaskan* it appeared that one existed but was essentially invisible. Commander J.C. Hibbard⁴⁸⁵ was firmly convinced that *Athabaskan* had a functioning welfare committee at the time of the 'incident.'⁴⁸⁶ On closer examination, however, there was considerably less certainty. Commander Medland expressed his belief that the requirement for welfare committees had been cancelled. He also testified that, regardless of the cancellation, in his understanding welfare committees performed the same function as ship's fund committees.⁴⁸⁷ This view was shared by Lieutenant-Commander Parker, who was responsible for running the welfare committee on *Athabaskan*. While he was certain that a welfare committee existed, when pressed it became clear that in Parker's view the welfare committee met at the same time and in the same place as the ship's fund committee and consisted of exactly the same personnel. It also performed exactly the same function.⁴⁸⁸ The welfare committee was, then, in all particulars indistinguishable from the ship's fund committee.⁴⁸⁹ It was clear that Parker was doing his best to provide the 'correct' answer to the questions put to him, but as the cross-examination by the commissioners progressed, it became equally clear that there was no functioning welfare committee aboard *Athabaskan*.

⁴⁸⁵ Commander Hibbard had actually begun his service with the volunteer reserve and later transferred to the RCN. His wartime service was outstanding. In addition to several shore appointments he commanded HMCS *Skeena* and *Iroquois* and served as senior officer of Convoy Escort Group 24. He was awarded a DSC in 1943 for his actions in this capacity and a bar to same in 1944 for outstanding service in the destruction of a German submarine. (http://www.nauticapedia.ca/Articles/Admirals_Canadian.php, retrieved 18 April 2016.)

⁴⁸⁶ Testimony of Commander Hibbard, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁷ Testimony of Captain Medland, pp. 601-602.

⁴⁸⁸ Testimony of Lieutenant-Commander Parker, pp. 872-886.

⁴⁸⁹ The ship's fund committee was put together to administer a pool of money, collected from the personnel and to be used to provide amenities and recreational activities for the ship's company.

The reasons for the failure to establish a welfare committee were similar to those given for *Magnificent*. The failure to incorporate the directive that welfare committees be formed into the regulatory structure left the impression among senior officers that the idea had been dropped. Even those officers, like Lieutenant-Commander Parker, who believed that such committees were a good idea, received very little guidance as to the functions that they were to perform and the parameters within which they were to operate. This was particularly true of matters of ship's routine. Ordinarily the purview of the executive officer, it was unclear whether they fell within the mandate of the welfare committees.⁴⁹⁰ In the absence of guidance it appears that, at least on *Magnificent* and *Athabaskan*, the senior officers took the path of least resistance and just failed to form welfare committees at all, leaving the ratings with no vehicle for airing complaints.

The final incident investigated was the one aboard HMCS *Crescent*. As the last of the three ships to arrive in Canadian waters, it made sense that the other ships be heard from first. The portion of the hearing devoted to *Crescent* was significantly shorter than those devoted to the other ships. This was reflected in the more direct focus of the questions put to the witnesses. By the time they got to *Crescent* the Commission had gained its sea legs and had determined what the important issues were.

As had been the case with the other two "incidents," the proximate causes of the "incident" aboard *Crescent* were relatively mundane. At the time of the "incident" *Crescent* was alongside in Nanjing China. She was initially in company with HMS

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

Cossack and then on her own. Given the uncertain political situation in China at the time, the crew were not given leave and were not permitted access to Nanjing proper.⁴⁹¹

Prior to the "incident" the weather had been miserable and rainy. To make matters worse, by the time she reached Nanjing, *Crescent* had used up much of her available supply of fresh fruit and vegetables and there were none available to purchase locally. While the quantity of the food available was sufficient the menu became considerably more bland for the men than it had been previously on the cruise.⁴⁹² These factors combined to create a generally negative feeling among the men.

In order to provide some form of entertainment for the ratings, Captain H.V.W. Groos had decided to establish a shore canteen in a warehouse structure near *Crescent's* berth. To access that structure the men had to cross a bridge spanning a ditch. This in turn necessitated the placement of two additional sentries, one in the canteen and one at the bridge.⁴⁹³ The sentries would by necessity come from the seaman's branch, and would be standing sentry duty in addition to their other duties. This duty meant that in some cases the men were getting only one hour off between watches.⁴⁹⁴ This constellation of circumstances would prove unfortunate for *Crescent*.

The closest proximate cause of the "incident" ostensibly involved forty cases of beer. *Crescent* was transporting this beer for delivery to the British ambassador. On two occasions arrangements had been made with the ambassador to provide a truck to pick the cases up. On each occasion the men on watch, primarily seamen, had to move the

⁴⁹¹ Testimony of Captain Groos, Naval Inquiry -- Transcripts -- *Crescent* Vol. IV, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 12, p. 1896.

⁴⁹² Testimony of Chief Petty Officer Mace, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1896.

⁴⁹³ Testimony of Captain Groos, *passim*.

⁴⁹⁴ Testimony of Able Seaman Cleet, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1570; Testimony of Able Seaman Taylor, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1785.

cases from the ship to the jetty. When the promised truck failed to arrive, the cases had to be moved back aboard to prevent the disappearance of the beer.⁴⁹⁵ One can well imagine how frustrating this must have been for the men moving the beer, particularly combined with the additional watches.

The "incident" itself began at 0805 on 15 March. At that time "hands fall in" was piped following breakfast. At 0815 Captain Groos was advised by Lieutenant G.R. Wood the executive officer that the seamen from both the fore and aft seaman's mess decks were refusing to fall in and had locked themselves in the forward mess deck. There were eighty-three men involved in this action, out of a ship's complement of one hundred eighty-six officers and men.⁴⁹⁶ It appears that Lieutenant Wood then had "clear lower decks" piped, on his own initiative, and again received no response from the men.⁴⁹⁷ The vast majority of the men involved were from the seaman's branch and were below the rate of leading seaman. The stokers and electricians were not involved for the most part, as issues of ship's routine did not apply to them and the evidence is that they had no particular issues.⁴⁹⁸

Captain Groos then met with Seaman Rudolph, who he considered a leader among the men, although not necessarily a ringleader behind the "incident." At Rudolph's request Groos agreed to visit the mess deck and address the men. Groos made it clear, however, that he would be doing all of the talking during the meeting. When he arrived in the mess deck, Groos advised the assembled crewmen that what they were

⁴⁹⁵ Testimony of Captain Groos, pp. 1381-1392; Testimony of Lieutenant Wood, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1464.

⁴⁹⁶ Testimony of Captain Groos, p. 1393.

⁴⁹⁷ Testimony of Lieutenant Wood, pp. 1444-1465. wood testified that he piped "clear lower decks" at 0905, which leaves a delay of approximately an hour which is not adequately explained in the record.

⁴⁹⁸ Testimony of Able Seaman Carter, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1523.

doing was wrong and not the correct method of stating a grievance. He further advised them that their actions constituted a mutiny, and that he would have "hands fall in" piped at 0950. Failure on the part of the ratings to respond at that time, Groos advised them, would be viewed as a mutiny and the appropriate steps would be taken to quell it. At 0950 the "hands fall in" was piped and all hands responded.⁴⁹⁹ No further action was taken against the men and the entire incident was over in less than two hours.

As had been the case with the other two ships, the Commission duly inquired about the presence of any "red" influence aboard *Crescent*. The questions were by this point, however, pro forma and asked as almost an afterthought. They also only asked three of the witnesses about this, with two of them dismissing the idea outright.⁵⁰⁰ Able Seaman Peden raised the idea of collective bargaining powers, but only in reference to the necessity of raising general grievances and he specifically excluded discussion of wages and similar issues from the appropriate areas for collective action by the ratings.⁵⁰¹ By the time of the *Crescent* hearing the Commission seems to have decided that there was no communist influence behind the 'incidents.'

Considerable attention was focused in the conduct of Lieutenant G.R. Wood, the executive officer. One of the demands made of Captain Groos in a "manifesto" he had discovered on the port flat during the incident was for Wood's removal.⁵⁰² The men complained that Lieutenant Wood did not seem to know his job, particularly with regard

⁴⁹⁹ Testimony of Captain Groos, pp. 1394-1395; Testimony of Able Seaman Carter, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1527.

⁵⁰⁰ Testimony of Mr. Scott, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1788; Testimony of Able Seaman Carter, p. 1527.

⁵⁰¹ Testimony of Able Seaman Peden, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, pp. 1719-1721.

⁵⁰² Testimony of Captain Groos, pp. 1394-1395.

to changes in ship's routine and the issue of the beer on the jetty.⁵⁰³ There was also a general criticism of the brusque and offhand way in which he spoke to the men.⁵⁰⁴

Some of the complaints certainly had some foundation. Lieutenant Wood was undeniably inexperienced as an executive officer.⁵⁰⁵ *Crescent* represented his first appointment as an executive officer, and he had received no specific training in his duties as such. The shortage of personnel on the ship generally and the diplomatic responsibilities which Captain Groos while in Nanjing meant that Wood had very little by way of mentoring available to him. He was essentially left to fend for himself in his new duties. To make matters worse, he had only recently been appointed to *Crescent* and was her third executive officer in a year.⁵⁰⁶ In these circumstances it would have been surprising if Wood had not shown signs of inexperience and uncertainty in the performance of his duties.

Some of the criticisms of Lieutenant Wood, on the other hand, were unfair. He was, for example, blamed for the beer on the jetty issue and for changes in ship's routine. In fact, the order to move the cases of beer originated with Captain Groos and the changes in routine were done to conform to the senior ship on station, HMS *Cossack*, again something for which Wood was not responsible. Thus Wood, to match *Cossack's* routine, ordered the ratings to change out of their work clothes to go to the canteen. This annoyed them considerably. While this was continued after *Cossack's* departure, it was unfair to blame Lieutenant Wood for things over which he had minimal control.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Ibid., pp. 1414-1415; Testimony of Leading Seaman Perlson, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, pp. 1604-1605.

⁵⁰⁴ Testimony of Able Seaman Taylor, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1785.

⁵⁰⁵ He did have considerable experience as a junior officer, having served throughout the war on a number of ships. (Testimony of Lt. Wood, pp. 1444-1447.)

⁵⁰⁶ Testimony of Captain Groos, passim.

⁵⁰⁷ Testimony of Captain Groos, pp. 1414-1415; Testimony of Lieutenant Wood, pp. 1469-1473.

It appears that the problem of Lieutenant Wood was a matter of personality rather than any sense of superiority or entitlement. According to Captain Groos, Lieutenant Wood was quite a shy individual. His discomfort led to his appearing to have a brusque and superior attitude, which rubbed the men the wrong way.⁵⁰⁸ Once confronted with his shortcomings, however, all witnesses agreed that Wood's performance improved across the board, and by the time *Crescent* returned to Esquimalt, all agreed that he had become quite a good Executive Officer.

Lieutenant Wood's difficulties were symptomatic of a larger issue plaguing the RCN; the lack of stability in personnel. The proper functioning of the divisional system as a vehicle by which the happiness and wellbeing of the crew could be supported required that the officers and men know one another and feel comfortable speaking to one another about a wide range of issues. This, in turn, required that the officers and men serve together for extended periods of time.⁵⁰⁹ In *Crescent's* case there had been a frequent turnover of officers and men, with most of the divisional officers being new to the ship. They did not, therefore, know their men particularly well, and the barometer for testing the mood of the crew had ceased to function.⁵¹⁰ This situation was made worse by the presence of an executive officer who was also new to his job and unfamiliar with both his fellow officers and the men of the lower deck.

The establishment of welfare committees was designed, at least in part, to address this problem. Unlike *Magnificent* and *Athabaskan*, *Crescent* had a functioning welfare committee at the time of the "incident," separate and apart from the ship's fund committee. This committee had met two or three times during the cruise prior to the

⁵⁰⁸ Testimony of Captain Groos, p. 1416.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1434.

⁵¹⁰ Testimony of Lieutenant F.P.R. Saunders, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1857.

'incident," including a meeting on 13 March. At that meeting the welfare committee had requested the abolition of the shore canteen which was the source of much of the discontent. It requested that the men be allowed to have their beer on the ship instead. The request was duly put to Captain Groos by Lieutenant Wood and denied by Captain Groos on 14 March.⁵¹¹ It is difficult to believe that it is a coincidence that the "incident" occurred the very next day.

The failure of the welfare committee to alleviate the unrest and prevent the "incident" was due to a complete confusion as to the proper terms of reference for welfare committees in general. The instructions on the creation of welfare committees did not provide any guidance as to what items came within its purview and which did not.⁵¹² This left the decision in the hands of the individual executive officers. In Lieutenant Wood's case, he had made the decision that the welfare committee was authorised to deal with amenities and recreational facilities, but that its authority did not extend to matters of ship's routine, such as the changing of uniforms or the establishment of recreational facilities ashore.⁵¹³ On *Crescent*, then, Lieutenant Wood determined on his own authority that the welfare committee could not deal with some of the most serious causes of discontent among the crew.⁵¹⁴

Welfare committees were supported, in principle, by the men of the lower deck. Chief Petty Officer Pickering, the member for the Chief Petty Officer's Mess, went so far as to suggest that they, in and of themselves, were the answer to the RCN's morale

⁵¹¹ Testimony of Lieutenant Wood, pp. 1562-1563.

⁵¹² Testimony of Lieutenant W.M. Jamieson, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, pp. 1803-1809.

⁵¹³ Testimony of Lieutenant Wood, pp. 1562-1563.

⁵¹⁴ Testimony of Chief Petty Officer Pickering, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1890.

problems.⁵¹⁵ The failure to establish firm parameters for the operation of welfare committees, however, led to the general belief among the members of *Crescent's* welfare committee that in its present form it was all but useless in getting anything of significance accomplished.⁵¹⁶ It seems, then, that an ineffectual voice was in many ways worse than no voice at all for the men of the lower deck.

In the absence of a functioning welfare committee, the spectre of HMCS *Ontario* once again hove into view. The crew of *Crescent* were familiar with the actions of *Ontario's* crew and were aware that the men involved in that "incident" had not been punished for their actions. While the witnesses uniformly denied that the *Ontario* "incident" was a factor in *Crescent*,⁵¹⁷ this is not a credible claim given the similarity of the two series of events. It is much more reasonable to conclude that the men of the *Crescent*, like those aboard *Athabaskan*, believed their actions to be appropriate in the absence of any other effective vehicle for airing their concerns.

The Commission also dealt with the issue of Canadian identification with the crew of *Crescent*. As had been the case with *Athabaskan* few of the witnesses spontaneously mentioned a desire for Canadian identification on their uniforms. Those who did wanted it for the same reasons that had prevailed among *Athabaskan's* people. They were tired of the abuse that they received when they were mistaken for British sailors and found that they were more respected, particularly by American sailors, when they were known to be Canadian.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 1888-1889.

⁵¹⁶ Testimony of Petty Officer Knight, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1833.

⁵¹⁷ See for example the testimony of Ordinary Seaman Vanderschaaf, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1266; Testimony of Able Seaman Taylor, p. 1785.

⁵¹⁸ Testimony of Able Seaman Carter, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1534; Testimony of Able Seaman McKee, Transcript *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1556; Testimony of Ordinary Seaman Vanderschaaf, p. 1666.

Of particular interest in this regard is the testimony of Sub-Lieutenant C.B. Wither, who had recently completed his training with the Royal Navy. He was acting as a divisional officer for Canadian sailors for the first time aboard *Crescent*. Wither acknowledged that the Canadian sailor was better educated than his British counterpart and required more information generally about what he was doing and why he was doing it. He was steadfast, however, in his belief that the divisional system in the RCN was "almost a dead loss" due to the frequent changes of personnel, and equally firm in his conviction that the training of Canadian officers on British ships had nothing to do with morale problems and had no negative impact on officer-man relations.⁵¹⁹

It was at this point that the questioning took a strange turn. The Commission began to question Wither's habits and mannerisms, at one point asking him whether he was conscious that he "spoke a different language than the other people on a Canadian ship,"⁵²⁰ presumably based on what the commissioners perceived to be his English accent. This was the first mention of any accent possessed by a Canadian officer that arose during seven volumes of testimony and the phrasing of the question made the Commission's view of the matter quite clear. While it was not explicitly stated, the Commission clearly felt that Sub-Lieutenant Wither's accent was problematic in his role as a divisional officer. While the specific Commissioner posing the question is impossible to determine from the transcript, given Louis Audette's feelings about British trained regular officers, it is clear that he was driving the questioning in this instance.

The commissioners continued to engage in some back-handed questioning practices. In exploring the issue of whether the senior ratings and officers should have

⁵¹⁹ Testimony of Sub-Lieutenant Wither, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, pp. 1872-1882.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1874.

seen the trouble coming, Coxwain Marshall [sic] testified that the incident had been a surprise to him and the other Petty Officers aboard *Crescent*. He was then advised that there was evidence before the Commission that the conditions aboard *Crescent* were so bad that the impending trouble was obvious.⁵²¹ No such evidence had been given and the statement was a trap designed to get Coxwain Marshall to agree with the general proposition that *Crescent's* officers had known of the trouble and been negligent in their response. Such questioning, again, would never have been allowed in a more formal setting, and Audette and Wickwire, not to mention Commander Hurcombe, as lawyers, would have been fully aware of this fact.

With the views of the crews of the individual ships established the Commission moved on to the final phase of the inquiry. This involved the examination of the more senior naval personnel and began in Esquimalt, to conclude in Ottawa in the early part of June of 1949. Not surprisingly the testimony in this final phase moved away from specific causes of discontent and concentrated more on broader naval policy issues.

Among the most senior officers of the RCN there was universal agreement that one of the main problems facing the fleet was the paucity of properly trained officers, particularly for the executive officer and divisional officer positions. Admirals P. Nelles, H.G. DeWolfe⁵²² and H.T.W. Grant⁵²³ all agreed that the root cause of the shortage was

⁵²¹ Testimony of Coxwain Marshall, Transcript, *Crescent* Vol. IV, p. 1760.

⁵²² DeWolfe had enjoyed a great career. He began the war in command of HMCS *St. Laurent*, on which he fired the first shots fired by the RCN during the war, and then enjoyed a stint as the director of plans at headquarters. In 1943 he was given command of HMCS *Haida* and commanded her for the rest of the war. *Haida's* storied career is well beyond the scope of this thesis, but DeWolfe certainly established a reputation as a first rate fighting sailor while in command. (Douglas et al. *No Higher Purpose* pp. 98, 532; *A Blue Water Navy*, p. 283.)

⁵²³ Grant was one of the finest sailors that Canada ever produced. He joined the RCN in 1914 and served with RN ships for his "big ship time." He was with the RCN through the lean times between the wars and served as director of naval personnel in 1940, supervising the rapid wartime expansion of the RCN. He was subsequently given command of the cruiser HMS *Enterprise* (an RN ship) and was awarded the DSO

the rapid growth of the RCN following the wholesale discharge of personnel in the immediate post-war period. As Admiral Grant explained the situation, the RCN had to expand in order to maintain its relevance among the three services. While the option had existed for the RCN to remain small and operate as a training cadre for wartime expansion, this would have resulted in the RCN receiving a smaller portion of the defence budget. If expansion or equipment replacement proved necessary, the RCN "would have a hell of a job trying to get another damn nickel from the Government."⁵²⁴ Clearly the RCN's fall into virtual irrelevance in the inter-war years still haunted the senior naval leadership, and they were prepared to put up with a flawed system of expansion rather than have it happen again.

The consequence of the commitment to growth in the RCN was an over-commitment of ships and inadequate time to train the personnel to man them.⁵²⁵ In order to both respond to its commitments and to provide some sea training for its officers, which was necessary to allow them to retain their watchkeeping certificates, frequent rotation of personnel was necessary. This meant that in the case of both divisional officers and executive officers, men were being appointed to positions for which they lacked experience and in which they were not given sufficient time to know their men and properly learn their jobs.⁵²⁶ According to Mr. E.S.W. Belyea, a personnel selection officer during the war and an expert on the divisional system, the system in these

for his role, in company with HMS *Glasgow*, of defeating a superior force of German destroyers. *Enterprise* also led the assault on UTAH Beach in Operation Neptune. Grant became CNS on 1 September 1947 and was responsible for guiding the transition of the RCN from war to peace. (Wilfred C.D. Lund, "Vice-Admiral Howard Emmerson Reid and Vice-Admiral Haarold Taylor Wood Grant: Forging the New 'Canadian' Navy," in Whitby et al. eds. *The Admirals*.)

⁵²⁴ Testimony of Admiral Grant, Naval Inquiry -- Transcript -- Ottawa June 1949, Part 2, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 3, p. 3467.

⁵²⁵ Testimony of Admiral DeWolfe, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. V, p. 1940-1959.

⁵²⁶ Testimony of Captain Adams, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949 Part 1, p. 29; Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3484-3487. Captain Adams was the Deputy Chief of Naval Personnel at the time of the "incidents."

circumstances became less of a functioning unit and more of a tool for personnel management.⁵²⁷

The lack of experienced officers and the frequent changes of personnel led to a breakdown of communication between the men of the lower deck, the officers and the petty officers. In essence nobody was speaking to anyone else about matters of concern in the ships. The men, for their part, felt that their concerns had been disregarded and that there was nobody in whom they felt comfortable confiding.⁵²⁸ The petty officers, many of them new to their positions due to the changes in pay and trade group structure, had little confidence in their officers, who also were new to their positions. The officers were inadequately trained to either recognise this or to do anything about it if they had. While the method by which the men chose to make their grievances known was wrong from a regulatory point of view, even Admiral Grant was prepared to concede that the men felt that they had no choice in the circumstances but to take coordinated action.⁵²⁹

In the long term the solution to the inexperience problem was the provision of a dedicated training ship. Admiral Grant suggested the use of HMCS *Uganda* but conceded that any large ship would suffice. He was firm, however, that a large ship was essential if a significant number of officers and ratings were to be trained at the same time and a steady supply of properly trained officers was to be maintained.⁵³⁰ The operational portion of the fleet would then be manned by officers with both technical and leadership training and would be officers in whom the ratings could have confidence. It

⁵²⁷ Testimony of ESW Belyea, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. V, pp. 2022-2023. Belyea had been summoned by the Commission to give evidence as he had done post-war academic work on the nature of the divisional system. He was a civilian at the time he gave his evidence.

⁵²⁸ Testimony of Admiral (Ret.) V.G. Brodeur, Transcripts, Esquimalt Vol. IV, pp. 2118-2119; Testimony of Admiral Grant, p. 3492.

⁵²⁹ Testimony of Admiral Grant, *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3484-3487.

would also allow for divisional and executive officers to spend more time in their respective positions and thereby get to know the men under their commands.⁵³¹

In the short term there were two potential solutions. The first was to provide some relief to the seaman's branch. It was no coincidence that the driving force behind all three "incidents" were the members of the seaman's branch, and this was not lost on the commissioners. With increasing technical specialisation in the other branches, accompanied by higher pay, the seaman's branch had "fallen into disrepute" in the words of Admiral Grant. The specialist ratings had come to believe that participating in cleaning and other maintenance tasks was beneath them. According to Grant this was being immediately addressed and directives had gone out requiring the participation of other branches in seaman's duties.⁵³² This was only a partial solution, however, and a full solution would only occur when the seaman's branch was treated as a specialty in the same way as the technical branches were, and, of course, paid accordingly.

In a related vein the Commission also explored making changes in the recruiting process. In doing this they examined the system used by the United States Navy, which involved all new recruits entering the service as seamen and receiving initial basic training in seamanship. Specialisation took place only after this initial training had been received, and the substantive pay was the same for all personnel by rank. There was no grade group pay given in the US Navy. While witnesses like Lieutenant A.H.M. Slater, the recruiting officer for the West Coast, were in favour of this system,⁵³³ expansion requirements again became an issue. While a good idea in theory and for a large navy, the demand for technical specialists required to keep Canadian ships operational, and the

⁵³¹ Testimony of Commander R.L. Hennessy, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949 Part 1, pp. 67-69.

⁵³² Testimony of Admiral Grant, p. 3494.

⁵³³ Testimony of Lieutenant A.H.M. Slater, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. V, 2041-2055.

additional technical training required to run increasingly sophisticated equipment made a general entry system impractical,⁵³⁴ at least until the size of the fleet had stabilised.

In terms of recruiting literature issued by the RCN, there were also problems. As Admiral Grant colourfully put it, "our desire to afford the sailor reading lamps and bedroom slippers so that he will not be at a disadvantage with his contemporaries ashore conflicts in some measure with life on the lower deck."⁵³⁵ This echoed several other comments and a more general call for more accurate representations of naval life in the recruiting material produced by the RCN. When the ratings completed their training and arrived aboard ship the marked difference between the rosy picture of travel and adventure provided by the recruiting material and the reality of the hard work and cramped living conditions of the lower deck was bound to cause some dissatisfaction. The witnesses were in agreement that while a more accurate portrayal of life in naval service might discourage some recruits, those that enlisted would be more prepared for the hardships to come and generally more content in the service.

There was also widespread agreement among the senior officers that in the short term the use of welfare committees could help to ameliorate the morale problems. The Canadian rating, being viewed by the senior officers as both better educated and therefore more outspoken than his British counterpart, did not obey officers by virtue of rank alone. Obedience of officers in the RCN was the result of the officer proving himself as competent and concerned with the welfare of his men.⁵³⁶ A properly functioning divisional system would render welfare committees unnecessary. Until such time as the divisional system had been brought up to scratch, however, the welfare committee would

⁵³⁴ Testimony of Commander Hennessy, p. 61.

⁵³⁵ Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3494-3495.

⁵³⁶ Testimony of Admiral Nelles, p. 1967; Testimony of Commander Hennessy, pp. 67-69.

provide a good safety valve for the ratings to make their concerns known to the more senior officers. When combined with the appointment of a director of welfare and service conditions (in essence an inspector general for the navy), which had only been done four months prior to the hearings, Admiral Grant felt that a short term solution to the morale issues was at hand.⁵³⁷

Captain J.D. Prentice⁵³⁸, the President of the Naval Officers' Association, went even further. He advocated the establishment of a central welfare committee as was used in the RN, which was made up of representatives from each individual ship's welfare committee and met once a year. The central welfare committee would report directly to the responsible minister and to the naval staff as to issues of concern to the lower deck.⁵³⁹ He was suggesting, in effect, giving the ratings a direct voice on the naval staff.

While the Commission was in favour of the welfare committee as a concept throughout the hearings, the suggestion of a central committee was more than its membership was prepared to countenance. The commissioners expressed concern that a central welfare committee would in essence place the ratings in charge of the Navy and could lead to expectations of collective bargaining by the lower deck.⁵⁴⁰ There was clearly a limit to the amount of say that the Commission felt it was appropriate for the ratings to have.

⁵³⁷ Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3470-3473.

⁵³⁸ The transcript does not specify the initials for Captain Prentice, but the only individual that it could be is Captain J.D. "Chummy" Prentice, who had enjoyed a long and distinguished career, including being the commander of the first Canadian vessel to sink a u-boat and receiving the Distinguished Service Cross. He also commanded the destroyer flotilla tasked with defending the English Channel during the D-Day landings and was overall a very accomplished and respected leader. (See Douglas et al., No Higher Purpose.)

⁵³⁹ Testimony of Captain Prentice, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. V, pp. 1937-1938.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

As it had throughout the proceedings, the Commission dealt once again with the issue of Canadian identification on uniforms. Captains E.P. Tisdall and C.J. Dillon and Admiral Grant all indicated their support for Canadian identifiers on the uniforms of the ratings.⁵⁴¹ The question was what form the identification would take. By the time of the hearings, a maple leaf identifier had been approved for use on the ratings' uniforms. The Commission, in all probability in the person of Louis Audette, immediately began a heated argument with Admiral Grant about whether a "Canada" shoulder flash would be more appropriate.⁵⁴² It was clear from the thrust of the questions that the Commission believed it would be.

Unfortunately, Admiral Grant, no great fan of the Canadian identifier to begin with, became somewhat intemperate in his remarks. He indicated that he was opposed to any identifiers because the sailors had not earned them, they spoiled the look of the uniform, and they didn't improve the quality of the men as sailors. He also indicated, however, that he was prepared to go along with some identification if it would improve morale and that "if they [the ratings] don't like it [the maple leaf] and still want to put 'Canada' on we will take the maple leaf off and put 'Canada' on the seat of their pants."⁵⁴³ This was immediately interpreted by the Commission as a callous and disrespectful remark and undermined Grant's credibility. In reality, and given the proper context, it was an ill considered response to deliberate goading on what he considered a minor issue. It overshadowed the remainder of his testimony, which made it clear that he was

⁵⁴¹ Testimony of Captains Tisdall and Dillon, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949 Part 1; Testimony of Admiral Grant, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949 Part 2. Captain Dillon was the Naval Secretary at the time of the hearings.

⁵⁴² Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3496-3501.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

prepared, within reason, to do whatever was needed to improve morale, but that the RCN had far bigger problems than Canadian identification to deal with.⁵⁴⁴

One of the bigger issues that Grant believed was detrimental to the wellbeing of the RCN was the tri-service structure introduced by Brooke Claxton. He pointed out the unbalanced trade group structure in which, for example, a cook and a baker were two separate trade groups in the Army and Air Force and were functions performed by two different people. In the RCN they were performed by one person and represented one trade group. In Grant's view this was a fundamentally unfair arrangement for the naval personnel and required a remedy. He also railed against the bureaucracy that the tri-service structure had created which prevented the timely completion of any changes. As an example he used the appointment of a Director of Welfare and Service Conditions, which, although having been completed months earlier, was still bogged down in discussions of authority and had yet to have any impact on service conditions.⁵⁴⁵ It was clear that Grant believed that the tri-service structure ignored the essential needs of the RCN as a distinct service, and in this the Commission agreed with him.⁵⁴⁶

One of the main areas in which the RCN was prejudiced by the tri-service structure was in the matter of budgeting. Prior to the changes introduced by Claxton, each service submitted its own budget (known as "estimates" in the RCN) to Parliament annually to be approved or modified. Under the changes made by Claxton, however, there was one pool of money available for the military, and it was up to the three services to allocate it as amongst themselves. The minister held final approval on the allocations

⁵⁴⁴ Audette was infuriated by this exchange and stewed over it for quite some time. On his copy of the transcript the only testimony that is annotated by him was that of Admiral Grant and the annotations are less than flattering.

⁵⁴⁵ Testimony of Admiral Grant, pp. 3473-3476.

⁵⁴⁶ Testimony of Captain Hope, p. 3032.

and, depending on the situation at any particular time, would approve the allocation that provided the best "bang for the buck." in terms of prestige or to meet particular global conditions.⁵⁴⁷ This approach tended to give low priority to expenditures that would take years to realise, such as the construction of new ships and shore establishments, and a higher priority to programs in which the impact would be more immediate. This by its nature prejudiced naval interests, which required expensive long-term projects such as ship replacement, in favour of army and air force projects which were cheaper and faster on a per unit basis.

Construction of accommodations, particularly on the East Coast, was illustrative of the problem. The extant barracks at HMCS *Stadacona* had been intended to be a temporary structure to deal with the wartime influx of personnel. By 1947 the building was badly in need of replacement. Plans for construction of new barracks had first been submitted for approval in 1947. Due to spending cuts and interference from the deputy minister of national defence, by 1949 they had still not been formally approved.

Questions were raised by the deputy minister not only over the need for the construction and the costs of replacing the barracks, but over such minutiae as the selection of building materials.⁵⁴⁸ Given that construction of the barracks was a five year project, the earliest date for completion would be 1954, some seven years after the initial request.⁵⁴⁹ The implication in the testimony was that the other services did not have similar problems with construction, although Admiral Grant stopped short of stating this outright.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, the RCN certainly believed that it was having a harder go of things at budget time than the other services.

⁵⁴⁷ Testimony of Admiral Grant, passim; Testimony of Captain Hope, pp. 3020-3030.

⁵⁴⁸ Testimony of Captain Hope, pp. 3000-3007.

⁵⁴⁹ Testimony of Admiral Grant, p 3480.

Similar difficulties were experienced in the procurement of clothing stores and other supplies. Even such a seemingly simple thing as the purchase of hats required a lengthy tendering process, and resulted in the navy being chronically short of basic stores. The men, then, were left to purchase their own clothing with an entirely inadequate kit allowance. Again, this problem did not seem to exist in the army or the air force. The upshot of it all was that even when the naval staff knew how to ameliorate service conditions, the systems in place rendered it virtually impossible for them to do so in a reasonable period of time.⁵⁵⁰

The issue of communist influence, which had been steadily declining in importance as the hearings progressed, was virtually ignored in the final session. Only one witness, Commander L.L. Atwood, the director of naval intelligence, mentioned it at all. For his part, Atwood was certain that there were communists at work in the RCN, but offered as proof only the absence of any mention of infiltration in the "communist press."⁵⁵¹ Once again the circular reasoning applied and the proof was the absence of any proof.⁵⁵² No other witness was asked about "red" influences or chose to comment on it. It is clear that by the time they got to Ottawa, the commissioners had decided that the RCN was not, in fact, a hotbed of communist activity and that the causes of the "incidents" were considerably less political.

Two additional issues of interest arose during the Ottawa hearings for the first time. Admiral V.G. Brodeur called for more conformity of discipline for breaches of regulations. He felt that punishments varied by officer and that the lack of uniformity of

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Testimony of Commander Atwood, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949 Part 1, Q. 30-33.

⁵⁵² Both of the witnesses that made use of this line of reasoning were members of the Naval Intelligence division, which shines a light on the thought processes predominant in that department when it came to Communists.

punishment between officers led to confusion among the ratings. Lenient officers would give the ratings a sense of what they would be able to get away with, only to have that proven incorrect under another officer.⁵⁵³ None of the other witnesses, the ratings in particular, had raised this as an issue.

The other new issue was that of class. Both Mr. Pegg, who had left the RCN after a seven year enlistment, and Captain K.F. Adams raised the issue of social class. While a number of witnesses had complained that the officers spoke to them in a condescending manner, only these two linked this and the resulting disaffection to social class.⁵⁵⁴

Captain Adams suggested that officers be instructed in the difference between class distinction and those based on education, in order to address this issue.⁵⁵⁵ While he was the only witness to specifically raise this, Adams was preaching to the choir in Louis Audette, who was already firmly convinced that education and not birth should be the basis of social stratification and had made his views on this clear since his wartime service.

The hearings overall illustrated a number of problems plaguing the RCN both at a micro and macro level. Communist influence in the RCN was not one of them. The failure of the commissioners to follow up aggressively on indications that there may be subversion and their increasing lack of interest in the subject as the hearings progressed leads to the conclusion that they never really believed there were "reds" in the navy to

⁵⁵³ Testimony of Admiral Brodeur, p. 2107. Brodeur was the son of L.P. Brodeur the founding minister of the RCN and was known as a fanatic about discipline, so his testimony is hardly surprising.

⁵⁵⁴ Testimony of Mr. Pegg, Transcript, Esquimalt Vol. IV, p. 2178; Testimony of Captain Adams, Transcript Ottawa June 1949 Part 1, p. 39. Mr. Pegg had served under Commander Brock on *Ontario* so his view is understandable as Brock was an Anglophile and tended to airs of superiority and arrogance that seemed to annoy all those around him.

⁵⁵⁵ Testimony of Captain Adams, *ibid.*

begin with. Even with the heightened sensitivities of the cold war, the idea seemed too absurd for the commissioners to countenance.

On a micro level it became clear that while the proximate causes of the "incidents" were mundane, the factor that took them from minor griping to full scale disobedience was the absence of any method by which the men of the lower deck could express themselves. The frequent changes of personnel and overall lack of experience of the junior officers had rendered the divisional system non-functional as anything other than a bureaucratic organisational tool. The orders promulgating the creation of welfare committees had not been done properly and allowed individual ships and officers the ability to opt out under the guise of not having been ordered to form one, or to mash the welfare committee together with the ship's fund committee and thereby deny it its proper function. Ambiguous terms of reference made this problem worse, and inexperienced executive officers simply lacked the ability to determine what matters impacted ship's welfare and which did not. The welfare committees, then, when they existed, provided an ineffectual voice for the ratings, which in many ways was worse than no voice at all.

On a macro level the problem was clearly one of funding. The tri-service structure was not working for the RCN. It had created a number of more lucrative specialist trade groups which were attracting the personnel on enlistment. The seaman's branch, responsible for maintenance and operation of the ship generally, had become increasingly understaffed and overworked. It is no coincidence that the driving force behind all three incidents was the seaman's branch, and that the seaman's branch would continue to be the lightning rod for discontent until something was done to fix the problem. Part of the solution was to make the other branches more responsible for

general duties around the ship, and part was to recognise the seaman's branch as a specialist branch in its own right. Both of these solutions were in the process of being implemented, but neither had been completed in time to prevent the "incidents."

The hearings also illuminate a shocking gap in the naval regulations. Mutiny, the most serious crime in the naval lexicon, for some reason remained an undefined term in the regulations. The disagreements between the commissioners and senior officers as to what constituted a mutiny is surprising in a military service dependent on discipline. This led to a situation in which, when the "incidents" occurred, there was uncertainty as to what disciplinary action was appropriate, which in the long term is not a tenable situation.

Overall the picture of the RCN that emerges from the hearings is of an organisation undergoing severe growing pains. From its massive wartime size the RCN had shrunk in the immediate post-war period to virtual non-existence. It then, in a very short span, had to grow again to something approximating ten thousand men, very few of whom had any prior naval experience. This situation was bound to cause problems in the short term while the new officers and men became more familiar with the naval environment and their duties in it. The naval staff for its part was learning on the fly. While many of them had experience running a wartime navy, none were well versed in how to run a navy in peacetime. As in many things, mistakes were proving the best teachers in this regard. Given the internal studies being done, and the responses of the witnesses, the RCN was aware of what the issues were and the naval staff was taking steps to remedy them. They unfortunately ran out of time.

CHAPTER 6

Aftermath

The Commission forwarded its final report, rather clumsily entitled "Report on certain 'Incidents' which occurred on board H.M.C.S. Athabaskan, Crescent and Magnificent and on other matters concerning the Royal Canadian Navy" to Claxton on 25 October, 1949.⁵⁵⁶ Given the number of witnesses and reports that had to be taken into consideration and the requirement for consultation among the commissioners, the report was produced with remarkable speed. Overall the report represented a balanced and relatively moderate view of the evidence put before the Commission. There were, however, some anomalies which allowed the report to be used by the government, and in particular Claxton, to change the focus of the discussion to the Canadianization of the RCN and away from the causes of discontent that required expenditure.

The Commission itself undoubtedly believed that it was performing a quasi-judicial function rather than a purely investigative one. At one point, for example, the commissioners took "judicial notice" of the name of a popular fictional radio character.⁵⁵⁷ This device, used sparingly by judges, generally allows for the admission as fact things that are generally common knowledge and it is generally restricted to the courts. The presence of Mr. Wickwire and Commander Hurcombe to provide advice concerning the

⁵⁵⁶ Memorandum, Hurcombe to Claxton, 25 October, 1949, Audette Papers, MG31 E18 Vol. 12 File 16.

⁵⁵⁷ Report Concerning the RCN, October, 1949, MG 31 E18 Vol. 14 File 4, p. 21.

manner in which evidence was taken served to bolster the idea that the Commission was acting in some way as a judicial body. As a quasi-judicial body, then, one would expect the commissioners themselves to act in a judicial manner and for the conclusions and recommendations made to be based on evidence presented to the Commission during the course of the hearings. In most of the findings this was in fact the case but in a few instances the report came to conclusions and made recommendations with no basis in the evidence in some cases and in others with very little.

The Commission dealt with the issue of subversive influences in the RCN in an almost perfunctory manner. While they found that "labour actions" in other areas had some influence on the attitude of the ratings, the Commission remained unconvinced that there was any ongoing communist agitation in the RCN.⁵⁵⁸ Given that, during the course of the hearings, the Commission never really looked for any such agitation, this conclusion is hardly surprising. In light, however, of the pervasive fear of communist agitation in the trade union movement, and particularly the CSU, one is left to wonder whether no evidence of agitation was found because it was not there, or because the commissioners did not want to find it. What is certain is that evidence of communist agitation, had it been found, would have placed the hearings and indeed the RCN in an entirely different light and would have critically undermined public confidence in both the RCN and in Claxton for allowing it to happen on his watch.

While communist agitation was not found the Report did find agitation present from another source. The presence of men on the lower deck who had been aboard HMCS *Ontario* at the time of her "incident" was found to be problematic. This was particularly visible in the demands of the men on *Crescent* and *Athabaskan* for the

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 26; 73.

removal of their respective executive officers. The commissioners saw the link between these requests and the successful effort by the men of *Ontario* to remove their executive officer, Commander Brock. The failure of the naval leadership to discipline the men of *Ontario* in any meaningful way, and the removal of Commander Brock, apparently in response to the demands of the ratings, was seen by the Commission as encouraging the men of *Athabaskan* and *Crescent* to take a similar course of action.⁵⁵⁹ For Admiral Mainguy, who had made the decisions concerning the *Ontario* "incident," agreeing to this conclusion must have involved the swallowing of a considerable amount of pride indeed.

The commissioners were also quite careful to point out from the outset that their report would be, by its nature, critical of the RCN. They were clear that they did not wish this criticism to overshadow the proud achievements of the RCN and its personnel. While they found some things wrong with the RCN, they also wished it to be remembered that "a great deal also is overwhelmingly right" with the Navy.⁵⁶⁰

In this context, then, the Commission was clear in its view that many of the problems encountered would be solved by the simple passage of time.⁵⁶¹ Many of the difficulties were attributed to growing pains caused by the rapid peacetime expansion of the fleet and "the process of a quick turnover from war to peace."⁵⁶² The report also contained an acknowledgement of the RCN's knowledge of and attempts to solve the problems in the years prior to the incidents.⁵⁶³ In placing these riders on their findings, the commissioners seemed eager to ensure that no radical or sweeping change was seen

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 36-39.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 3.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁶³ Ibid. pp. 41-42.

by Claxton as a necessary solution to the RCN's problems. While aware, then, that their report would be potentially useful politically, they sought to limit precisely how useful it could be.

The report then went on to make nineteen observations and thirty recommendations to improve morale in the RCN. They ran the gamut from the relatively minor to the quite controversial. What was excluded was any discussion of naval policy or any critique of the way in which the RCN was being utilised. The argument that the RCN was trying to do too much with too little and sending under-trained, inexperienced and poorly equipped personnel into the international arena, while suggested throughout the hearings, would not be raised by the Commission and policy would remain Claxton's preserve.

Among the relatively innocuous recommendations was the call for the provision of better films for the men to watch while at sea. Given the unique circumstances of life afloat, off-duty sailors could not simply pop into town to see a film or go to a tavern. The maintenance of morale required that they be provided with some form of entertainment and it became clear during the hearings that pre-war films and outdated training films were not particularly entertaining and did not fill the bill. It was therefore recommended that more and better films be provided for viewing at sea and that public funds be provided to subsidise the costs of this if necessary.⁵⁶⁴ Given the relatively modest costs involved in this it was not likely to raise a great deal of objection from Claxton or the government and so was a fairly safe recommendation.

A similar recommendation was made concerning the provision of recreational facilities ashore. The Commission had travelled to Seattle, Washington, during the

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

course of the hearings and toured the US Navy base located there. They were suitably impressed with the recreational facilities available to the men, next to which those for RCN sailors in Halifax were barely adequate, and those in Esquimalt non-existent. They recommended that base accommodations and recreational facilities be constructed on both coasts without delay.⁵⁶⁵ This recommendation was also well supported by the evidence and unlikely to meet with any real opposition, particularly as no time line was suggested for the completion of construction.

The Commission's recommendation that payment for good conduct badges be reinstated and for the provision of lockers for the storage of civilian clothes so that the men could change before going ashore were also relatively easy fixes to minor nagging problems which arose during the hearings. Similarly the recommendation that each class of ship in the RCN have its own routine followed by all ships of that class represented a solution to a nagging problem that was behind the incidents and could be fixed easily by fiat.⁵⁶⁶ These issues were more administrative than functional and were unlikely to have any significant impact on the direction of the RCN going forward.

Where things began to get more controversial was in the area of welfare committees. The Commission found, quite correctly, that the incidents probably would not have happened had the ships had properly functioning welfare committees.⁵⁶⁷ The commissioners were convinced that the men of the lower deck needed an outlet for their grievances, failing which discontent would simmer under the surface until it erupted in 'incidents' of mass insubordination. Furthermore, the outlet had to be a real and functioning one, not just the appearance of agency but real participation in aspects of the

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 59-65.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

decision making process aboard ship. As a result the Commission recommended that welfare committees be established on all ships along the lines that had been previously set out, that is to say comprised of one member elected from each mess and chaired by the executive officer. The Commission went one step further and also recommended that the power of the welfare committees be clarified by regulation and expanded to include all matters within the discretion of the ship's captain.⁵⁶⁸ This would, then, allow the welfare committees to comment on ship's routine and to have these comments be addressed rather than dismissed out of hand as had previously been the case. The inclusion of the welfare committees in the regulations would also prevent "misunderstandings" among senior officers opposed to them about whether they were mandatory or optional.

While the standardisation would serve to rectify the veritable swamp of individual practices then operating, the Commission went even further. Taking a page from the Royal Navy model, the Commission recommended that the minutes from each meeting aboard each ship be forwarded to the newly created Director of Service Conditions and Welfare.⁵⁶⁹ In doing so the Commission was advocating the creation of a central repository for feedback from the lower deck so that widely held complaints could be more easily recognised and acted upon in an organised way, before they festered and erupted in incidents of insubordination.

The Commission was also critical of the tri-service system of rank and pay structures instituted by Claxton, although the commissioners were careful not to make any recommendations about it. The report found that the tri-service structure put an

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 47-51.

undue administrative burden on a small number of individuals in the case of the RCN, and to a greater degree than in the other services. The committees and paperwork required of the system, which were over and above those ordinarily required, fell to a relatively small number of suitably senior officers. This left them inadequate time for the proper formulation and implementation of naval policy. It also had the effect of leaving the RCN scrambling for personnel to fill staff roles, so departments tended to be staffed by whomever was available rather than by officers with appropriate training and experience.⁵⁷⁰ This was not an issue that emerged from the evidence before the Commission and in all probability reflected the overall impression made on the commissioners, particularly Admiral Mainguy. Regardless of the source of the observations, however, the failure of the Commission to make any concrete recommendations regarding the tri-service structure, and to confine itself to observations, was clearly done out of deference to Claxton's policies.

This impression is reinforced by the absence of any mention of the pay structure. All of the reports done by the RCN had indicated that the changes in rank and pay structure had created some significant difficulties. There were too many mid-range non-Commissioned officers and not enough seamen. It was no coincidence that the driving personnel behind all three incidents were crewmen below the rate of leading seamen and the hearings had made it clear that the bulk of the ordinary work around the ship fell to them. Nonetheless, any substantive comments would have crossed the line into naval policy, and it became clear from the outset that this was a line that the Commission was not prepared to cross.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 47-51.

The observations regarding the lack of expertise of departmental officers were certainly behind the Commission's findings concerning recruiting. The Commission found that "in the opinion of almost every witness" there were problems with recruiting. The evidence, according to the report, was that RCN recruiting was handled too much by professional firms who had no knowledge of the RCN and not enough by naval personnel. As a result the recruiting material tended to over-emphasise the adventure associated with life in the RCN together with the pay and pension benefits that accompanied it. The material did not stress enough the qualities that the commissioners felt were important in recruits; the desire to pursue a "manly" career and to serve one's country which in turn, it was felt, would lead to a willingness to make sacrifices for a career in the RCN. The rosy picture of naval life created by the recruiting material could not help but be belied by the realities of naval life and discontent was the natural outcome.⁵⁷¹ The commissioners recommended that some officers be trained specifically in recruiting and that all recruiting material be centrally produced and approved by the naval staff before being disseminated to the public.⁵⁷²

While the Commission's findings on the issue of recruiting were undoubtedly accurate, they were also somewhat disingenuous. Certainly some of the witnesses had referred to the disappointment caused by the differences between the picture of naval life presented by the recruiting literature and the somewhat harsher reality. To characterise the number as consisting of "almost every witness," however, is a gross exaggeration of the evidence presented. It would have been far more accurate to state that almost none of the witnesses mentioned recruiting. While the issue of recruitment was not the most

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p. 53.

important one dealt with, its treatment by the Commission is indicative of the way in which it was prepared to manipulate the evidence secure in the knowledge that there would be no inconvenient transcript of the evidence lurking about to expose its interpretive licence.

Of more concern was the tendency of the Commission to make recommendations on which no evidence had been presented at all, as in the training of officers. The Commission found that officers generally were inadequately trained, particularly those who had transferred from the wartime reserves to the peacetime RCN. They also found a "reprehensible tendency of certain senior officers of the RCN to condemn the transfereers [sic] as 'not of the same stuff as we are or were.'"⁵⁷³ To address this problem the Commission recommended that young naval officers receive more education in the humanities.⁵⁷⁴ This was a thinly disguised recommendation for the requirement of a university education for all officers and humanities courses for engineering officers, who were already required to have a university education.

These findings are troubling for a number of reasons. There was no evidence before the Commission that the RCN's junior officers lacked in formal education or that any such lack, had it existed, contributed to the "incidents" in any meaningful way. The assumption seems to have been that education in the humanities could teach young men how to be leaders and therefore better divisional officers. There was no evidence whatsoever before the Commission to support this belief, and the commissioners seem to have taken the proposition as self-evident, which it clearly is not.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

The second problem with the findings, particularly with regard to the 'transfereers,' is that there weren't very many of them. The vast bulk of the junior officers had joined the RCN after the end of the Second World War, and had not served in the reserves at all before making the Navy a career. The overwhelming majority of the very senior officers had received their training in the Royal Navy and had never been reserves at all. It is difficult, then, to determine what problem this recommendation was designed to address and who exactly it was aimed at.

The real motivation for both the findings and recommendations surrounding the education of officers was rooted in Louis Audette's wartime experience. As a reserve officer he had railed against the treatment he had received at the hands of the "professionals." For his part he had been open in his contempt for the lack of formal education of the regular officers with whom he came in contact. As Mayne has argued, Audette spent much of the Second World War lobbying the government concerning the problems with the Navy, and one of his issues was the lack of education of the regular naval officers.⁵⁷⁵ The Commission and its report provided another opportunity to make his point, this time in circumstances in which the RCN would be hard pressed to respond. It appeared that, on this issue at least, Audette was going to have the last word.

A similar phenomenon is evident in the Commission's handling of the issue of "Canadian" identification on the uniforms of lower deck personnel. The commissioners found an "almost unanimous" desire among the witnesses heard from for some form of Canadian identification on their uniforms.⁵⁷⁶ In fact they found that " the men were

⁵⁷⁵ Mayne, pp. 39-40.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 68.

vehement in their demands that they be identified as Canadians."⁵⁷⁷ The report duly contained the recommendation that "Canada," as opposed to a maple leaf, appear on the uniforms and that a maple leaf be painted on the funnels of His Majesty's Canadian Ships.⁵⁷⁸ This was, as has been seen, taking some liberties with the evidence presented. Very few of the witnesses expressed a desire for Canadian identification on their own initiative. Those witnesses that did favour more Canadian identifiers, and they were in the overwhelming minority, did so in response to direct prompts from the commissioners in the form of very leading questions. The men of the lower deck were neither "almost unanimous" nor particularly "vehement" in their demands for Canadian identification on their uniforms. Those that wanted it seemed to see it as a way of avoiding getting into fights with American sailors who confused them with Englishmen.

The report went even further. The alleged desire for Canadian identification was transformed almost seamlessly into an "almost universal" belief on the part of the witnesses that the RCN as a whole was not "sufficiently Canadian." While the report gave little guidance as to what exactly this meant, the commissioners did find that there was among the witnesses a "general insistence...on the necessity of building up whenever possible Canadian traditions."⁵⁷⁹ The report regrettably provides no detail as to the exact traditions that were uniquely Canadian and that required "building up." Given the RCN's history, however these findings could only be read as an indictment of Royal Navy traditions and a recommendation that the RCN draw away from the Royal Navy culturally.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 40.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 68.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

One of the Royal Navy traditions that the commissioners did feel needed to be changed was the perceived social distance between the officers and men of the RCN. They found as a fact that there was prevalent in the RCN an "artificial distance" between the officers and men that was "not wholly connected with the necessity of maintaining the essential differences in rank."⁵⁸⁰ This artificial distance was in reality a reference to a perceived difference in social class between officers and men and was apparently more prevalent in *Athabaskan* than on the other two ships.⁵⁸¹ These observations were based on the Commission's belief that rank in the Royal Navy was achieved on the basis of social class rather than ability, and the corresponding belief that there was no Canadian context for such differences based on social or economic standing.⁵⁸²

In addition to the report itself Audette took the unusual step of writing a supplemental letter to Claxton on 11 October, 1949.⁵⁸³ It is significant that this letter was sent prior to the forwarding of the actual report as this allowed Audette to have the first word on the findings and to influence the context in which Claxton would read and interpret the findings. There was a good chance, then, that any ambiguity in the report would be resolved in favour of Audette's interpretation of events.

In the letter Audette made two key points that were not driven by any of the evidence presented at the hearings. The first concerned the education of the RCN's officers. While he had little to say about the technical education and abilities of the officers in areas like engineering, he argued that they possessed an insufficient education

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. p. 14.

⁵⁸² This assumption was incorrect and in fact the Royal Navy based its promotions on merit rather than social standing, and had done for some considerable time. See, for example, N.A.M. Rodger, The Command of the Ocean (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

⁵⁸³ Audette to Claxton, 11 October, 1949, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 2.

in leadership. This inadequacy, he argued, left them unable to adapt to the differences between Canadian and British sailors on their return from their training with the Royal Navy.⁵⁸⁴

Without specifically stating it, what Audette was advocating was the requirement that RCN officers obtain a university degree, or the equivalency of one, in the liberal arts. Reserve officers, who were generally required to have such a degree, could, he maintained, rise to the command of a major vessel in three to four years. Regular officers learning on the job, presumably took longer, although Audette offered no concrete evidence in favour of either proposition. This viewpoint flowed directly from Audette's wartime experience and the low opinion that he had formed of the intellectual abilities of RCN officers. While this argument also found its way into the report, the fact that he mentioned it in a side letter to Claxton both indicates the source of the report's findings and serves as an indicator of how seriously Audette took the matter.

The second significant point Audette made in his letter to Claxton concerned the RCN's insufficiently Canadian character. Unlike the comments in the report, however, Audette in his letter is speaking specifically about the actions and mannerisms of RCN officers on their return from training in England. He focused particularly on the artificial English accents acquired by the junior officers which were not "Canadian," in his view.⁵⁸⁵ The lack of social distance between Canadian officers and their men, he argued,

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Interestingly listening to any of the archival recordings of the CBC from the time period reveals that a slight English accent was extremely common among Canadians at the time, and was not restricted to junior naval officers.

made such accents a "source of great irritation to sailors," and represented the imposition onto Canadians of the speech "of those who command and of those who obey."⁵⁸⁶

While there is no evidence in the transcripts that supports the idea that the accents of Canadian officers irritated Canadian sailors, they certainly irritated Audette. As was seen earlier, the accents were only an issue with one of the witnesses, and in that case it was the questioner who raised it. None of the other witnesses raised the issue at all.

Regardless of this, Audette's papers contain a memorandum, placed there by Audette, which clearly outlines his belief that the training of Canadian junior officers with Royal Naval units led to speech and mannerisms which were not "characteristically Canadian" and which in turn led to an "unreasoned anti-British feeling" in the Canadian sailor.⁵⁸⁷

While the memorandum is undated, it is reasonable to assume that it was written before the completion of the report and is a clear indication that, regardless of the evidence, Audette was concerned that the training arrangements involved the imposition of Royal Navy social patterns onto the RCN, and that this was problematic. It was clear that nothing, particularly nothing as trivial as a complete lack of evidence, was going to drive him off of the idea.

Regardless of Audette's agenda, however, the real test of the effectiveness of the report would be in Brooke Claxton's use of it. From the outset Claxton had been firm that the report would remain in his hands and that the decision on whether to release it would be his and his alone. This would allow Claxton, and by extension the government, to control the message concerning the state of the RCN.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Memorandum, undated, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 1.

After some initial hesitation, Claxton tabled the report in the House of Commons on 1 November, 1949.⁵⁸⁸ The following day Claxton rose in the House to offer a summary of the progress being made in implementation of the recommendations made. Of the forty-two recommendations he reported that thirteen had been implemented prior to his receipt of the report, six were in the process of being implemented, four were part of the Government's long-term plan and the remainder were dependent on government policy, which had yet to be determined.⁵⁸⁹ The policy in question would depend on the approval of the budget for national defence as a department and the remainder of the discussion in parliament surrounding the report would occur in this context.

From the outset Claxton made every effort to control the way in which the report was presented to the Canadian public. While his initial comments in the House concerning the report were brief he did manage to emphasise what he considered to be the most critical parts of it. He referred specifically to the "Canadianization" of the RCN as one of the "more important" recommendations made in the report. He was also careful to include comments about the training of officers, remarking that the officers involved in the incidents were trained under a system that was "different from that which is now in effect." This new system of training he characterised as more "genuinely Canadian" than its predecessor.⁵⁹⁰

Claxton was, of course, talking about the replacement of the "big ship time" that Canadian officers spent training with the Royal Navy by the tri-service college at Royal Roads. This system had only just taken effect and was fraught with difficulties, from uneven divisions among the three services to the absence of any requirement that

⁵⁸⁸ Hansard, 21st Parliament, 1st Session, Vol. 2, p. 1321.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 1369.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

graduates actually commit to serving time in any branch of the Canadian military.⁵⁹¹ To argue that the new and largely untested system was a panacea for the RCN's problems was too naive for someone of Claxton's intelligence and experience. Rather it became clear from the very outset that for Claxton the goal of the report and the investigation process more generally was to place the blame for the RCN's problems squarely at the feet of the British. This would allow him to characterise the RCN as somehow less than Canadian, and ultimately to do with it as he pleased.

As debate over the budget continued in Parliament throughout the month of November 1949, it became clear that Claxton was not going to have it all his own way. George Drew, the leader of the opposition, rising to address the report on 3 November, used it to support his call for the establishment of a standing committee on national defence. He had been arguing for such a committee for some time and had been opposed by Claxton at every turn. The report allowed Drew to renew his argument for parliamentary oversight, arguing that a properly administered Navy would have discussed and addressed the habitability issues and other problems without the need for "incidents" such as those which occurred. The "true lesson" of the Mainguy Report, according to Drew, was not the need for a more Canadian Navy but the need for a standing committee and a stronger parliamentary oversight of the Department of National Defence.⁵⁹²

Debate over the report followed this pattern. Claxton continued to defend the report on the basis of the need for Canadianization of the RCN. He went so far as to describe it as "historic" in the way in which it dealt with the issues of traditions and discipline, although he was somewhat unclear about what caused him to use that

⁵⁹¹ Testimony of Commodore W.B. Creery, Transcript, Ottawa June 1949, Part 2, MG31 E18 Vol. 14 File 3, pp. 3140-3142.

⁵⁹² Ibid. pp. 1401-1404.

particular word.⁵⁹³ The majority of the recommendations, although dealt with in detail by Claxton on 18 November,⁵⁹⁴ were given somewhat short shrift and treated almost as afterthoughts. While he failed to define "Canadianization" in any meaningful way beyond the need for domestic training of naval officers, it was clear throughout Claxton's comments in the House that it was where he wanted attention to focus.

The opposition, for its part, saw through the report and continued to press the issue of parliamentary oversight of the armed services generally. George Pearkes tied this idea to suggestions in the report that the RCN lacked adequate resources for its projected role as an anti-submarine warfare force.⁵⁹⁵ As Canada committed itself to active naval participation in the post-war world, the argument ran, parliament had the obligation and the right to ensure for itself that the RCN was capable of meeting Canada's commitments. This concern was echoed by Davie Fulton, the MP for Kamloops, who extended the critique to all branches of the armed forces.⁵⁹⁶ Claxton had not, it appears, been particularly forthcoming in the past in releasing information about the Canadian military to the House of Commons. In maintaining rigid control over the flow of information, however, he had raised the hackles of the opposition who now saw in the report an opportunity to leverage the administrative failures of the RCN into more parliamentary oversight and less control for Claxton. Claxton, in resisting this push, needed to shift the focus of the discussion to the issue of Canadian identity, and he made every effort to do so.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., p. 1411.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1963.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 1668.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 1697.

The news media, for its part, echoed the focus that Claxton put on the report in Parliament. The *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, for example, led with the report on 2 November, 1949. While the *Chronicle-Herald's* story provided a brief general overview of the report's findings, the focus was clearly on the relations between the officers and men of the RCN. Emphasis was also placed on the need to Canadianize the RCN based on the "broad demand within the ranks" for such an effort.⁵⁹⁷ The attempt by the *Chronicle-Herald* to offer a broader perspective was, to a large extent, a nod to objectivity and balance, but was done mainly for the sake of appearances. The real story, it was clear, was the issue of Canadianization, and in this the terms on which the report was to be presented to the Canadian public were set.

While the *Chronicle-Herald* had at least attempted, however, feebly, to present the report in a balanced way, the Toronto *Globe and Mail* made no such effort. The headlines in that paper read "Nelson Tradition Overplayed," and "Ask Canadian Navy, Erase Pallid Imitation." The article itself made references to "dragging skeletons from closets" and characterised the report as aiming a "withering fire of criticism" at Canada's naval leadership. This criticism, the story insisted, was based on the need to Canadianize the RCN and do away with the slavish adoption of English Royal Navy traditions. It was also the *Globe and Mail* that introduced the "phony accents" adopted by some junior RCN officers as a problem for the navy.⁵⁹⁸ As had been the case with the *Chronicle-Herald*, the article focused squarely on the issue of Canadianization of the RCN.

The *Globe and Mail's* front page article was, of course, hyperbole. The report did not drag anything out of any closets, and while it was critical of some aspects of the

⁵⁹⁷ Halifax Chronicle-Herald, 2 November, 1949, p. 1.

⁵⁹⁸ Globe and Mail, 2 November, 1949, p. 1.

RCN, the commissioners had also gone to great pains to state that there was also a great deal that was good about the RCN. Thus the report's comments could hardly be reasonably described as a "withering fire." What is most interesting, however, is the comment about the accents adopted by the junior officers. This had only come up on one occasion during the hearings and did not feature significantly in the report. It was, however, an issue that annoyed Louis Audette almost beyond reason. While both Audette and Claxton were both far too experienced as political operators to leave proof behind, the appearance of this issue in such a prominent place in the coverage of the report could reasonably be seen as indicating that either Audette or, more likely, Claxton had spoken to the reporters at some point and was to at least some degree manipulating the way in which the report was covered and the emphasis that was placed on it.

The *Globe and Mail* did present a relatively balanced summary of the report's findings, and carefully summarised the steps already taken to address the recommendations⁵⁹⁹ but on page three of the paper. Thus the front page coverage gave the impression that the main point of the report was about Canadianization with the other findings presented as afterthoughts. This was, as has been seen, not an accurate portrayal of the report. It did, however, place the emphasis where Claxton, and by extension the government, wanted it.

The *Vancouver Sun* continued the trend. Although its initial coverage was buried on page thirty-seven, the headline read "English Accents Get the 'Full Treatment.'" The thrust of the story was that officers with faux English accents were not particularly well treated by either the ratings or their fellow officers. The story also referred to a Canadian Press "survey" conducted on the evening of 1 November 1949, which indicated that the

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

majority of the ratings were in favour of the Canadianization of the RCN.⁶⁰⁰ Nothing more was reported either concerning the Report or the "survey." The focus for the *Vancouver Sun* was clearly to be on the Canadianization issue, although the positioning of the story indicates that the *Sun* did not believe that the report itself to be particularly important. As for the alleged "survey," it was either astonishingly fast and managed to get a significant sample of ratings in almost no time, or it was not a survey in the sense in which that term is ordinarily used.

In the following days the focus of the reporting continued to remain squarely on the issue of Canadianization. The *Chronicle-Herald* reported on Claxton's promise to begin the process of Canadianization without delay and described him as the "heart and soul" of the process.⁶⁰¹ While long on generalities, however, the stories were short on detail as to how this Canadianization was to be achieved. Some vague references were made to Claxton's comments about hiring civilians to perform much of the routine paperwork involved in naval administration, allowing naval officers to spend time at sea with their men. General comments were also made about the need for more Canadian training and education of naval officers.⁶⁰² Beyond this, though, little was said about how the RCN was to be made more Canadian, and it does not appear that Claxton was pressed on the issue.

After the initial blush had worn off the Report some of the news outlets began to explore other ramifications of the Commission's findings. The *Globe and Mail*, for example, was critical of Claxton for allowing the situation to develop in the first place,⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Vancouver Sun, 2 November, 1949, p. 37.

⁶⁰¹ Halifax Chronicle-Herald, 3 November, 1949, p.3.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Globe and Mail, 3 November 1949, p. 3.

while the *Vancouver Sun* led its story with the headline "Navy Too Small for Job Report Hints"⁶⁰⁴ a sentiment that was echoed a few days later in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*.⁶⁰⁵ These articles must have come dangerously close to the mark from Claxton's point of view. The commissioners, in making it clear in the report that they had not been tasked with commenting on the RCN's ability to meet its commitments, had inadvertently drawn attention to an area of potential criticism of the RCN that Claxton desperately wanted to avoid. At a time when Canada's role in a nascent NATO was under discussion, a long and divisive discussion over Canada's military capabilities was the last thing that Claxton wanted. The suggestions in the press and from the opposition benches that Canada's navy, at least, was not up to the mark must have been unwelcome and alarming to Claxton.

Fortunately for the government nothing further came of the suggestions concerning the RCN's capabilities. By the end of November the report had passed from public interest. The last parting broadside fired by the *Globe and Mail* was to criticise Claxton for keeping the information too close to his vest. In an editorial suggesting that had Parliament had more oversight and information, the "incidents" would never have happened, the *Globe* was playing to the opposition.⁶⁰⁶ With this criticism Claxton was back on familiar ground and the potential for uncomfortable and damaging discussions of naval capability had passed.

From an international perspective the report received considerable attention. In the United States, the report was "serialised" in the monthly intelligence report of the United States Navy. In Australia and New Zealand it had received press coverage

⁶⁰⁴ Vancouver Sun, 4 November, 1949, p. 42.

⁶⁰⁵ Halifax Chronicle-Herald, 7 November, 1949, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁶ Globe and Mail, 14 November, 1949, p. 6.

focusing on the Canadianization of the RCN and the removal of British influence. These stories ran along very similar lines to those published in Canadian papers. In London, the report was mentioned in the press, again in the context of the dissociation of the RCN from Royal Navy traditions. The Admiralty decided to make no comment on the report and to wait and see what actions the RCN took in response to it.⁶⁰⁷

While little is known about how Admiral Mainguy or Leonard Brockington reacted to the use of their report, Louis Audette's position is well recorded in his papers, and makes for some interesting reading. While it would have been completely out of character for him to criticise Claxton and the government openly, in his private correspondence, he was less reticent. He believed, for example, that the press reports got it wrong in their focus on breaking with Royal Navy traditions.⁶⁰⁸ While this was clearly part of the report, he was of the view that the focus on traditions and Canadianization detracted from the report's recommendations surrounding the education of officers, and the need for better communication between officers and ratings.

Audette was also displeased in the way the report was being seen as critical of Claxton's tri-service policy. While it had been long reported that the RCN had not been cooperative with Claxton's attempts to harmonise the three services,⁶⁰⁹ Audette was displeased that any critique was in the report. In a letter to Angus MacDonald he indicated that comments about the tri-service policy were included in the final draft as a compromise with the other commissioners, although it is probable that the commissioner

⁶⁰⁷ These responses were reported to Audette by Simpson. (Simpson to Audette, 21 June, 1950, MG31 E18 Vol., 13 File 2.)

⁶⁰⁸ Audette to Commander R.P. Welland, 6 December, 1949, MG31 E18 Vol. 12 File 16.

⁶⁰⁹ *Le Droit*, 5 July, 1949. MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 1.

in question was Admiral Mainguy. Audette was clear in his letter that he had not wanted it included and did not view it as his place to criticise policy in general terms.⁶¹⁰

Audette's most interesting exchange was with G.W.G. "Shrimp" Simpson. Simpson had been the Commodore (D) at the Royal Navy base at Londonderry in Northern Ireland, with responsibility for the combat readiness of all the escorts that put in there for replenishment after the North Atlantic run. In that capacity he had had extensive dealings with Canadian ships and their crews and was familiar with both the men and their propensities.⁶¹¹ Audette presumably felt that not only would Simpson be interested in the contents of the report, but would also agree with the Report and its findings.

In the second assumption, Audette could not have been more wrong. Simpson believed that the report was a whitewash designed to cover up the real issues facing the RCN. The large scale brawls between American and Canadian sailors that the report implied had taken place were, in Simpson's view, illusory and designed to create sympathy for the Canadianization arguments. He was clear that he had never witnessed any such brawls, and that in his view the witnesses must have been speaking about small disagreements that occasionally led to fisticuffs. This was not enough to base a change of policy on. He also took exception to the inference in the report that all Royal Navy officers were either snobs, or bullies, or both and that Canadian trainees had suffered by exposure to this. He wrote that he was unaware of any Royal Naval officer who had achieved his position by virtue of his social rank. It was merit that counted in the Royal

⁶¹⁰ Audette to Angus MacDonald, 26 November, 1949, MG31 E18 Vol. 12 File 16.

⁶¹¹ Sarty et al., Blue Water Navy, p. 177-178.

Navy, in his experience.⁶¹² Any suggestion to the contrary was, then, part of the attempt in the report to shift the focus to nationalist issues and away from the real problems.

The real issue, in Simpson's view, was the failure to punish the men of the *Ontario* for their incident. This had led the men of the lower deck to believe that locking themselves into the mess deck was a valid form of protest. This situation was aggravated by the failure of the senior officers aboard the various ships to implement welfare committees as they had been ordered, thereby removing all other avenues of communication. Simpson argued that better and more thorough training was what was needed and that the shift to Canadianization served to distract from this fact.⁶¹³

Audette's response was to some extent predictable. He saw Simpson's letter as a direct attack on the honour of the commissioners and particularly resented the suggestion of a whitewash. His response, however, was more of a critique of Simpson than of his arguments.⁶¹⁴ Given, however, that Simpson was serving in New Zealand at the time he made the comments, Simpson's opinion was not particularly relevant to the way in which the report was viewed in Canada. The strength of Audette's response is perhaps indicative, however, of how close Simpson came to the truth of the matter.

The report itself and the way in which it was used by Claxton does, in fact, indicate that there was some degree of whitewashing going on. In the House of Commons the focus was placed from the beginning on the Canadianization of the RCN, which apparently grew out of the desire for more definitive Canadian markings on the uniforms of the ratings. This was a bit of a stretch, but was appealing enough to attract the attention of the press, who dutifully led their early reports with this issue. The other

⁶¹² Simpson to Audette, 21 June, 1950, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 2.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Audette to Simpson, 25 September, 1950, MG31 E18 Vol. 13 File 2.

issues facing the RCN were thereby relegated to the interior pages of the newspapers where their impact would be lessened. By shifting the focus of the report to a nationalist point of view, Claxton successfully parried opposition attempts to insert themselves into his domain, and allowed himself the opportunity to address the other issues at his leisure and with a minimum of expenditure.

Conclusion

The report of the Mainguy Commission has been viewed as an indictment of British influence on the culture of the RCN and a call for its Canadianization. Wilfrid Lund has gone so far as to characterise the report as the Magna Carta of the RCN,⁶¹⁵ presumably due to its role in freeing the RCN from the perceived cultural tyranny of the Royal Navy. Peter Hayden has taken a similar position, accepting the contention that most Canadians saw the RCN as a "small, exclusive cadre that was largely British in its thought and action."⁶¹⁶ In this context he has argued that the report demonstrated a desperate need in the RCN for its own identity, independent of that of the Royal Navy.⁶¹⁷ Marc Milner for his part characterises the post-war RCN as an unhappy fleet, resentful of the harsh discipline imposed by officers who were overly British in their outlook.⁶¹⁸ In coming to these conclusions, Milner, Lund and Hayden have taken the report at face value and assumed that it reflected an accurate and unbiased set of conclusions based on the evidence put before it.

The temptation to take the report at face value is understandable. The memoirs written by wartime members of the RCN such as Alan Easton, James Lamb and Hal Lawrence tend to portray the RCN as possessing a "strong Canadian nationalist

⁶¹⁵ Lund, "Rollo Mainguy: Sailor's Admiral," in *The Admirals*, p. 190.

⁶¹⁶ Hayden, p. 231.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁶¹⁸ Milner, *Canada's Navy*, chapters 8 and 9.

sentiment.”⁶¹⁹ It becomes tempting to draw a straight line between that portrayal of the RCN and the report of the Mainguy Commission and to conclude that the discontent in the RCN with British ideas of discipline and sense of Canadian national identity for the RCN had simply continued after the war and led to the "incidents." With the Mainguy Report supporting this conclusion there is certainly no obvious reason for historians to adopt any other line of reasoning.

To adopt this line of reasoning without further inquiry, however, is misleading. There is little evidence that the Canadian nationalist sentiment present in the RCN during the war continued afterwards. None of the studies done by the naval staff between the end of the war and the “incidents” refer to nationalist sentiment at all. If it was important enough to lead to the “incidents,” it is highly unlikely that this latent sense of nationalism would receive no mention whatsoever. The report in many respects bore little relationship to the evidence of the witnesses and the use of the report by Claxton to emphasise the need to Canadianize the RCN ignored many of the recommendations it contained. It is only, however, through a comparison between the report and the evidence presented that this becomes apparent.

Richard Gimblett, on the other hand, has based his conclusions on the hearings themselves rather on just the content of the report. In examining the incident aboard HMCS *Crescent* he argues that the basis for the discontent in the lower deck flowed primarily from the manning policy introduced by Claxton, and that the RCN had been aware of the morale issues and their causes since 1947. He further argues that the Mainguy Commission was led astray with regard to the perceived "yearning for identity"

⁶¹⁹ Peter Hayden, “A Tale of Two Navies: Building the Canada-United States Cold War Naval Relationship,” *Canadian Military History* 23, Nos. 3 & 4 (Summer and Autumn 2014), p. 178.

of the RCN but he does not explore the reason why the Commission made the error. Given that he was studying the impact of Claxton's harmonisation policy had on the manning of the RCN, it is not particularly surprising that he would focus his attention on this issue. It does again, however, represent the taking of the report at face value and treats the transcripts of the hearings as a discrete body of historical evidence separate and apart from the report that they supposedly inspired.

Treating the hearings and the report as two distinct historical events, however, misses the fundamental relationship between the two. If the report was representative of a serious investigation, then the findings in the report should have a solid basis in the evidence presented. It does not. Many of its conclusions are based on very little evidence. Others, such as the issue of the Canadianization of the RCN, were based on evidence planted by the commissioners. The reasons for the divergence between the report and the evidence are attributable to both post-war naval policy and the historical context in which the report was prepared.

In this context the "incidents" aboard His Majesty's Canadian Ships struck the RCN at its weakest point. In the wake of the V-E Day riots in Halifax the reputation that the RCN had won at great cost during the War had been damaged. Rightly or wrongly, the inquiry into the riots led by Justice Kellock found that the fault for the disorder and the attendant destruction lay squarely at the feet of an ill-conceived naval policy. Whether that conclusion was correct or not became immaterial to a public that was looking for explanations, and in the public mind the RCN, and it alone, was responsible for the riots.

To make matters worse, the RCN had been involved in a period of rapid and massive demobilisation and subsequent expansion. Perhaps the only thing as impressive as the speed at which the RCN went from a small and obscure force to one comprising, at its peak, approximately 100,000 men, was the speed at which, in the immediate post-war period, it shrank back into relative obscurity. Post-war planning called for a navy of approximately ten thousand men, many of whom, it was assumed, would be retained following the cessation of hostilities. The reality was that the RCN did not manage to retain even that relatively small number of men, and went from a position of strength to one in which it was chronically undermanned. The cadre of trained and experienced personnel, both officers and ratings, on which the RCN was relying and on which it hoped to build its fleet, simply failed to materialise. This led to a situation in which the RCN was attempting to meet its increasing commitments with an undermanned and under-trained fleet.

By 1947, as Richard Gimblett has pointed out,⁶²⁰ the RCN was seriously engaged in the business of determining what issues were facing the fleet and what solutions existed. As Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton would have been aware of the various reports and studies prepared by the naval staff and he was as a consequence well aware of both the causes of discontent and the impact that his harmonisation policies had had on the RCN. In the post-war years, however, the focus of governmental spending was to be on social programs rather than the military. Claxton's decisions would echo this and any changes to naval policy or living conditions would have to be made with a minimum of expenditure.

⁶²⁰ Gimblett, "Gunboat Diplomacy."

The austerity required of the Canadian military did not, of course, stop Claxton from participating in discussions surrounding the establishment of NATO or of arguing for a strong Canadian role in the organisation. The focus NATO placed on hemispheric defence meshed well with Claxton's desire to move further away from Britain and, at least from his perspective, its negative influence. His experiences in both world wars had served to make Claxton a strong Canadian nationalist. Moving defence policy away from British influence was, by definition, a good thing for Claxton and one to be pursued whenever possible.

In the context of the NATO discussions the three incidents could not have come at a worse time. Part of Claxton's job as minister was to convince Canada's allies, particularly the United States, that Canada, and in particular her Navy, was reliable and capable of making a valuable and meaningful contribution to the collective security of the putative NATO allies. It would be difficult to convince Canada's NATO partners of that fact in the face of three very public incidents in which the Navy appeared neither reliable nor capable of performing the tasks before it. Once they had taken place, then, Claxton had to at least appear to act quickly and decisively to address the problems.

The challenge that Claxton faced in planning his response hinged on the nature of the incidents themselves. They fell into a legal grey area in which everyone, including the commissioners, recognised them as mutinies, but in which there was little legal support for this recognition. Formal prosecution and punishment of the ringleaders behind the "incidents" would prove at least difficult, and at worst impossible. To make matters worse the kind of sit-down strikes that had comprised the "incidents" in question had a long line of antecedents in naval history. Incidents of mass disobedience were the

tried and true means by which the men of the lower deck made their views known to the senior officers. Prosecution of the ringleaders would have brought this fact into the light of day and would have been a source of embarrassment to both the navy and the government. In addition an acquittal would have had the effect of giving the conduct an official sanction. It is one thing to have sit-down strikes unofficially available as a kind of safety valve, but quite another to have them given a more formal place in the relations between officers and men.

The impracticality of prosecution left Claxton with two options. The first was the creation of a royal Commission to formally investigate the causes of the three "incidents" and to recommend solutions. For Claxton this approach posed some difficulties, not the least of which was the fact that he knew full well what the issues were and what was causing the morale issues on the lower deck. A royal Commission would have made this knowledge clear and a matter of public record. This would have had the effect of forcing Claxton's hand in solving the problem.

The other difficulty of using a royal Commission to investigate the "incidents" came down to independence. A royal Commission would, by its nature, have been led by a judge who would have operated independently of the ministry of national defence and would have had the power to take the investigation in any way he saw fit. Furthermore the transcripts of the hearing would have been a matter of public record and available for review to anyone who wanted to do so. This, of course, would allow the conclusions of the royal Commission to be checked against the evidence presented which was precisely what Claxton did not want.

The other option available to Claxton, and the one that he selected was to conduct a departmental enquiry into the "incidents." This type of enquiry would be almost entirely in Claxton's control as minister. He would be in a position to appoint whomever he chose to conduct the investigation and to establish the process by which the hearings would be conducted. This control allowed Claxton to dictate the scope of the inquiry, which he did to great effect by limiting its scope to morale issues only and excluding any questions or discussion of policy and expenditure. As a result of Claxton's ability to control the process, none of the witnesses were asked questions about the future role of the RCN or about the harmonised structure of pay and ranks, both of which had a bearing on the morale issue. The ability to control the process also allowed Claxton to ensure that there was no inconvenient transcript of evidence against which the findings of the Commission could be checked. The report would, then, stand alone as the first and last official word on the "incidents."

Claxton's choice of commissioners is also indicative of his desire to control the outcome of the hearings. In Louis Audette, for example, Claxton had very much picked a known quantity. Throughout his wartime service in the RCN Audette had been a vocal advocate for more formal education among the officers. Audette's anti-communist credentials were also spotless. He was suitably nationalistic and had taken strong stands against communist infiltration whenever had the opportunity. Furthermore, as an Ottawa insider he would have known what Claxton expected of him and would assiduously follow the terms of reference provided to him. There was very little chance that Louis Audette would go off message and begin inconvenient discussions concerning planning

and general naval policy. In short, Claxton could be sure that Audette would not embarrass him.

Audette's opinion of the professional serving officers was also well known to Claxton. While a number of adjectives could be used to properly describe Louis Audette, reticent would in no circumstances be among them. Throughout his naval service Audette had been openly critical of RCN regular officers with whom he came into contact. Many of those same officers remained in the service after the war and had been promoted to senior positions. He actively disliked them for what he perceived to be a superior or elitist attitude, often symbolised by an English accent, which he felt was not warranted by their lack of formal education. While Audette had no difficulty on principle with the concept of elites running things, he clearly felt that the RCN was being run by the wrong one. Education was the proper basis for elitism, in his mind, and Claxton would have been well aware of this view when he asked Audette to sit on the Commission. For Audette, then, the Commission was the final battle in the fight with Admiral Nelles that had begun during the Second World War.⁶²¹ In the report's conclusion that officer education was deficient Audette got the last word on the issue.

Leonard Brockington was similarly a known quantity to Claxton. The two men had worked closely together in the establishment of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Brockington was a senior career civil servant. His experience in chairing the enquiry into labour unrest in the merchant marine had given him extensive experience in conducting such hearings in an efficient and effective manner, and perhaps more importantly in writing reports on the outcome that contained just the right amount of obfuscation. Like Audette, Brockington would have known what was expected of him

⁶²¹ Mayne, *passim*.

in terms of the conclusions that were to be reached and the manner in which they were to be expressed. With Brockington, as with Audette, there would be no questions raised as to expenditure or general naval policy.

For Rollo Mainguy the situation was somewhat different. Unlike Audette, who had his own axe to grind, and Brockington, who was an experienced bureaucrat, Mainguy was simply placed in an impossible position. If he came down on the side of the naval leadership he would be perceived as engaging in a cover-up of the problem. If he came down in favour of reform he would be viewed by many of his colleagues as having betrayed them. For Mainguy, then, the chairmanship of the Commission was a no-win situation, and the best course of action was for him to keep quiet and let the other two commissioners deal with the matter.

To make matters worse for Mainguy he was nearing the end of his career. As Commanding Officer Pacific Coast he was in line for an eventual appointment as chief of the naval staff. This was the pinnacle of any naval career and something Mainguy had worked towards for his entire adult life. The CNS appointment was, however, made by the minister of national defence, who was not obligated to appoint any particular individual. Any perception of Mainguy as uncooperative or as someone who could not be counted on to comply with ministerial directives and policies would seriously jeopardise his future career prospects and perhaps more importantly his pension, which was rank dependent. Professionally, then, Mainguy was well and truly stuck.⁶²²

There is, of course, no document in which Claxton indicates the reasons behind his selection of the commissioners. He was far too experienced a political operator to

⁶²² Mainguy became Chief of the Naval Staff on 1 December 1951. (Lund, "Vice-Admiral E. Rollo Mainguy: Sailor's Admiral," p. 187.)

leave any such evidence behind. The individuals selected, however, do indicate a desire on Claxton's part for a Commission that would follow its terms or reference and do what was expected of it. Two of the three men selected were Ottawa insiders and would have been known to Claxton socially as well as professionally. There was plenty of opportunity for him to convey his wishes to the men involved in a way that would remain undetectable. In the end he must have been very pleased indeed with the work done by the commissioners.

In spite of outward appearances the Mainguy Commission and subsequent report do not represent a good faith exploration of the issues confronting the RCN in the immediate post-war period. Claxton and the Naval Staff knew well before 1949 what was "wrong" with the RCN through a series of internal enquiries and reports that were quite exhaustive. The harmonisation of the rank and pay structure between the three services was a priority for Claxton and he was not willing to scrap it even though it was one of the main causes of discontent on the lower deck. The issues of habitability both afloat and ashore was a problem which would cost a great deal of money to solve, and military spending was not a priority for the government. The absence in the RCN of anyone whose function was to keep abreast of the condition of the fleet compounded the problem and prevented the RCN from presenting a united front to Claxton. The combination of factors, then, allowed him to do nothing to address the issues between 1947 and 1949 which, until the incidents, suited him perfectly.

It was also clear from the internal reports prepared by the RCN what was not a problem. None of the reports or correspondence make any mention of the perceived "snobbishness" of Canadian officers. Nor are their "English" accents mentioned as a

problem by any of the personnel preparing reports, even those based on interviews with the men of the lower deck. There was no indication prior to the hearings that the lack of a sufficiently Canadian identity was something that was bothering anyone, lower deck or upper. At the hearings themselves this continued. The vast majority of the witnesses failed completely to mention anything about the attitude of the officers or the absence of Canadian identifiers on the ships or uniforms until prompted to do so by the commissioners. There were virtually no independent or spontaneous comments made and the chief problem with the lack of identifiers seemed to be being mistaken for British sailors by United States Navy personnel, with the attendant fisticuffs. While it is difficult from the transcripts to tell who is leading the charge in the questions concerning Canadian identity, it is safe to assume that it was Louis Audette. It is unlikely that it was Rollo Mainguy and it would have been uncharacteristically direct for Brockington. It seems that only Audette was significantly bothered by the lack of Canadian identifiers to make an issue of it.

Whether or not he gave specific instructions to the commissioners to focus on the issue of national identity, the focus on it made in the report suited Claxton perfectly. It allowed him to focus on an issue that would speak to the nationalist sentiments of Canadians and to blame the "incidents" on something that was as easy to appear to remedy as it was functionally meaningless. In the end both the hearings and the attendant report were no more than an attempt to distract both the government and the public from the real problems facing the RCN. The findings made by the Commission bear little relationship to the evidence given at the hearings. The ordered destruction of the transcripts was designed to ensure that this fact would remain unknown and more

importantly unknowable. The existence of the transcripts, however, allows the Commission to be seen for what it was, an exercise designed to produce the illusion of activity without running the risk of actually doing anything significant. It would be another decade before most of the Commission's recommendations were acted upon, particularly those concerning the education of officers,⁶²³ but in drawing attention away from the operational weaknesses of the RCN the Commission served its purpose.

⁶²³ Lund, "The Rise and Fall of the Royal Canadian Navy," p. 233; 381. In fact Lund argues that the failure of Grant and the Naval Staff to implement the recommendations of the Report was behind Audette's eventual decision to turn the files, including the transcript of the hearings, over to the Library and Archives Canada. It was, according to Lund, meant as a shot at Grant. (p. 221)

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