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The Creation of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service and its Role in Canadian Naval Intelligence and Communications, 1939-45

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To Paul

Contents

Abstract

This study explores the establishment of the Women's Royal Naval Canadian Service (WRCNS) on the basis of its British counterpart, and the subsequent restructuring of the service better to suit Canadian needs during the Second World War. This development paralleled and complemented other efforts on the part of the Canadian navy to become more autonomous from Britain's Royal Navy. Many Canadians, and the government itself, had profound reservations about the employment of women in military service, but within the navy, as in the other armed forces, these reservations were overcome by much needed skills available among the women who volunteered. The WRCNS made a particularly valuable contribution to the Battle of the Atlantic providing a highly capable, enthusiastic workforce to staff the rapidly expanding communication and intelligence networks developed by the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) to protect convoys, target U-boats and give Canada full partnership in Allied decision making for operations in the critically important north Atlantic theatre. The work of the WRCNS directly contributed to Allied victory in the Atlantic and to the enhancement of Canadian national autonomy.

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I would like to thank Dr. Roger Sarty for his unwavering support and guidance throughout this difficult process. He has been an invaluable resource. I would also like to thank Donna Porter and Glenn Wright at Library and Archives Canada. They were kind enough to assist me with my document search. Donna provided me with some of her notes from her time at the Department of National Defence and Glenn helped expedite access to restricted documents. They have both continued to be available to me for advice and information and I have truly appreciated their assistance.

I could not have completed this paper without the support of my friends and family. Kate Betts-Wilmot has been a great motivator and shoulder to cry on and I could not have done this without her encouragement. My husband and family have been my rock throughout this process. My husband has listened patiently to thousands of sentences in various configurations. He has, with great interest (feigned or real), been attentive as I continually talked about Wrens, sailors and naval intelligence. My mother has suffered this same fate, continually proof-reading endless paragraphs and debating chapter configurations. I am eternally grateful for this support.

Finally, I would like to thank the all of the men and women who choose to serve their country in times of war. Their bravery and sacrifice is inspirational. I hope that in some small way, by illuminating a portion of their story, their memories and accomplishments are kept alive.

Abbreviations

CAC	Canadian Army Corps
CWAC	Canadian Women's Army Corps
DHH	Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
ETO	European Theatre of Operations
FIS	Foreign Intelligence Section
HF/DF	High-Frequency Direction-Finding
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NSHQ	Naval Services Headquarters
NSS	National Selective Service
OIC	Operational Intelligence Center
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCAF (WD)	Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division)
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy
RCNR	Royal Canadian Naval Reserve
RCNVR	Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve

RN	Royal Navy
USN	United States Navy
VD	Venereal Disease
WAVES	Women's Auxiliary Volunteer Emergency Service
WRANS	Women's Royal Australian Naval Service
WRCNS	Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service
W/T	Wireless Transmitting Stations
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Chapter 1: The Royal Canadian Navy, the Battle of the Atlantic, and the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service

The establishment of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS) was a key element in the success of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in meeting complex new operational challenges during the Second World War while undergoing the strains of massive expansion. Women not only freed men from shore duty in order to provide crews for large numbers of new-construction warships, but brought skills and knowledge that were not to be found among the diminishing pool of men available for military service. These abilities helped the service quickly and greatly to increase the size and capacity of command, intelligence and communications staffs beginning in 1942-3. The changes were critical in improving the performance of Canadian maritime forces against the largest offensive by Germany's submarine fleet, and, in the process, secured the navy's – and Canada's – place in the senior levels of Allied maritime command.

In the face of burgeoning success by the German submarine force in 1942-3, Britain and the United States prepared to reserve complete control over Allied anti-submarine forces for their own senior commanders, and relegate Canadian headquarters to a subsidiary role. That would have been a major set back because of the enormous national commitment the country had made to the war against the submarines, and

because the most critical operations, which took place in the Atlantic in waters immediately adjacent to the Maritime Provinces, directly affected Canadian interests. The navy's successful efforts simultaneously to build command, intelligence and communications organizations that could manage Allied operations while continuing rapid expansion of the anti-submarine fleet were a benchmark in the transformation of the Royal Canadian Navy from a subsidiary branch of Britain's Royal Navy (RN), the 'parent' service in everything from regulations and uniforms to equipment, training and attitudes, into a national service with the capabilities to serve Canadian interests. The WRCNS, typical of most elements of the RCN, was founded on a British model, the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), but the new organization, established in the midst of the German submarine offensive in 1942 and the resulting inter-Allied disputes about the most effective response, rapidly became distinctly Canadian. The purpose of the present study is to examine the manner in which the Canadian navy quickly adapted a British institution to meet emerging national needs, and how Canadian women contributed to this achievement.

The employment of women to build the organizations that would secure Canada's position in the control of Allied maritime operations marked two important departures. Although Britain had established women's military services, including the WRNS, during the First World War because of a serious shortage of manpower, Canada by contrast had no such precedent. Because the country had undertaken full scale mobilization later than Britain in 1914-18, there had not been such a serious shortage of manpower, and within the Canadian military, including the small Canadian navy, women had been employed

only in the traditional role as nursing sisters. The Canadian services did not create women's branches until 1941-2, and not because of the imperative need for personnel (shortages would begin to develop only in 1943). The main impetus was political, arising from the demands of Canadian women themselves to be allowed to serve in the manner of British women. Although the government and the armed forces ultimately proved receptive to the pressure exerted by women, the creation of the women's services and their early effectiveness in supplying committed and skilled personnel did little to change socially conservative attitudes among much of the population, and within the government itself.

When the Canadian women's services were created, the idea that the navy might establish itself as a major oceanic force with high-level Allied command functions had just begun to develop under the force of extraordinary circumstances. In fact, the navy, founded in 1910 under the Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, had a troubled and controversial history that did little to foreshadow the service's remarkable expansion in 1941 and after.

The Royal Navy had encouraged the establishment of navies in the self-governing dominions to secure assistance in the tightening naval race with Germany before the First World War. The idea was that the dominion services, built on the Royal Navy model and with the assistance of British-built ships, British officers and instructional personnel, could in the event of war instantly and seamlessly integrate with the parent service under the centralized control of the British Admiralty in London. Many influential French Canadians opposed the new Canadian service because its close association with the Royal

Navy implied subservience to British foreign and defence policy. Many English Canadians had grave doubts for nearly the opposite reason, wondering if Laurier's tired and scandal wracked government could, even with British assistance, create a navy with any real capability to contribute to the defence of Canada and the Empire.[1]

Robert Borden, after leading the Conservatives to victory in the election of 1911, abandoned the navy financially and politically. Upon the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the meager remnants of the service depended upon the RN for the loan of trained officers and petty officers to operate a fleet of small patrol vessels, including armed ex-civilian yachts, to maintain the most basic defences in the immediate approaches to Canadian ports, while British cruisers protected shipping along Canada's coasts and kept watch for major German warships and armed merchant vessels.

After the cessation of hostilities, the Liberal party took office in 1921 and made massive, sweeping reductions in the defence budget. This lack of funding continued through the 1920's and, with the onset of the Great Depression, into the 1930's. Although King, during his administrations in the late 1920s and 1930s, allowed the navy to procure a total of seven modern destroyers so that it could more adequately defend Canada's coasts, the tiny service remained utterly dependent on the Royal Navy for training, personnel and equipment. All officer training, as well as advanced courses for other personnel, were conducted by the RN. Many RCN personnel spent two of every six

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[1]W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert H. Caldwell, William Johnston and William G.P. Rawling. *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943.* Vol. 2, Pt. 1. (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 2002) Chapter 1. The next several pages are taken from this source, which synthesizes the full body of literature.

years serving with the RN to take courses and glean experience that the RCN could not provide. The only full-fledged fleet exercises by Canada's destroyers were as part of the larger British fleet. The disjunction between King's nationalist policies and the under-funding of the RCN was painfully brought home by the Munich crisis of 1938 when he realized that in the case of war, the RCN, lacking the heavy ships needed to defeat Germany's new surface raiders, would have to operate as a part of the RN's America and West Indies command with its headquarters in Bermuda.

In the opening months of the Second World War, the RCN indeed functioned as a sub-unit of the RN. Although the King government soon approved the construction in Canadian yards of over ninety coastal defence ships, including sixty-four 'corvettes,' until the latter part of 1941 the navy had seemed destined mainly to carry out coastal duties under British command and at most, contribute a few larger ships for ocean operations as integral parts of Allied forces. It was the unheralded success of the German submarine fleet in attacking allied merchant shipping on the high seas in 1941 that led Britain to beg Canada to assign its corvettes to trans-Atlantic convoy protection duties, and undertake a crash program to construct many more corvettes and larger ocean escorts. The RCN, as a result, began to assemble, albeit initially on a small scale, the intelligence and command facilities needed to control far-reaching and complex convoy protection operations. British and US efforts during the crisis of the German submarine offensive in late 1942 and early 1943 to relegate Canada to a very subordinate position came as an unpleasant surprise, and it was this blow to the country's prestige and interests that finally brought the RCN's leadership to demand a prominent place in the Allied command structure.

This effort was successful, but only because the navy was able rapidly to meet British and American demands and because the service multiplied the size and capacity of its intelligence, command and communications organizations. The members of the new women's service, fortunately, proved to have an aptitude, and, frequently, the educational and civilian employment background, necessary for intelligence and communications work.

Until the 1980s, the historiography of the RCN was extremely underdeveloped. This was mainly the result of government cuts to the military official histories program shortly after the end of the Second World War. In 1947, the minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton, ruled that any historical project that could not be completed within the year should be cancelled. The navy's historian, Professor Gilbert Tucker, could within that time limit complete two of the planned volumes, one carrying the story from the navy's origins to the outbreak of the Second World War, and the second covering 'Activities Ashore' during that conflict[2]. Tucker was not willing to do an operations volume without enemy records and high-level intelligence records, neither of which were available. As a result, the operational history, *Far Distant Ships*, was done on the basis of Tucker's team's very preliminary work by a Public Affairs officer, the well-known author Joseph Schull. Further substantial research on the navy's history did not take place until the late 1970s and 80s, when the naval archives, in Britain, the US and in Canada, were, by degrees, opened to the public.

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[2]Gilbert Norman Tucker. *The Naval Service of Canada: Activities on Shore During the Second World War.* Volume 2. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952).

Tucker's Second World War volume is a very thorough examination of the administration and organization of the navy but gives little analysis. Tucker deals briefly with the WRCNS, noting their numbers and their departure from the WRNS model.[3] He discusses manpower issues, citing parliamentary debates on the need for women's services to meet potential personnel shortages, and follows the brief administrative history of the WRCNS[4]. He fails to note, however, that the real impetus behind the creation of women's services was the public demands of Canadian women to be of use in the war effort. Tucker does make the important conclusion that Canadian women altered the WRNS institution for their own benefit. The book thus provides a solid understanding of the administrative structure of the RCN, including a great deal of statistical information. It does not, however, explore the intense international pressures on the navy, the development of increasingly important Canadian interests as the country's participation in the maritime war mushroomed, and the interplay of these factors in the 'nationalization' of the service. In this respect the book is not untypical of many early post-war works, a quality that may in part have reflected the continued influence of the wartime emphasis on the nearly seamless unity that gave the Allied cause its strength.

The final instalment of the first official naval history of the war, Schull's *The Far Distant Ships*, contains little analysis, and is extremely narrative, designed for public

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[3] *Ibid.* 318-19.

[4] *Ibid.* 319-22.

consumption .[5] The only perceivable thesis is that the Canadian navy worked very hard during the war, overcoming considerable obstacles to perform very well. The book read more like patriotic propaganda than an official history of operations.[6] Schull barely mentions the WRCNS, noting only that recruiting for that branch began in 1942.[7] During one of the pieces about specific ships, he also mentions that there were eight Wrens aboard a ship from Derry to Greenock.[8]

After Schull's book, there was a void in the published literature until the early 1980's as many of the key files needed for critical analysis remained classified. Once these documents were released, historians began to undertake a renewed examination of specific issues faced by the emerging RCN during the war. In the conference proceedings *The RCN in Retrospect* (1980), W.G.D. Lund pushed more deeply than Tucker's original official histories into the role of intelligence in the Battle of the Atlantic in the RCN's transformation into a national service. Lund argues that the RCN aggressively developed its intelligence capabilities so that the service could track the movement and coordinate the defence of Atlantic merchant ship convoys, and thereby exercise national command in the function and theatre to which Canada made an

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[5]Joseph Schull. *The Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operation s in the Second World War.* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952).

[6]*Ibid.* 26.

[7]*Ibid.* 126.

[8]*Ibid.* 407.

enormous contribution to the Allied cause..[9]

Lund lays the groundwork for his argument by showing how, even in the early months of the war, when the tiny RCN depended upon British warships for the defence of Canadian waters, the navy took pains to ensure that the senior British force commander based at Halifax did not exercise control over Canadian warships without proper reference to Canadian authorities.[10] Circumstances changed dramatically, following the fall of France, when Britain struggled for survival against German blockade. Canada dispatched its best warships to serve in British waters. In May-June 1941, when the expanding German submarine force was able to concentrate for "pack" attacks on convoys as far west as the approaches to Newfoundland, Canada then, at Britain's urgent request, concentrated all of its existing warships and the new anti-submarine corvettes that were just coming out of Canadian shipyards into the Newfoundland Escort Force to protect convoys on the long passage from Newfoundland to Iceland and back. Canadian warships came under US command when the United States Navy took responsibility for the defence of convoys west of Iceland in the fall of 1941, but the US did not have an integrated command structure, and the Canada retained a fair measure of command authority. The price of this arrangement was a patchwork of US and Canadian naval and air force commands in the western Atlantic. In the fall and winter of 1942, when the U-boats enjoyed some of their greatest successes against ocean convoys in the western

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[9]W.G.D. Lund. "The Royal Canadian Navy's Quest for Autonomy in the North West Atlantic: 1941-43." Ed. James A. Boutilier. *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982) 138-157.

[10]*Ibid.* 138. The RCN had only six destroyers and five minesweepers

Atlantic, the British pressed for the creation of a more closely integrated British-US trans-Atlantic command that would have effectively removed Canada from command authority even though the RCN was providing fully 48 percent of the north Atlantic escorts. The RCN, with the government's support, resisted increasing US dictation of ship deployments and control of intelligence, and at the same time began to expand and improve the Canadian intelligence organization. The RCN's efforts persuaded the Americans, and then the British, that Canada, rather than the US should control convoy operations in the north-west Atlantic, and culminated in the appointment of Admiral Murray, RCN, on 30 April 1943 as the Commander in Chief, Canadian Northwest Atlantic.[11] Murray, whose headquarters were in Halifax, was the only Canadian officer of any service to command an Allied theatre during the Second World War. Lund's argument that the RCN fought for its autonomy primarily with the British, but also by refusing to submit to total control by the Americans became a key theme in literature about the RCN during the Second World War.

Using Lund's arguments as a springboard for his own theories, Marc Milner, in *North Atlantic Run*, further examines both the RCN's desire for autonomy and the immense pressure the British brought to bear upon the Canadians in the first half of the Battle of the Atlantic (1939-43).[12] This book uncovers the range of the RCN's contribution to maintaining and protecting the convoy system. The British and later the

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[11] *Ibid.* 153. Murray was even in technical command of the US Air Forces bases in Newfoundland.

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

Americans did not have the sea power to escort properly all of the convoys needed to supply the Allied war effort in Europe. As a result, Canada was placed under immense pressure to rush its newly built corvettes and green sailors into trans-Atlantic convoy escort duty in 1941-42. Because Canada was 'holding the line', the British and Americans were then able to train their crews properly and test new ships before battle. Although the appearance of the situation lends to placing sole blame for the situation upon our Allies, Canada does hold some culpability as the RCN was so short of experienced officers and command staff that they themselves did not fully realize the equipment problems nor could they properly communicate their needs and the reality of the Canadian situation to the British and Americans.

This all came to a head in the fall of 1942 when poorly equipped Canadian escorts led two of the convoys that suffered the highest losses. The British, as part of their bid to gain full control of the whole Battle of the Atlantic, asked Canada to pull its four big mid-ocean escort groups and reassign them to full British command in British waters for a chance to re-equip and get some refresher training. Both the Canadian government and the RCN were angry and embarrassed that Canada's biggest contribution to the war effort was being benched and to be told they were not good enough by the British. Milner points out that after the Canadian groups were out of theatre, they in fact had to be pressed into intense operations in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. There was little time for training, but important new equipment was fitted in British ports, and the Canadian ships performed well supporting the convoys that supplied Allied operations in North Africa. At this same time, in the winter of 1942-43, fully equipped and well

trained, top British groups experienced the same problems in the North Atlantic as the Canadians previously had. The British were forced to realize that the true problem was a shortage of escort vessels, not a fault with Canadian tactics or preparedness.

Canadian anger over the rough treatment they received at the hands of the British during re-deployment was compounded by the British and American efforts to consolidate the overall command of the Battle of the Atlantic, further squeezing out Canadian command and control in the higher levels of operational planning. This resulted in the RCN's push for autonomy, with the issue coming to a head at the Washington Allied Convoy Conference in March 1943. Canada argued that the RCN contributed almost half of the vessels in the North Atlantic escort force and further, that Canada's large, natural harbours and, albeit undeveloped, communication facilities were ideal to play a larger role in convoy command. The issue was finally resolved when Rear-Admiral Murray was placed in charge of the Northwestern Atlantic Command on 20 April 1943, which controlled all naval operations north of New York through the middle of the Atlantic. Canada was given a greatly expanded area of influence, but further benefitted through the massive development of the HF/DF and 'Y' naval intelligence networks.[13]

Canadian naval history flourished in the 1990s. A number of books and articles were published by university scholars and the government funded a more comprehensive

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[13]David Zimmerman. *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). RCN dependence upon the British was also noted by David Zimmerman whilst examining the role of science and technology during the war, expanding on Milner's ideas about technological development and its importance

official history.[14] The next offering by Marc Milner in 1994 further developed the arguments in his *North Atlantic Run* about the Canadian fight for naval autonomy.[15] He concludes that the Second World War was a coming of age for the RCN. Canada's small ship navy became very effective in anti-submarine warfare in 1943-45, even as anti-submarine operations became much more technical and demanded ever increasing standards of expertise and training for personnel.

A Nation's Navy, published in 1996, collected many of the emerging scholarly works about the RCN's wartime struggle for independence. Further, it specifically develops the important role played by naval intelligence in both the war and in the RCN's quest for autonomy from the British. William Glover argues that before the war, Canada ignored its navy and depended upon the British, even for coastal defence. At the outbreak of the war, Canada expanded the navy and followed the British pattern. By the middle of the war, however, Canada began to recognize its own needs and tailored the navy to fit its unique role in the war, and as an independent post-war nation. Glover details how the

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[14]Tony German. *The Sea is at Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy.* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990). German's book was not particularly academic in nature and lacked analysis. It was a popular book with overly simplified analysis about how hard-fighting sailors were let down by corrupt, short-sighted, soul-less politicians, bureaucrats and staff officers in Ottawa. Its major failing was a lack of detail about operations due to the expansive time period covered.

[15]Marc Milner. *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive against Germany's Submarines.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Milner continues his argument for naval autonomy and technological development in his chapter of the Hadley, Huebert and Crickard book. Marc Milner. "The Historiography of the Canadian Navy: The State of the Art." Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob. Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) 23-34.

RCN 'Canadianized' by wearing maple leaves on uniforms and how national policy and identity became linked with the RCN. [16]

Mackenzie King's desire for naval autonomy developed with his realization that Canada was in a precarious position caught as it was between its connection to the British Empire and the "consequences of proximity" to the United States.[17] This led to the RCN's first thrust of independence at the outbreak of the war when Admiral Percy Nelles recommended that the RCN be placed under British control and King refused, preferring a co-operative relationship. King also began to 'Canadianize' the RCN by authorizing the reopening of the Naval College in 1940 so that officers would no longer receive the bulk of their training with the Royal Navy and supporting great expansion of the fleet despite warnings from the Finance Department that costs would be excessive.[18]

Training for reservists and ratings had a definite Canadian flavour organized as it often was by reservists who applied skills from related civilian fields, but officer training remained very British. There were no senior officers in the RCN who could think from a purely Canadian perspective. Gaining operational control was a huge accomplishment for the fledgling navy, but the form with which the RCN gained control was British. This newfound independence was reflected in a post-war planning document written in 1942: " The present excellent liaison with Great Britain and the United States must not be

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[16]William Glover. "The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy?" Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob. Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) 72-3.

[17]*Ibid.* 78.

[18]*Ibid.* 80-1.

allowed to lapse. This does not mean the cultivation either of an Imperial or a Pan American Navy. Nor does it mean complete uniformity or imitation, but rather a complete exchange of information. Canada must be kept abreast of new developments in naval affairs abroad."[19]

The British flavour of the Canadian navy is further fleshed out by David Zimmerman's examination of the social background of RCN personnel. He argues that there was a huge British influence, especially through the officers, on all branches of the RCN and that the navy was very British in character.[20] Most of the RCN was white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, 68% Anglican.[21] The Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR) for personnel with civilian professional marine experience and Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) for personnel who had no professional marine experience, were a bit more representative of the Canadian ethnic landscape, but regardless of the composition, the RCN functioned only in English.[22] The decidedly British nature of the RCN and its personnel complicated the bid for autonomy made by upper brass and politicians, as most sailors did not desire a separation, or perhaps could

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[19]Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant J.S. Hodgson, RCNVR. "Post-War Naval Problems." 1942. *Ibid.* 87. Hodgson, an extraordinarily capable staff officer, drafted most of the foundation documents on post-war naval planning.

[20]David Zimmerman. "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data." Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob. Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) 256-79.

[21]*Ibid.* 265.

[22]*Ibid.* 278.

not easily recognise the need for autonomy.

Catherine Allan develops the next stage of the RCN's bid for autonomy, the development of an intricate, dependable and accurate naval intelligence department. Her exploration of naval intelligence and its expanding network is built on work done by W.G.D. Lund in the 1970s. She argues that although initially working for the RN, the Canadian Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) and Foreign Intelligence Section (FIS) played a much bigger role than was first envisioned.[23] This put Canada in an independent, self-sustaining position within the Allied intelligence organization as a whole. Without a sophisticated and accurate intelligence system, staffed by well-trained servicemen and women, Canada would have been left out of the decision-making loop because it could not fully participate in strategy without a solid intelligence picture. Following the pattern of the rest of the RCN, the new intelligence branch worked to gain its autonomy from the historic dependence on the RN and make its own contribution to the war effort. By becoming a full partner in the Allied operational intelligence network, the naval intelligence branch of the RCN was the first to achieve emancipation through its commendable operational role in the Battle of the Atlantic.[24]

The Department of National Defence sponsored a second series of official naval histories in the late 1990's as many documents pertinent to the story of the Battle of the

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[23]Catherine E. Allan. "A Minute Bletchley Park: Building a Canadian Naval Operation Intelligence Centre, 1939-43." Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob. Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) 157-72.

[24]*Ibid.* 158.

Atlantic were declassified. The second in the series, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-43*, discusses the RCN's struggle for independence at a much greater depth, having more documents available to substantiate this thesis.[25] The authors argue that the RCN played an important role in the Second World War by keeping Allied shipping lanes open and that it was Canada's major contribution to the war effort. The book follows, at length, the RCN's steps toward autonomy and highlights the important role Canadian naval intelligence was able to play in U-boat tracking and convoy routing.[26] Tracking German submarines and plotting convoy routes to avoid them was the crucial key to Allied success in the Atlantic and on the continent (ETO), maintaining the steady flow of supplies from North America.[27] This saved the British from starvation, as well as provided heavy machinery, fresh troops and materiel for the war effort. This book, so far, is the most influential work about the World War Two Canadian Navy and gives a very detailed and comprehensive picture of naval activities, political maneuvering and intelligence trading. However, it does not provide much information about the WRCNS nor the contribution they made to the RCN.

Roger Sarty, in his book *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*, also argues that

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[25]Douglas *et. al.*

[26]*Ibid.* 237 and 380.

[27]ETO is the acronym for European Theatre of Operations.

the RCN used its importance in the Battle of the Atlantic to push for independence.[28] Sarty generally hypothesizes that the Canadian navy started the war as very weak and through dedication and hard work throughout the war, grew to become one of the most formidable navies in the world. He further argues that the suppression of U-boats was made possible by adding personnel to integrate operational intelligence with the command of air and sea forces. He credits the rapid development of the intelligence network to the women of the WRCNS. Because women could not serve in combat, they took up other trades, including assignments in information-handling. Women were often placed in these positions because of their compatibility and superior education.[29] Many wireless interception and direction-finding stations were entirely staffed by WRCNS, with male personnel to do any heavy lifting (answerable to the Wren-in-charge). Sarty credits the Allied success in the Atlantic to the good intelligence about U-boat positioning by Ultra decrypts and Wren-run direction-finding stations.[30] Although published before *No Higher Purpose*, Sarty's is the only academic piece that deals with the contribution made by the WRCNS with any detail.

As for publications regarding the WRCNS, there have been very few. Only one, an article by Barb Winters, could be considered scholarly. Winters argues that the existing women's war work historiography is a revisionist interpretation of the emancipation question, drawing negative conclusions. Winters criticizes this approach as

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[28]Roger F. Sarty. *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*. Montreal: Art Global, 1998.

[29]*Ibid.* 149.

[30]*Ibid.* 150.

one that places 21st century ideals of equal pay for equal work, maternity leave and combat duty onto a 1940s time frame and that these jobs in the service were opportunities and did, in fact, advance the status of women in Canada. She argues that women who had served in the military proved age old feminist claims that women really could do anything a man could do. Winters argues that pay equity was never reached, but that raising women's pay from 66% to 75% (when compared to a man's pay for the same position) was groundbreaking, as were the opportunities for veteran's benefits.[31]

Other sources, newspaper articles, a Canadian Geographic article, and memoire books give very personal experiences and do not provide any analysis of policy, procedure or events.[32] Rosamund Greer's book *The Girls of the King's Navy* does the best job of providing a bit of history about the WRCNS before the author begins to discuss personal experiences.[33] Other compilation books, like Carolyn Gossage's *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots*, discuss women's personal experiences in the service by

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[31]Barbara Winters. "The Wrens of the Second World War: Their Place in the History of Canadian Servicewomen." Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press , 1996) 282-4.

[32]Library and Archives Canada (LAC). MG 28. I471, vol 2. "Vancouver Wrens Association." This file had numerous newspaper clippings, as well as the Canadian Geographic story about the WRCNS. Gordon M. Dallyn, Ed. *Canadian Geographical Journal*. Vol. 27 (5). November 1943. Library and Archives Canada citations are given in the following order: record group, volume, file.

[33]Rosamund 'Fiddy' Greer. *The Girls of the King's Navy*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983.

using anecdotes from various participants.[34] This book, and Barbara Dundas' *History of Women in the Canadian Military*, focus much more attention on the CWAC's and WD's, because they had much higher enrolment numbers and therefore more veterans to give statements.[35] Dundas' book does provide a bit of organizational history, but definitely gives a lot more coverage to the other two women's services. Also, her book attempts to cover a very broad time span and therefore does not give great detail about any one period.

Ruth Roach Pierson's book, *They're Still Women After All*, follows along the lines of Dundas' work, but does give a lot more organizational detail as it does not include the lengthy personal remembrances.[36] Her book also includes the stories of civilian women working in factories, on farms or doing volunteer work for the war effort. Pierson's research is detailed, meticulous and still holds the field. Her interpretation is politicized, critiquing pay scale differentials between men and women, gender segregation, and government propaganda campaigns that were sexist and thereby highlights the government's ambivalence toward the 'women' issue. Her feminist agenda becomes quite clear as she criticizes the Canadian government for inequity, and contests the view that war work liberated Canadian women, inspiring second wave feminism. Pierson

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[34]Carolyn Gossage. *Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War (1939-45).* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991).

[35]Barbara Dundas. *A History of Women in the Canadian Military.* (Montreal: Art Global, 2000).

[36]Ruth Roach Pierson. *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood.* (Toronto: McClelland & Steward, Inc., 1990).

contends that the government was only half-hearted in its effort to involve women and kept the status quo by ensuring that all decision-making remain in the hands of men.[37] Again, because the WRCNS was the smallest of the women's branches, it received the least coverage.

The other Canadian women's services have received equally little scholarly coverage. They receive, like the WRCNS, a paragraph or two in major scholarly operational histories that note their existence, but not much else. Barb Winters wrote a major research paper, unpublished, about the development of the RCAF Women's Division. Pierson and Dundas both covered the CWAC's and WD's in their compilation books, providing a brief operational history and in depth discussion about uniforms, chastity and the perception of women in uniform by the general public. Pierson gives some analysis of government decisions about promoting women's war work but does not go into great depth. Dundas and Gossage give numerous personal stories where former members discuss dances, mess hall food and overseas adventures. These books give a good perspective on life as a woman in the service, but do not analyze or interpret assignments, orders or the decisions made by the government and military for the women's services. All of these books were designed for public consumption and only Pierson approaches a scholarly analysis, but maintains a tone that is friendly to the general reader. Jeffrey Keshen, in *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, has issues similar to

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[37]Pierson. *Still Women After All.* 15.

Pierson.[38] His book covers men, women and youth during wartime, a broad spectrum that sacrifices detail. His chapter entitled "Women Warriors", gives only one paragraph to the WRCNS. His chapter, frequently citing Pierson, is devoted to social commentary and public perception rather than an in depth look at any of the women's services.[39]

Some of the non-scholarly books are worth mention, if for no other reason than the photograph collection that they used. Ada Amey's *Here come the Khaki Skirts* is a photographic history of the Canadian Women's Army Corps.[40] It shows training centers, marching drills, uniform variations and various staged 'on-the-job' photos, some from personal collections. Ms. Amey did considerable research as when naming those in her photographs, as she listed them by their husband's names, tracking them after the war. W. Hugh Conrod also published a notable book about the CWACs.[41] Conrod gives a bit of operational history and details the origins of the volunteers as well as providing short biographies of the leadership. He delivers a lot of demographic information, but the book is tedious and full of personal stories. Conrod also fails to make any type of analysis of the capabilities of the leaders he so carefully describes.

The British women's auxiliaries face the same fate as their Canadian counterparts,

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[38]Jeffrey A. Keshen. *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004) 172-93.

[39]Keshen 176-77.

[40]Ada Amey. *Here come the Khaki Skirts . . . the Women Volunteers: A Picture Review of the Canadian Women's Army Corps during the Second World War.* (Cobalt, ON: Highway Book Shop, 1988).

[41]W. Hugh Conrod. *Athene, Goddess of War: The Canadian Women's Army Corps; Their Story.* (Halifax: William Macnab & Son, Ltd., 1983).

with very little scholarly writing available. The WRNS seems to have garnered more interest than the WRCNS. There are several books published about its origins, many directed at a younger audience. Margaret Fletcher produced a large, picture-filled volume that describes some of the circumstances surrounding the development and organization of the WRNS, giving details about training, assignment variety and numerous pictures showing the Wrens at work.[42] Fletcher's work would make a nice coffee table addition or sixth grade project reference; it certainly wasn't intended to provide scholarly analysis.

Vonla McBride also wrote a book for a classroom educational series sponsored by the British government about her experiences with the WRNS.[43] She briefly describes the service before the war, but mostly discusses her personal experiences in the 1950s and '60s. John Drummond wrote about the WRNS in a similar fashion as Carolyn Gossage, titling chapters around story themes, such as 'Spirit,' 'Bravery' and 'Tragedy'. His book is very narrative and contains no analysis.[44] However, he does include passages from Admiralty Instructions given to Laughton Mathews, of whom he devotes a great deal of text. The book was designed for an adult audience but was a feel good, light piece that celebrated the achievements of the WRNS and downplayed the difficulties. Even in H.M.D. Parker's famous tome, *Manpower*, there was very little discussion of the

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[42]M. H. Fletcher, Commandant. *The WRNS: A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989).

[43]Vonla McBride. *Never at Sea: Life in the WRNS.* Ed. Rachel Bleackly. My Life and Work Series. (Reading: Educational Explorers Ltd., 1966).

[44]John D. Drummond. *Blue is for Girl: The Story of the WRNS.* (London: W.H. Allen, 1960).

contribution made by British women to the war effort. However, Parker does note that women were learning trades. He argues that the British government initially thought that volunteer numbers would be great enough to cover the demand for workers. However, the war was of such an unprecedented scale that women were being drafted into labour jobs, especially the trades.[45]

Ursula Stuart Mason has written the most useful and informative books, although not scholarly, that gives some analysis and an in-depth picture of the organization and operation of the WRNS, beginning at the First World War.[46] Mason discusses the development of the WRNS and its reformation after the war, partially due to the impetus of former members and other women who saw war coming after the events at Munich in 1938.[47] Mason gives a solid appraisal of the leadership of the WRNS and its formation, as well as the chain of command and various roles available to women. Because both of Mason's books cover a very broad time period, she does not give a great deal of analysis. Her work is well researched and informative, especially as an introduction to the subject. In her second book, Mason gives a brief chronicle of other women's services modeled

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[45]H.M.D. Parker. *Manpower: A Study of War-time Policy and Administration.* History of the Second World War United Kingdom Civil Series. Ed. Sir Keith Hancock. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957) 279-98.

[46]Ursula Stuart Mason. *The Wrens, 1917-1977: A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service.* Fwd. By HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. My Life & Work Series. Ed. Rachel Bleackly. (Reading: Educational Explorers Ltd., 1977). Mason's second book is an update of the first, containing a section about Wren groups around the world and a continuation of events from 1977- 1992. Ursula Stuart Mason. *Britania's Daughters: The Story of the WRNS.* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992).

[47]Mason. *The Wrens.* 50.

after the WRNS, including the Canadian, American, Australian, Dutch and New Zealand women's branches.

There is very little available on the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) aside from the occasional mention in official histories and a few pictures on web sites. G. Hermon Gill, who wrote the second volume of the Australian Navy's official history notes that the WRANS were patterned after the WRNS as an auxiliary branch, but were better paid.[48] He gives little other information about their existence, let alone their contribution. David Stevens does somewhat better in his 2001 offering, *The Royal Australian Navy*.[49] Stevens briefly chronicles the establishment of the WRANS in October 1942 through their disbandment on 2 September 1946.[50] Stevens notes that the full potential of the WRANS was never exploited by the Australian government and that they worked well behind the scenes as support staff, but that they were essential in maintaining the communications and signal intelligence operations.[51] Their role can be seen as very similar to the WRCNS; however, enrolment numbers were quite different. Only about 1700 women served with the Australian navy, including those who served as naval nurses. The WRCNS had approximately 6,000 women serving by the end of the war, without counting the navy nurses.

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[48]G. Hermon Gill. *Royal Australian Navy: 1942-45*. Vol. II. (Canberra: Griffin Press, 1968) 102, 466.

[49]David Stevens. *The Royal Australian Navy*. Vol. III. The Australian Centenary History of Defence. (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[50]Stevens. 143, 156.

[51]Stevens. 143.

The United States Navy had an auxiliary branch, formed on the British example, called the WAVES. There is no scholarly work available about the Women's Auxiliary Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), just memoirs of former officers and general mention in books about women serving in the US forces. Although a preliminary narrative account of the organization, administration and work of the WAVES was assembled by US Navy historians during the 1940s, this work was never published.[52] A book following women's involvement with the USN from WWI until 1999 was written by Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall.[53] Like so many other books about women's military service, this book covers a broad time span and is therefore unable to examine any situation in detail. Ebbert and Hall cite the main reason for the formation of the WAVES as the Navy's desire to have workers available twenty-four hours a day to man communications positions. They also wanted to have communications workers on call and this was not possible with civilian women so they decided to enlist them.[54] Ebbert and Hall go on to discuss the leadership and give personal stories from veterans. They discuss overseas adventures as well as training and promotional opportunities. They do not venture into political or military analysis, but provide a good overview of women who

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[52]Several attempts were made on my behalf by the WLU library staff to arrange an interlibrary loan of the narrative with the library of the Naval Historical Center in Washington, DC, but they declined as it is against their policy to lend any of their property to libraries in a different country. I was told that the cost of purchasing a copy was prohibitive.

[53]Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall. *Crossed Currents: Navy Women in a Century of Change*. (New York: Brassey's, 1999).

[54]*Ibid.* 30-32.

served with the USN during the war.

Winifred Quick Collins and Joy Bright Hancock, both former Captains, have written personal remembrances of their time with the USN.[55] Hancock served in both wars and both continued well after the end of the Second World War. Because both of their books are entirely personal biographies, there is no academic analysis. As women who rose in the ranks, Collins and Hancock are able to give an interesting perspective on life in the navy including famous American military, entertainment, and political personalities . The WAVES operated similarly to the WRNS and the WRCNS, borrowing their basic structure and training regimens.

The story of women in the military is only beginning to be told. For that reason the bulk of the present thesis is based on the administrative files of the Royal Canadian Navy, located at Library and Archives Canada, and on preliminary studies carried out by the naval history team at the Directorate of History and Heritage at National Defence Headquarters in the 1980s-90s and now available to researchers at that institution's archives.

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[55]Captain Winifred Quick Collins and Herbert M. Levine. *More than a Uniform: A Navy Woman in a Navy Man's World.* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1997). And Captain Joy Bright Hancock. *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence.* (Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 1972).

Chapter 2: Anchors Away

In 1942, when the Royal Canadian Navy decided to create a women's service, thousands of women had already submitted applications for service. The Canadian Navy asked the Admiralty for assistance with their new organization, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service. The Royal Navy sent three of their best Women's Royal Naval Service officers to mold the new organization. However, there was one crucial difference in the administration in relation to the British model; the WRCNS was integrated into the Royal Canadian Navy, not attached as an auxiliary. This gave Canadian women opportunities denied their British counterparts. Canadians would further alter the WRCNS structure once the WRNS Officers returned home, based on the legacy of the RCN, adapting the form and function of British naval institutions to suit the unique Canadian situation. This institutional alteration became the first step towards women having a wide range of careers in the navy. Canadian women created this opportunity for themselves.

During the First World War, the British forces mobilized women to free men for

active service. On 20 November 1917, *The Times* announced that the Navy was forming a shore service for women.[56] The director of this new service was Dame Katherine Furse, GBE, formerly of the Red Cross. The WRNS fulfilled domestic shored-based jobs, and were cooks, waitresses, laundresses, telegraphists, telephonists, bookkeepers, wireless operators, and motor drivers.[57] These tasks expanded into other areas as the Wrens proved their abilities in mail rooms, quartermasters departments and overseas base entertainment departments. Some even went to sea and learned to use and repair navigation equipment. By 1 October 1919, when the Wrens were demobilized, 5054 ratings and 438 officers had served with the WRNS.[58]

It was this experience that led to the re-establishment the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) in November 1938.[59] The Admiralty recognized that a war with Germany would be all-encompassing, straining man-power resources, and every available man would be needed for active duty. They therefore prepared for the emergency mobilization of female auxiliary personnel. Mrs. Vera Laughton Mathews, a senior officer in the WRNS during the First World War and daughter of the famed naval historian Sir John Laughton, had urged that the Royal Navy re-institute the organization.[60] The Admiralty appointed her director of the reconstituted WRNS in early 1939 and

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[56]Vera Laughton Mathews. *Blue Tapestry.* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1948) 11.

[57]Mason. *Britannia's Daughters.* 9.

[58]*Ibid.* 31.

[59]Fletcher 25.

[60]*Ibid.*

immediately began organizing a recruitment and publicity campaign. As D-WRNS, she reported directly to the Second Sea Lord, Sir Charles Little, and was responsible for organization and administration as well as the discipline of members and their general welfare.[61] Until 1941, the WRNS functioned under the auspices of the Civil Establishment Branch at the Admiralty.[62] Their administration was then transferred to the Commissions and Warrants Branch, as the Civil Establishment did not easily recognize the need for billets and uniforms, considering the women civilian personnel. The WRNS would not be subject to the Naval Discipline Act, accountable only to D-WRNS.[63]

An officer corps was one of the first elements organized, so that a structure would be in place for ready expansion in case war broke out suddenly. Officers were not given commissions, but the titles of Third, Second and First Officer respectively as they gained skills and seniority. Ratings were assigned the ranks of Wren, Leading Wren and Chief Wren.[64] The WRNS goal for recruitment was set at 3000 women with previous training as cooks, drivers, domestics and clerks.[65] A promotional booklet was published, "Women's Service in the Royal Navy", with information about duties, placements and

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[61]Mason. *The Wrens.* 51. D-WRNS refers to Director - WRNS.

[62]Brian Lavery. *Hostilities Only: Training the Wartime Royal Navy.* (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum, 2004) 227-8.

[63]McBride 26. Wrens remained the under Naval Discipline act until 1977 when women were admitted into the RN as regular personnel.

[64]Mason 53.

[65]Fletcher 26.

how to enlist.[66] By the spring of 1939, women were replacing men as Port Superintendents.[67] Port Superintendents were responsible for recruiting, training and staffing their port. These Wrens were responsible for organizing registration and enrollment of both men and women in the area, as well as making training arrangements for them.[68] By teaching Wrens many of the shore-based duties in peacetime, Laughton Mathews asserted that when the war began "her girls" would be able to seamlessly slide into their trades, freeing men for active duty without requiring an adjustment period.[69]

Upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, more trades were opened up to the WRNS, including intelligence duties. Wrens were trained at the Campden Hill Depot in London, alongside men as Linguists and Special Writers.[70] Applications to join the burgeoning service were flowing in. The recruitment goal was met and exceeded by December 1939. The war had become much more serious with the fall of France and the increased vulnerability of England, further augmenting the need for manpower in the RN. When plans for this women's auxiliary were first conceived, the intent was only to

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[66]Fletcher 27.

[67] http://www.seayourhistory.org.uk Port Superintendents were in charge of personnel for the port and were responsible for recruitment, efficiency, discipline and well being of the women serving in their area. They had to live in or near the port themselves. By 1941, WRNS Port Superintendents were responsible for both women and men at their port.

[68]Mason 54. Port Superintendents had to be 35 years of age or older and have organizational experience.

[69]Fletcher 27.

[70]Fletcher 29.

replace domestic positions the naval ratings[71] currently filled. These jobs remained the bulk of the work performed by women. However, as the war became more and more threatening to England in both the Battle of the Atlantic and the Battle of Britain, the role played by women was quickly expanded with new programs such as those for Captain's writers and general writers.[72]

By 1942, waiting lists to join the WRNS were extensive. The popularity of the Wrens caused a shift in the recruiting process and many women were selected for trades for which they possessed no civilian experience.[73] Some served on coastal minesweeping ships to operate navigation equipment and in some cases piloting the ships. They crewed harbour craft, duty boats, mail boats and operated hydrography equipment, scanning the ocean floor for mines, wrecks and natural rock formations. There were also various intelligence posts, including a coveted few at Bletchley Park, the centre for decryption and analysis of Axis communications. Wrens worked in the naval section, first as secretaries and messengers, but later as wireless telegraphers, operators, and coders.[74] The information provided by the naval section at Bletchley Park was crucial to Allied success in the battle of the Atlantic as it allowed the Allies to plot the positions of

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[71]A naval rating is a regular enlisted man.

[72]A writer is what we would commonly think of as an executive assistant, with skills beyond those of a secretary. Captain's writers had to be able to send and receive coded messages, as well as perform some minor bookkeeping duties.

[73]Fletcher 31.

[74]Patrick Beesly. *Very Special Intelligence: The Story of the Admiralty's Operational Intelligence Center, 1939-45.* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977) 51.

German submarines, send out attack forces and divert essential convoys. The work assigned to Wrens at Bletchley Park, although of crucial importance to the war effort, was very monotonous and isolating. The women who undertook these jobs had to be devoted and highly intelligent. "There were few chances of promotion, no contact with the rest of the Navy, and, due to the very necessary security restrictions, little social life when off duty."[75] The variety of positions with increased responsibility enhanced the prestige, glamour and appeal of the service for many Wrens.[76]

All promotions were based on selection by the Director WRNS, but the procedure for attaining a promotion was the same as with the RN, requiring Wrens to be interviewed by an Officer Selection Board and write examinations.[77] Although highly praised for their excellent work and grace under pressure, WRNS officers were never commissioned as an auxiliary service. The commissions were honourary.[78] They were paid between one half to two-thirds of men in equivalent positions. However, these women were happy to serve and, in their applications, many wrote that they would participate without pay if necessary, to help the war effort. The Admiralty sent Wrens to all corners of the globe to

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[75]Beesly 70.

[76]Fletcher 39-41 and Lavery 228. Another big draw of the service was the attractive uniform, especially the cap. This was the deciding factor for many young women anxious to join the service.

[77]McBride 58.

[78]McBride 44. Wrens never received official commissions, their commissions remained honourary throughout the war. Women were folded into the regular Navy in the 1970's at which point they received King's commissions. WRNS officers always held auxiliary status.

advise other countries about setting up their own women's corps and to staff overseas bases.[79] The WRNS became the model for the women's naval services of Canada, New Zealand, the United States, Australia, Norway, and Denmark.

Once the war began, Canadian women began starting women's volunteer auxiliaries. Some groups tied themselves to specific army units, while others did general war work, such as collecting scrap metal, paper and glass.[80] Some went as far as to create women's paramilitary corps, undertaking firearm training, mechanic and first-aid courses to prepare themselves for induction into the active forces. However, much of this volunteer work was done in a piecemeal fashion, overlapping in some areas and non-existent in others. Women, from September 1939 onward, began writing the government, asking for an official women's corps.[81]

Discussions in Parliament began in May 1940 at the instigation of one of the few female Members, Mrs. Dorise W. Nielson.[82] By June, the discussion centered around the creation of a "Voluntary Registration of Canadian Women", for those who wished to be considered for war-related work if and when they were needed.[83] There was much praise of the voluntary work done by women throughout 1940, especially the women's groups

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[79]Fletcher, 76.

[80]Ruth Roach Pierson. *Canadian Women and the Second World War*. Historical Booklet #37. Ed. Terry Cook. (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1983) 4.

[81]Jean Bruce. *Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War-at Home and Abroad.* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985) 37.

[82]House of Commons. *Debates*. 20 May 1940, 328.

[83]HofC. *Debates.* 12 June 1940, 707.

that worked to create the "Voluntary Register".[84] On 19 November 1940, John Diefenbaker took up the cause, commending women for their volunteer work with the Red Cross and other organizations. He went further, recommending that women have representation at the National War Services Department, to assist in better organizing the various women's groups around the country.[85] He also urged Canada to incorporate women into industry, to prevent possible future man-power shortages. Diefenbaker asked that the government offer industrial training, as well as medical and mechanical training in order to prepare women for the inevitable involvement in the war, and was the first Member of Parliament to ask that an official auxiliary corps be set up for women.

Howard Green (Conservative MP from British Columbia) was the first to publicly speak in alarmist terms about a man-power shortage that would rapidly grow more serious and to advocate mobilization plans for women in both industry and the military.[86] J.T. Thorson , the Minister of National War Services, was questioned by Gordon K. Fraser (Conservative from Peterborough) about his decision to select a man to coordinate women's voluntary services. Fraser suggested that women's already considerable and effective efforts should be recognized by the appointment of a woman to the position.[87] Thorson did not respond.

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[84]Mr. Reid. HofC. *Debates*. 28 June 1940, 1229. And Mr. Graydon. HofC. *Debates*. 4 July 1940, 1324.

[85]Diefenbaker. HofC. *Debates*. 19 November 1940, 227.

[86]Mr. Green. HofC. *Debates*. 21 November 1940, 292. and Mr. Stirling. HofC. *Debates*. 25 November 1940, 361.

[87]Mr. Fraser. HofC. *Debates*. 25 November 1940, 393.

Once Parliament resumed in 1941, the issue of some sort of national leadership for a large-scale women's volunteer organization was still in question.[88] Although the voluntary registry had been carried out by enthusiastic young women across the country, it was never used. In the discussion of the War Appropriations Bill for 1941, John Diefenbaker again chastised Parliament for making women wait, quoting British writer Peggy Scott's work "British Women in War" which told of the valuable contributions, not only to war work, but to morale, women's participation could offer. Diefenbaker demanded that women be mobilized immediately.[89] He asked that women be organized into auxiliary corps as is the case in Britain, to prevent man-power problems before they become serious. He estimated that women could free approximately 10 per cent of the men in the forces for front line service. Diefenbaker went on to point out that young women, anxious to help out, were being denied the right to leave Canada and do war work in England where they were needed.

However, Mr. Ralston countered Diefenbaker's assertions, stating that he had just visited England and that the war work women were doing there was unnecessary in Canada. He pointed to unemployment rates and the large supply of older men who could be reintroduced to industry.[90] He commented on women's inability to replace men in military service and the paucity of tasks they could handle. Ralston declared that women were only suitable as cooks and clerks, perhaps some as drivers, but the numbers needed

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[88]HofC. *Debates*. 10 March 1941, 1404.

[89]Mr. Diefenbaker. HofC. *Debates*. 19 March 1941, 1693.

[90]Mr. Ralston, HofC. *Debates*. 19 March 1941, 1697.

would be so limited as to make a program of training unwarranted, citing a figure of 1500 women among all three services. However, Ralston congratulated Canadian women for their patriotism and commended their volunteer efforts.[91]

Mackenzie King was also very reluctant to mobilize women. King felt that the armed forces had already taken in too many men and that women were not needed.[92] However, he did agree about the wisdom of appointing a woman to the National War Services board. He appointed Therese Casgrain, noting that she was articulate, wise and knowledgeable. He chastised his colleagues in his diary for not supporting the notion of women consulting on labour and unemployment insurance issues, even those specifically dealing with women and children's services.[93] He had meetings later in May with the heads of the Civil Service Commission and the Unemployment Commission, telling them that he wanted women to hold positions of high authority on those boards.[94] However, King still did not support recruitment of women into the military. It is clear that he did not doubt their ability to handle such jobs, only that he thought it was unnecessary.

Military service for Canadian women became a pressing issue in 1941 mainly because the Royal Air Force was establishing training schools in Canada, as part of the Canadian run British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, that would be partly staffed by

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[91] *Ibid.* 1698.

[92] King Diaries, 30 April 1941. http://king.collectionscanada.ca/EN/default.asp

[93] King Diaries, 15 May 1941.

[94] King Diaries, 19 May 1941.

members of the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force.[95] Many Canadian women were very anxious for those kinds of opportunities and seeing British women working in uniform on Canadian soil would have spurred strong protests. Finally, on 13 May 1941, the Cabinet decided to enlist "female auxiliary personnel", and the government announced that a Women's Voluntary Services division had been created in the Department of National War Services with the purpose of promoting community thrift and generosity for the greater good.[96] This new legislation also provided the option for the military to enlist a women's corp. From this point onward, each of the armed services developed their own programs.

The Army and Air Force quickly created women's auxiliaries that were chartered 26 June 1941 and the first women began their training on 1 July 1941.[97] The Army created the Canadian Women's Army Corps, known as the CWAC's and the Air Force created the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division), known as the W.D.'s. These organizations were structured separately from the Canadian Army and RCAF. Their administrative hierarchies were different from those of their male counterparts, namely being completely separate, much smaller and using vastly different disciplinary procedures, and all "officers" of the women's auxiliary were expected to salute any male officer. The purpose of these new organizations was made very clear from the beginning.

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[95]C.P. Stacey. *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945.* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970) 416.

[96]HofC. *Debates.* 4 November 1941, 4094.

[97]Mr. Thorson. HofC. *Debates.* 5 November 1941, 4101.

These women were to free men for front line service, nothing more or less.[98] The women's services were looking to recruit motor transport drivers, cooks, clerks, typists, stenographers, canteen helpers and store women. They preferred women with previous civilian experience and were swamped with applications.[99] However, the women chosen had to comply with regulations set down by the Department of National Defence[100], including physical fitness standards.[101] By 1 September 1941, 600 women had enlisted and more were awaiting orders once accommodations could be made for their training. Women's roles quickly expanded as they proved their abilities. However, the RCN, much the smallest of the armed forces, saw no immediate need for the creation of a women's service. Naval expansion depended to a large extent on the construction of warships, and large-scale deliveries of corvettes and coastal defence vessels ordered early in the war. This did not begin until the latter half of 1941, at which time the Allies also made much greater demands of the Canadian fleet.

As the Battle of the Atlantic grew more intense and Canada's role mushroomed in late 1941 and 1942, the navy began to feel the man-power crunch.[102] The Canadian Navy had not used women in the First War; therefore, unlike the Army, there was no precedent

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[98]Stacey 416.

[99]Gossage 32.

[100]The regulations state that a future Wren must be a British citizen between the ages of 20 and 45.

[101]HofC. *Debates.* 5 November 1941, 4101.

[102]Sarty. *Battle of the Atlantic.* 149.

for female involvement.[103] As early as May 1941, the subject of women working as nurses for the RCN was discussed in Naval Council meetings, showing that the RCN was open to the participation of women at some level.[104] In December, the Director of Naval Personnel recommended to the Naval Council that its "approval in principle be given to the recruitment of women that a full investigation might be undertaken."[105] The Director of Naval Personnel further recommended that Commander Eustace A. Brock be recalled from duty as Personnel Liaison Officer in the United Kingdom to take charge of organizing the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service. Brock had a mandate to investigate the best uses for WRCNS personnel and the naval staff also commissioned a study to compare the costs of employing members of the women's services to the engagement of civilian clerks. The matter was resolved at the naval staff meeting of 5 January 1942 meeting where the Director of Plans and Signal Divisions reported that there was a shortage of civilian clerks and an ever increasing workload at Signal Division offices and cypher offices.

The naval staff asked the Admiralty for the temporary loan of two "suitably qualified officers of the WRNS" to help organize the Canadian service. The cable read: "Please send us a Mother Wren".[106] Brock was also instructed to begin making the

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[103]During the First World War, the Canadian Army used women as nurses, with a few working in mail rooms and kitchens. Most of the women not employed as nurses were British or European, working temporarily with the army.

[104]Naval Council, 19th Meeting 12 May 1941. LAC, RG24, 4044, NS: 1078-3-4.

[105]Naval Council, 41st Meeting 8 December 1941. LAC , RG24, 4044, NS: 1078-3-4.

[106]Greer 12.

necessary arrangements for Barracks, Schools, etc as well as being tasked to find a suitable woman to act as Director of the WRCNS.[107] Brock returned to Canada in February 1942 to take up his new position, after organizing the trip and accommodations for the WRNS officers on loan. Brock was also instructed to return to Canada with WRNS uniform patterns.[108]

On 7 May 1942, the Government announced in Parliament that the RCN would be establishing a Women's Corps to alleviate the man-power crunch.[109] The establishment was for 150 officers and 2700 ratings, with a provision for 100 per cent expansion.[110] Wrens were to perform only shore duties, unlike Great Britain where some had duties afloat. It was intended that Canadian Wrens would do administrative work, such as typing, filing, decoding, deciphering, driving and messenger work.[111] They would be paid two-thirds of the wage normally given a man in the position that they would fill and receive four-fifths the pension.[112] These figures were based on a 1938 RN calculation that it would take three women to cover the positions of two men. This differential, in fact, was less than that in most civilian workplaces.[113] The WRCNS would be a part of the

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[107]Naval Council, 44th Meeting 5 January 1942. LAC , RG24, 4044, NS: 1078-3-4.

[108]Naval Council, 46th Meeting 26 January 1942. LAC , RG24, 4044, NS: 1078-3-4.

[109]HofC. *Debates*. 7 May 1942, 2218.

[110]Tucker 318.

[111]*Ibid.*

[112]Greer 25.

[113]Winters 284.

RCN, not an auxiliary like the WRNS, and its selection criteria were more stringent than the other services.[114] Although no documents clearly state the reasons behind this branch integration, the overall impression is that it was easier to control actual members of the military. Therefore, should the need arise, non-civilian women could work overtime without special pay and less administrative structure would need to be creative. It was a decision of fiscal responsibility. Also, considering the unpredictable nature of war, should an emergent situation arise in the night, these women would remain accessible because of curfews and barracks. Because the Canadian navy's service was smaller than the army and air force women's services and still received about the same number of applications, the WRCNS was able to be much more selective than the RCAF(WD) and CWAC.

The distinguishing feature of the WRCNS was its status as an integral part of the RCN, rather than as an administratively separate auxiliary as in the case of the WRNS and the other Canadian women's services.[115] WRCNS officers were the first women in the British Empire to hold a King's Commission and were therefore entitled to salutes from male NCO's[116] and ratings, not a privilege enjoyed by their British and Canadian counterparts. However, Wrens were to treat male officers of the same rank as a superior officer. Wrens were to be trained and promoted in the same ways as their male

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[114]Directorate of History and Heritage, 81/500/1440-600 Vol. I "Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service." Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence citations are given in the following order: record group, volume, file.

[115]Greer 7-30.

[116]Non-Commissioned Officer

colleagues, as was the case in the WRNS.[117] The government's policy toward Wrens was that their role was to replace men, freeing them for combat duties and therefore the WRCNS executive staff was to be kept to a minimum because they were not replacing the existing Naval executive, just overseeing the replacements.[118]

Upon arrival from the United Kingdom in June 1942, the WRNS officers loaned by the Admiralty, Chief Officer Dorothy Isherwood, Superintendent Joan Carpenter and Second Officer Elizabeth Sturdee, immediately ran into problems. Brock had been unable to complete his assignment, leaving organization, recruiting and training curricula up to the British WRNS.[119] This did not make a very good impression, giving Brock the unfortunate moniker "Useless Brock."[120] Luckily for the RCN, the British Wrens were formidable and set to work immediately and efficiently.

Isherwood hand-picked the first class for training, looking for a certain number of secretaries, cooks, regulators, personnel officers, and other trades who had relevant experience in their civilian lives to ease the transition to service life and ensure early effectiveness of the new organization.[121] She also gave a special priority to find candidates who showed promise as recruiters. Recruiting appropriate personnel to staff

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[117] DHH, 2000/5 19-309. "Women in the Wartime RCN: A (Very, very) Brief Study."

[118] *Ibid.*

[119] Tucker 316.

[120] DHH, 2000/5 18-290. "Jenny (Pike) Whitehead Interview." 'Useless' was a nickname used by the men as well!

[121] *Ibid.* 23.

the new service was of utmost importance to fulfill adequately the Navy's needs and to establish a good reputation.

Dorothy Isherwood had received a degree from Cambridge in 1924, and worked for the League of Nations, cataloguing and indexing documents. Upon returning to England, she became an assistant Librarian at her former Cambridge college of Newnham.[122] She then moved on to the library at Vassar College in the United States for four years. Upon her return to England, she took a job at the BBC, indexing all the programs broadcast. As war loomed, the BBC categorized its employees based on the essentialness of their jobs. As her position was classed as non-essential, Isherwood felt that it would be more interesting to join the WRNS rather than continue in the civil service. She was conditionally accepted in July 1939 for service in the event of war. She was called up for duty on 24 September 1939 and joined as an officer the next day. She indexed papers for the first two weeks and was then accepted as a Second Officer, running the correspondence registry at WRNS Headquarters for a few months. Isherwood was then promoted to Recruiting Officer. This gave her good experience for assisting other countries in creating women's naval services.[123] She performed this job for more than a year, until she was chosen by Vera Laughton-Mathews, D-WRNS[124], to lead the delegation to Canada.

Superintendent Joan Carpenter was chosen as she had experience running a

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[122] DHH, 2000/5 18-291A, 1. "Dorothy Isherwood Interview."

[123] *Ibid.* 3.

[124] Director, Women's Royal Naval Service

training establishment, having been Port Superintendent of Chatham since the beginning of the war. Carpenter had also been a member of the WRNS during the Great War, giving her exceptional depth of experience. She would have accepted any job given her.[125] Elizabeth Sturdee was secretary for the group. Her father was an Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Doveton Sturdee and she later married the Second Sea Lord[126]. Her naval background set her apart from other girls, making her a natural in terms of understanding naval tradition and protocol.[127]

Upon debarking the train in Ottawa, the three British officers were met by the Canadian and international press. This would become a regular occurrence in their recruiting trips across the country. Their first day was full of meetings, seeing Admiral Percy Nelles, chief of naval staff, Commander Eustace Brock, and Minister of National War Services, J.T. Thorson. Thorson's role as advisor was important because all women's war-related work, including women working in the services, was coordinated through the National War Services department. Isherwood, Carpenter and Sturdee were given Canadian Wrens Mary Dobson and Kay Wayling to assist them.[128] Dobson was a Canadian who had been living in England when the war broke out. She joined the WRNS and was sent to Canada in May 1942 once the RCN decided to create their own Service. Wayling, who would become Canadian Wren number two, held a science degree from

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[125]*Ibid.* 6.

[126]Mason 35.

[127]Isherwood Interview 6.

[128]*Ibid.* 9.

Queen's University and went on to work in naval intelligence.

The plan was for the British to mentor the development of the WRCNS for one year and then it would be turned over to Canadian women.[129] Isherwood gave Brock the rules and regulations of the WRNS and it was decided that it would be acceptable to issue the same rules for WRCNS; however, changes would have to be made as the WRCNS was not an auxiliary but a branch of the RCN. Policy changes were drafted and implemented by Carpenter to reflect the WRCNS' status as an integral branch of the RCN . The most important feature of the service that Isherwood would implement was in making the first two weeks of recruit training a trial period, in which a candidate would not be enlisted in the service. Recruits were thus free to leave if they did not care for the organization and superior officers were able to remove those recruits they felt would not be suitable.[130]

The RCN decided that for logistical reasons the first class would be small. Thorson informed Isherwood that there needed to be women from each province represented in the class. This did not pose a major problem as letters were flooding in from women across the country who were interested in joining.[131] The first task assigned to Isherwood and Carpenter was to decide how to divide up trades, based on the required number of potential officers, as well as cooks, drivers, clerks, etc. Then, it became Carpenter's job to draw up regulations for each trade specific to the Canadian situation

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[129]Tucker 318.

[130]Isherwood Interview. 10.

[131]*Ibid.* 11.

while Isherwood toured the country to interview all of the 800 women who had sent in letters of interest in the service. By the time Isherwood had finished her tour, she had interviewed over 2000 young women.[132] Her task was difficult as she could only select 70 women, and one of those positions would be taken by Wayling. She sent names of the successful candidates back to Carpenter in Ottawa, who had Naval Services Headquarters (NSHQ) issue an acceptance letter.[133]

Of the 70 women selected to attend the first training class, 68 accepted their offers for training. When the program was first discussed in the media, the RCN emphasized that it was especially looking for women with a scientific background. Many of these women would eventually be assigned to naval intelligence work, U-boat tracking, coding, and cyphering.[134] Many women in the first class were specially chosen for their leadership skills. The first class was intended to provide a cadre of officers for the emerging organization. Canadian Wren policy stated that everyone started as a rating, no women were brought in as officers to start the organization.[135] This specific requirement was put in place by the RCN to assert Canadian distinctiveness by highlighting the difference between class-conscious imperial Britain and the equal opportunity in Canada.

Uniforms were one of the major draws of the service. Many women commented

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[132]Greer 19.

[133]Isherwood Interview 12.

[134]DHH, 2000/5-18-292. "M. Aileen Mason Interview." Both Mason and Wayling had biology degrees from Queen's University at Kingston.

[135]Greer 25.

in interviews that the reason why they chose the WRCNS instead of the CWAC's or WD's was the smart uniform.[136] They were to be the same as the British uniform, except that the skirt was straight, not pleated. Uniforms were not distributed during the probationary period, so as not to waste the time of seamstresses measuring and fitting uniforms for girls who did not make the cut.[137] A bit cold, but economical, this was an approach that Canadians were not familiar with as they had not experienced the harsh rationing system in England.

The first class began on 1 August 1942 and was a six week course teaching naval protocol, history, personal hygiene and drill. The first class trained without uniforms, as they were not yet made. The RCN provided male officers to do the instruction as well as male stewards and cooks to teach the Wrens destined for similar positions. Doris Taylor, a Canadian woman who had gone to England and joined the WRNS in 1939, was now also assisting Isherwood.[138] Canadian women who were serving in British auxiliaries were given the option to return to Canada and serve in the equivalent Canadian branch, but many had built up seniority and chose to remain overseas until after the war.

A training school was set up in a former women's juvenile detention center and asylum at Galt, provided and renovated by the Province of Ontario. This "stone frigate", the naval term for a building, became the training center where all Wrens received their

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[136]Jenny (Pike) Whitehead Interview, and Greer 16.

[137]Isherwood Interview. 14.

[138]Isherwood Interview 17.

basic training.[139] The women arrived by train, having been sworn into the RCN by the station master at their respective local stations, as they had to be members of the service to use the train tickets they were issued. One of the women destined to be a cook, having previously worked in hotels in the Rockies, brought her own set of pots.[140] Cooks were also exempt from the rules that dictated that a Wren must not be over 45 years of age, as experience was valued and cooks were hard to find.[141] However, the dormitory size at Galt restricted the size of training classes. That, however, was not immediately a problem as there was a lack of accommodation for Wrens at Halifax and Esquimalt, the RCN's chronically over-crowded main bases where the wide majority of Wrens would be employed.[142] Training was halted for this reason in December 1942 and again in December 1943.[143]

Dorothy Isherwood handpicked the first class of WRCNS to build a backbone for the new service. Like casting a play, certain roles needed to be filled to ensure enough qualified candidates to create an officer corps, a secretarial pool, a recruiting department, a kitchen staff and a messenger service. Therefore, women with pre-war education and on the job experience were chosen first. Isherwood and Carpenter also had to be careful to ensure that they covered the proper political channels and that government stipulations

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[139]A stone frigate is the term for a naval base on land.

[140]*Ibid.* 19.

[141]Isherwood Interview. 38.

[142]Tucker 319.

[143]Isherwood Interview. 22.

were met. Not only did the first class have to provide all of the above mentioned services, but each province had to be represented. Luckily, there was no shortage of well-trained, well-educated young women who applied for service and Isherwood found herself having to restrict her choices as only 70 spots were available for training.

Sixty-seven women arrived at the training center established for the WRCNS at Galt, temporarily named *HMCS Bytown II*, a name that signalled it was being directly administered from Ottawa as an outstation of *HMCS Bytown*, the Naval Service Headquarters. These women represented a cross-section of Canadian society. The level of education and skill possessed by each woman was crucial to determining her final job placement which had already been chosen before she began training. Although the training schedule was strenuous, the women excelled, quickly picking up Naval protocol and jargon. Their days were spent in class learning the rules and traditions of the Navy, drilling and performing various chores, including the mopping of floors and gardening. The course was very intense. The success of these women was vital to the survival of the WRCNS. They had to prove to the Navy and the country that a woman could fill the position of a man and do it just as well, if not better.

The instructors at *HMCS Bytown II* were all male naval personnel. Many of the women in the first training class would go on to teach the very subjects they were learning in a few short months. They were hand-picked to form the officer cadre for the new organization. The WRCNS was the most selective and well-educated of the three women's branches. In many cases, the Wrens were better educated than the men they

replaced.[144]

On 19 September 1942, after completing basic training at Galt, twenty-eight women were selected to appear before the Officer Selection Board and twenty-two were promoted to probationary Leading Wrens or Petty Officer Wrens and continued on to officer training at Kingsmill House in Ottawa.[145] Officer training concentrated on the various administrative functions that would be necessary to ensure smooth functioning of the service. The emphasis was placed on creating a frictionless transition between male and female staff when Wrens assumed a position. Promotions, protocol and discipline were studied as well as methods to ensure cooperation from the ratings. The regulations for promotion were quite strict. In order to receive a promotion, a Wren must have:

> "...an obvious and sincere interest in the WRCNS, and the creating of a fine interest for the service; loyalty to the Naval and WRCNS Officers for whom they work and with whom they live; leadership and the ability to win respect of ratings and the quality of personality which we all know; the spirit of teamwork resulting in her helping her officers both practically and by example; neatness and tidiness in herself; capability of reacting in the right way to responsibility and authority, she should put a sacred trust in the furtherance of the WRCNS; the ability and knowledge of naval traditions and customs and procedure, the spirit of that traditions carries with it; conscientiousness, the realization that the Navy takes all one's time, in the Navy, you are never off duty. Time off is necessary, of course, for recreation. Time off is always given when possible, however, it is a privilege, not a right; impartiality and fairness."[146]

Officers must also maintain a close rapport with the ratings below them, as "Wrens are

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[144]DHH, 2000/5-20-338. "Frieda Dougherty Interview."

[145]Greer 25.

[146]LAC, MG30, C183. "Kay (Wayling) Peacock Interview."

rather like children..."[147] Officer candidates had to be over twenty-one years of age and have been in the WRCNS for at least three months. The first month after promotion, they possess an 'acting' rank, but are paid the salary of their promoted rank. During that first month, the promotion is probational, based on the outcome of various performance reports. If the situation is not working our, for the Wren or the WRCNS, she is offered, without disgrace, a return to her old rank, with a transfer, or an honourable discharge. The promotion of ratings followed a similar process, favouring Wrens who spent their off-duty hours organizing social functions or volunteering for charity work. Special consideration went to those who had shown an interest in helping others with personal problems.[148]

Meanwhile, Brock secured Kingsmill House on Rideau Street in Ottawa as a dormitory for the first class of officers and an office for the small staff under Isherwood.[149] Kingsmill House was run by Joan Carpenter, WRNS and later by Betty Samuels.[150] The first officer's training class began in February 1943.[151] The new service was making rapid progress, and Canadian women took full control of the organization. Evelyn Mills, a WRCNS officer, was given command of the Officers Training Center in

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[147]*Ibid.*

[148]LAC, RG 24, 1983-84/167 4020-100/101 "Advancement of Ratings."

[149]*Ibid.* 9.

[150]LAC, MG30, C183 "Kay (Wayling) Peacock."

[151]Isherwood Interview. 29.

Ottawa in March 1943.[152] In 1943, officer training moved to Hardy House in Ottawa, using Kingsmill House as a dormitory for those in training. Six of the women selected for officer training were chosen to be recruiting officers. Once they completed the course at Kingsmill House, they were sent to various parts of the country to staff recruiting centers. Their job was to interview prospective Wrens and make recommendations to the admissions committee and to liaise with the community to encourage applications. They were given a general duty writer to assist with paperwork. This network expanded once more as Wrens completed officer training.

Between training cycles, Joan Carpenter and Elizabeth Sturdee assisted with recruiting, as did Dorothy Isherwood, when time allowed. As well as a recruiting officer's endorsement, WRCNS candidates had to be of good health, strong moral character (no criminal record), at least five feet tall and within ten pounds of the government stipulated height/weight ratios, high school entrance standing, British subjects with British parents and between the ages of 18 and 45.[153] As cooks were difficult to find, they could be up to 49 years old.[154] Much emphasis was placed on proper recruiting, as the careful selection of women would reduce the waste in resources for those who found themselves unhappy in the service. This added greatly to the highly selective nature of the WRCNS.

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[152]Isherwood Interview. 30.

[153]LAC, RG24, 11878 EG 1000-906. "HMCS *Givenchy*."

[154]Barbara Dundas. *A History of Women in the Canadian Military*. (Montreal: Art Global, 2000) 62.

After the first class graduated, eight women were selected as recruiting officers and sent to the major centers across the country, with their own writers. Initially the recruiting process was a complicated two step process that had to be coordinated between Ottawa and the local office, but the situation was soon resolved with the appointment of a Wren in charge of recruiting at Commanding Officer Reserve Divisions, the office responsible for recruitment and initial training of male personnel.[155] Other Wrens moved from Galt to other Canadian Naval Bases, such as Halifax, Esquimalt and Ste. Hyacinthe to continue training in their categories. Some naval bases had training schools in place, and women were trained in a co-ed environment.[156]

Shortly after the first class completed training, Superintendent Joan Carpenter fell ill with breast cancer and was eventually invalided home to England for convalescence, after surgery.[157] Elizabeth Sturdee had returned to England in December 1942. Isherwood asked for two senior Wrens to replace them and was sent Chief Officer Betty Samuels and Second Officer Lorna Kellett, who arrived in December 1942.[158] Samuels and Kellett, on loan for four months, took over the organization, administration and curriculum of the Officer Training Program at Kingsmill House in Ottawa. Samuels was an ambitious young officer. She had previously worked in recruiting in England. Kellett

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[155]Tucker 319.

[156]Greer 53-4.

[157]Adelaide Sinclair, already chosen as future D-WRCNS, went with Carpenter to England to develop a clearer idea of the service, before returning to Ottawa to attend the Officer Training Program in February 1942.

[158]Isherwood Interview. 29 and DHH, 2000/5-18-291B. "Lorna Kellett Interview."

had attended secretarial school and worked as an administrator at Greenock before her selection. Isherwood continued to oversee the operations at Galt, and acted as *de facto* Director of the WRCNS as Brock never played any part in running the service.[159] In February 1943, Isabel Macneill, a well-educated Nova Scotian, was selected to head the training school at Galt, to relieve Isherwood of some of her heavy duties. Kellett was also transferred to become Isherwood's assistant, signing on for another six months in Canada.[160] Samuels returned to the United Kingdom in March 1943.

The selective recruiting process of the WRCNS led the service to acquire some of Canada's most talented and competent women. Isabel Macneill came from a prominent Halifax naval family, although her father was a university professor. After attending a private high school in Halifax, Macneill studied theater and design at the University of London.[161] Upon completion of her degree, she was hired as a scenic designer for Rudolph Haybrook, a prestigious London design firm. She then worked as a librarian at Dalhousie University in Halifax and as a councillor at Sea Pines Camp in Brewster, Massachusetts. Following this, she took a teaching position at Fairmont College in Washington, D.C. and was appointed assistant director of the Mountain Playhouse in Jannerstown, Pennsylvania.[162] Macneill returned to Halifax upon the outbreak of war and

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[159]Isherwood Interview. 29.

[160]Kellett Interview. 18.

[161]*Tiddley Times, June-July 1944.* LAC, MG 28, I471 Vol. 1, "Vancouver WRCNS Association." p 24-25.

[162]*Ibid.*

served with the Inter-Allied Hospitality and Food Fund which dispensed cheer to visiting men of all services. She then proceeded to co-found the Ajax Club for Sailors.

After completing her WRCNS training, Macneill was sent to Galt to help open the new training center *HMCS Bytown II.* Initially, she was a probationary training officer but was promoted to First Officer within eight months, a meteoric rise.[163] Then she became Isherwood's executive assistant and took over as Commanding Officer on 1 June 1943, in charge of a ship's complement of 600. Macneill's extensive theater training made her a popular dramatic reader and inspiring public speaker. She is the only officer to have met and known every woman serving with the WRCNS. She was promoted to Captain when she took over as commanding officer at *Conestoga.* Macneill was the only woman to be piped over when coming aboard or leaving a ship.[164]

On 1 June 1943, the training school at Galt (formerly known as *HMCS Bytown II*) was officially commissioned *HMCS Conestoga* as an independent command. This meant that Macneill was the first woman in Canada to command a ship.[165] After celebrating their one year anniversary, Isherwood and Adelaide Sinclair went on a "goodbye tour"; then Isherwood took up a commission in the Mediterranean and Kellett

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[163]LAC, MG 30, E373. "Isabel J. Macneill Biographical File."

[164]*Ibid.*

[165]LAC, RG 24, ND 1858-1901/2-2 Vol. I. "HMCS *Conestoga.*" and Greer 39. Stone frigates were considered ships with independent commands, regardless of the sea-faring nature of the facility. Sinclair was a London School of Economics graduate, had taught at the University of Toronto, was Dean of Women there and then worked on the War Time Price Board as an economist.

returned to Greenock in September 1943.[166] Brock was returned to HMCS *Niobe* and Sinclair officially became the D-WRCNS. Sinclair moved into Kingsmill House in Ottawa and began her administrative duties. She was the only woman to enter the WCRNS as an officer, without taking part in basic training. She was a well-educated Torontonian who, following her husband's death, had served on many charitable boards and had worked at the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. With an education in Economics and experience running large women's organizations, Sinclair was ideally suited to take the reins of the WRCNS from Isherwood.[167]

Adelaide Helen Grant (MacDonald) Sinclair was the only Canadian Wren to receive direct entry into officer training. She was born in Toronto and graduated from Havergal college. Before entering university, her parents insisted that she take a domestic science course so that she would be able to cook and clean properly. After turning eighteen, Sinclair took a job as a cook for a girls berry picking camp on the Niagara Peninsula during the summer of 1918. This was her first leadership experience and she felt it changed the course of her life. That fall, she enrolled at the University of Toronto, majoring in Political Science. She graduated in 1920 with first class honours. She then secured a fellowship to continue on to Masters' level graduate work in economic history and acted as Dean of Women at University College. She also served as vice-president of her class, President of the Women's Undergraduate Association and various other

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[166]Isherwood Interview. 69.

[167]LAC, MG 30, E391. "Adelaide H.G. Sinclair Biographical File." Although not directly stated, I have inferred that Isherwood did have input on the selection of her successor and that she preferred Sinclair over Macneill.

executive positions, honing her leadership skills.

After completing her MA, Sinclair moved to England and continued graduate work at the London School of Economics and the University of Berlin. In 1927, Sinclair returned to Canada to take up a teaching position in the Economics Faculty at the University of Toronto. She married Donald Sinclair, a Toronto barrister, in 1930 and became a housewife. However, she continued lecturing part-time and spoke at various YWCA events. Donald died suddenly in 1938 and Sinclair then devoted her time to executive work for various Toronto welfare agencies. She was also elected President of Kappa Alpha Theta, a sorority of over 27, 000 women in Canada and the United States. Sinclair learned about organizing small units within the umbrella of the large organization, perfect practice for heading up the Wrens.[168]

In 1942, Sinclair moved on to work as chairwoman of the Central Volunteer Bureau in Toronto, directing women's voluntary efforts in various types of war work. She then went on to serve as chairwoman of the Women's Salvage Committee. Following this, she moved to Ottawa to join the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. Her job was to keep the Board informed of changes and economic controls set up by other countries, especially the United States.[169] However, in late 1942, she was chosen to replace Dorothy Isherwood as Director of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service.

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[168]*Tiddley Times, April-May 1944*. LAC, MG28, I471 Vol 2. "Vancouver WRCNS Association."

[169]*Ibid.*

She began officer training with the first class in March of 1943.[170] Upon completion, she travelled to England for four months to observe the organization, administration and various responsibilities of the WRNS. She returned to Canada, worked closely with Isherwood for a few months, then took over the job. She focused much of her attention on improving training for both ratings and officers.

The organization and administration of the service was another key component to its smooth functioning. Its administration was set up to mirror the navy's in both its NCO and Officer structure. In July 1943, the rank system was also changed to mirror the RCN's, once the loaned British WRNS officers returned to England. The WRCNS began to pay women higher rates once its WRNS supervisors returned to England, acknowledging the competence and hard work of the Wrens. On 11 August 1943, the duties and responsibilities of D/WRCNS were formally signed over to Adelaide Sinclair. Her duties included:

> (1) D/WRCNS is responsible to Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) for organising the WRCNS to perform effectively the functions assigned to it and for the morale and well-being of the Service and for advising CNP on all matters affecting this responsibility.
> (2) D/WRCNS is available in an advisory capacity on all matters likely to affect the morale and well-being of the WRCNS, (e.g. pay, conditions of service, accommodation, uniform, and the general aspects of victualling and messing).
> (3) D/WRCNS is responsible to CNP for the selection and appointment of Officers of the Force, the actual machinery of such selection and appointment being handled in conjunction with DOOP. She is also available for consultation as regards preliminary training and ratings.
> (4) She is responsible for the performance of their duties by the staffs specifically under her control and should be consulted as to the numbers, grading, etc., of staffs for WRCNS offices, quarters, etc. Apart from this she

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[170]LAC, MG 30, E391. "Adelaide H.G. Sinclair Biographical File."

> is not directly concerned in the work of WRCNS personnel unless a welfare matter is involved (e.g. physical working conditions).
> (5) D/WRCNS decides on the suitability for entry of all exceptions to the age limit laid down.
> (6) D/WRCNS advises CNP on all questions of discharge, and gives approval for discharge on grounds of pregnancy.[171]

WRCNS personnel were not subject to the Naval Discipline Act, rather the D/WRCNS would assign a punishment in the form of cancellation of leave, restriction to barracks, extra work and in worst case scenarios, dishonourable discharge. Detention or corporal punishment was never considered as appropriate discipline for women in the service.

There were 22 trades open to WRCNS personnel in 1942 and regardless of pay, Wrens proved their abilities, increasing the number of available trades to 39 by 1945.[172] This meant that the variety of assignments considerably broadened throughout the war, as Wrens proved their worth and more men were needed for active duty. WRCNS personnel stationed in Great Britain were often seconded to duties that the WRCNS did not offer, such as harbour craft drivers, mechanics and minesweepers. British women had more than 50 trades available because the man-power situation demanded that there be female mechanics, minesweepers, air craft recognition specialists, etc.[173] Almost all WRCNS personnel applied to work overseas, but only a few were chosen. Most of the WRCNS personnel that did work overseas were actually in Newfoundland. The WRCNS chose women that were intelligent, competent and eager to accept any assignment that came

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[171]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1505, 4360-100/59. " Duties of D/WRCNS."

[172]LAC, RG24, 11878 EG 1000-906. "HMCS *Givenchy.*" and Tucker 320.

[173]Tucker 325.

their way. In April 1943, the first group of Canadian Wrens were sent overseas to the United Kingdom, where they relieved men stationed at HMCS *Niobe*, the main barracks for RCN personnel serving in Britain.[174]

Beginning in November 1943, the WRCNS assisted the WRNS by training their Wrens selected to serve in the United States, either in Washington, New York or Seattle. The WRNS sent cadet Third Officers to Galt for the three week training program. The WRCNS also began training American recruits who wished to serve with the WRNS, rather than in the USN's Women's Auxiliary (WAVES).[175] Administration became a bit more complex once WRCNS personnel began serving overseas, first in Newfoundland and the United States and then in the British Isles. Canadians who had been serving with the WRNS were given the option to serve with the WRCNS upon its formation. A few made that choice. It was much more common for Canadian WRNS personnel to make the transfer, retaining rank and seniority, once WRCNS personnel began serving in England.[176]

To further complicate matters of transfer, WRNS personnel who had married a Canadian serviceman were folded into the WRCNS organization when they came to Canada if they chose to remain in the service. Generally, these women would apply for a compassionate discharge, then return to Canada (or England in the case of British

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[174]LAC, RG 24, ND 1858-1901/2-2 Vol. I. "HMCS *Conestoga*." 200 ratings and officers were requested, however, of that group, several were sent to Greenock.

[175]DHH, Adm V14074.

[176]LAC, RG 24, 1983-84/167, 1819, 4975-7. "Transfer between WRNS and WRCNS."

personnel serving with the WRCNS) and join that country's corresponding service. Canadian women living in the UK were also actively recruited once WRCNS personnel began serving at Greenock, London and Londonderry.[177]

Some immediate changes were made once Canadians were fully in control of the WRCNS. Firstly, the system of rank was changed in order to be brought back in line with the RCN. This differed from the Royal Navy where WRNS officers were not given official rank, being an auxiliary group . Since Wrens were trained and promoted in the same manner as the men, it only made sense that their ranks should coincide.[178] A WRCNS officer now received the same benefits as those given to RCN officers. "The women serving in the navy held the same responsibilities, were subject to the same chain of command, and followed the same grievance procedures as the men. Further, they took the same oath of allegiance, worked towards the same objectives, and were expected to endure the same inconveniences as men."[179] The only exception was salary, originally set based on Admiralty rates,[180] which was also increased to bring them more in line with their male colleagues. They were now earning 4/5 the salary of a man in their position.[181]

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[177]*Ibid.*

[178]Barbara Winters. "The Wrens of the Second World War: Their Place in the History of Canadian Servicewomen." Eds. Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crickard. *A Nation's Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press , 1996) 284.

[179]Winters 284.

[180]These rates were based on the Admiralty's assumption that it would require three women to replace two men.

[181]Women in the Wartime RCN: A (Very, very) Brief Study. DHH: 2000/5-19-309.

This resulted from a recognition of hard work and dedication in the women's services. Wrens were also accorded the benefits of veterans, such as educational and land allowances. However, the RCN was reluctant to pay staff salaries to Wren officers, except in individual cases where an argument was strongly made.[182] Staff salaries, or the salaries of higher ranking officers, were significantly more than the regular pay scale. Because the WRCNS organization was seen as temporary and because it was run and staffed by women, the RCN did not want to pay WRCNS officers an increased salary for positions of increased responsibility. They clung to the belief that it would take more than one woman to perform the work of one man, ignoring the glowing praise and outstanding productivity of the Wrens. The RCN was also under budget constraints and was attempting to keep costs down, cutting corners wherever possible.

Canadian Wrens were 'Never at Sea'.[183] However, the onshore replacement of male staff was very successful as WRCNS officers paid greater attention to detail and maintained better discipline than their male counterparts. It was, nevertheless, debated as to the degree with which women could handle demanding positions. To investigate, Lieutenant Foster and Lieutenant Low were sent to England in early 1942 by Naval Services Headquarters to observe the WRNS at Bletchley Park and in other intelligence operations. Low returned very much impressed with their efficiency and enthusiasm for the work. Foster criticized the WRNS teletype operators, stating that they were

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[182]Winters 285.

[183]'Never at Sea' was the motto of the WRNS, although, many of their member actually performed duties aboard ships.

inaccurate in the operation of their equipment and could not pay sustained attention to the radio traffic. Given the RCN's desire to expand, however, he felt women could be useful in some minor capacity.[184] Although the WRCNS members interviewed by Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence did not mention facing these kinds of attitudes in any naval officer they worked with, undercurrents of this attitude did prevail in some circles.

Wrens were given more complex and essential positions in signaling and naval intelligence. There was a certain amount of doubt among male officers that women could handle the furious activity, citing that "WRCNS officers would not have had the emotional stability or physical stamina necessary to perform their duties..."[185] But because women couldn't serve in combat, they took up many other trades, including assignments in information-handling. Due to their compatibility and superior education, women were often placed in these positions. Eric S. Brand, Director of Naval Intelligence and Trade, found that Wren ratings had a better grasp of their work as a whole, as well as a keenness and intelligence that served them well.[186] This was just one example of the commendations earned by the Wrens.

WRCNS members were also commended by the British government, which

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[184]LAC, RG24, NS 8740-102/1-11928. Catherine Allan. "Canadian Naval Signals Intelligence in the Second World War."

[185]DHH, 81/520/1440-18 Vol. I. Commander Eric S. Brand. "History and Activities of the Operational Intelligence Center, NSHQ 1939-1945." These were doubts initially expressed by Lieutentant-Commander J.M. de Marbois. After working with Wrens, he quickly changed his opinion.

[186]Sarty 148.

awarded 16 British Empire Medals as well as several Officer/Member of the Order of the British Empire commendations.[187] The hard work and efforts of the WRCNS were recognized by the United Kingdom, and later, by naval historians. However, the most important recognition of their abilities was through the RCN. Wrens were commended through promotions and positions of increased responsibility.

The principle goal of the WRCNS was to replace men in shore positions, allowing them to be free for combat duty. However, through patriotism, enthusiasm and intelligence, the WRCNS set their own objectives, gaining autonomy as an independent command. Their struggles as a group mirrored the individual struggles faced by Wrens at their posts. Each new duty became a proving ground, not just for Wrens, but for the perception of women all across Canada.[188] The WRCNS service record was exemplary. This, combined with the need for manpower, brought about a massive expansion in trades made available to them. Many Wrens were given the opportunity to travel the country and the world. Their abilities and intelligence helped shatter old myths that women were feeble and incompetent. They set a new tone of professionalization for Canadian women, with many of their supporters asking for "equal pay for equal work", a slogan that would be used 1970's women's liberation movement.[189] They were given positions of immense responsibility and trust, partially resultant from their excellent reputation. This included

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[187]Greer 151-156.

[188]Winters 286.

[189]Mr. Hazen, HofC. *Debates*. 2 February 1943, 101 and DHH, 75/554. Adelaide Sinclair. "Suggestions for improvement of WRCNS in case of another war."

highly classified work in naval intelligence. By the end of the war, two High Frequency Direction Finding stations were staffed and run entirely by WRCNS personnel. Success in the Atlantic can be partially credited to the good intelligence about U-boat positions provided in part by Wren-run stations.[190]

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[190]Sarty 150.

Chapter 3: Mixed Signals

During the First World War, Canadian naval headquarters in Ottawa found itself shut out of naval intelligence in the North Atlantic. Whenever a threat appeared in the northwestern Atlantic, the British took over. The Admiralty's intelligence organization worked directly with the senior British commanders of the Royal Navy forces stationed at Halifax and Esquimalt. If local help was required, it was obtained directly from the senior Canadian commanders at Halifax and Esquimalt, bypassing Ottawa and therefore Canadian government influence over - even timely knowledge of - important developments in the country's own waters and adjacent ocean areas.

After the war, the RCN worked to make Ottawa the central hub of the Empire's naval intelligence for the northwest Atlantic Ocean, and the northeast Pacific Ocean. Under arrangements worked out in 1920-1, Ottawa became the main North American regional intelligence authority for the RN. NSHQ was now responsible for gathering all intelligence from both Canada and the US and passing it from Ottawa to the Admiralty. The Admiralty in turn, passed information through Ottawa for dissemination and action at Halifax and Esquimalt.

In order to facilitate the transition between old and new information pathways, the

RN loaned a specialist officer, to serve as Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) in Ottawa. Canada lacked any fully qualified intelligence officers at the time. Funding cutbacks during the 1920s and then during the Great Depression hindered the RCN's bid for fuller national autonomy by preventing the creation of a specialized intelligence branch that could develop expertise. The last British appointment as DNI was Commander (later Captain) Eric S. Brand, RN, who arrived shortly before the outbreak of war in 1939, and in fact remained in Ottawa where he and his wife lived for the rest of his career and then retirement.[191]

At the outbreak of war in September 1939, two types of intelligence had to be dealt with quickly for immediate operations. First, shipping intelligence, the tracking of all merchant ship voyages, was crucial, both for the protection of Allied shipping and to prevent the shipment of important resources to the enemy. This close control of shipping was essential for both intelligence and security. "Intelligence and security are like two sides of a coin; although different, they are interdependent. Intelligence is basically the collection, evaluation and distribution of information about the enemy, while security involves your efforts both to prevent the enemy from obtaining real information and also to help him obtain false information."[192] It was necessary to have information on precisely which British and Allied ships were arriving and departing from particular

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[191]Eric S. Brand, RN(R). Ed. Mack Lynch. *Salty Dips: "... and All Our Joints Were Limber"*. Vol. 3. (Ottawa: Ottawa Branch Naval Officers' Associations of Canada, 1985) 79.

[192]C. Herbert Little. "Early Days in Naval Intelligence." Ed. Mack Lynch. *Salty Dips: "... and All Our Joints Were Limber"*. Vol. 2. (Ottawa: Ottawa Branch Naval Officers' Associations of Canada, 1985) 117.

ports, and precisely when, together with the contents of their cargoes. Ottawa and the Admiralty gathered this information and rapidly processed it to ensure that any merchant ship at risk would receive special routing instructions to steer it clear of suspected enemy forces. This information was essential for the formation of convoys and the assignments of safe routes to them. The shipping intelligence system became known as 'Trade' and included both the gathering of shipping intelligence and the transmission of instructions to shipping, including instructions to join particular convoys and the assignment of routes for those convoys.

In mid 1942, the Director of Naval Intelligence division was reorganized to separate the shipping control function in a new Director of Trade division. Brand headed the new Trade division and Lieutenant-Commander C.H. Little, RCNVR, took over the intelligence division. Because of Brand's skill and the ability of the Canadian officers he mentored (including Little), Canada played a key role in the North American 'Trade' and convoy organizations right from the beginning through the end of the war. Between 1939 and 1941, when the United States was neutral, Ottawa administered the British and Canadian Consular Shipping advisors, who, under civilian cover, carried out trade intelligence duties through British consulates in the US, working with the British Security Coordination, whose head offices were in New York, run by Canadian Sir William Stephenson. After the US entered the war on 8 December 1941, Canada continued to carry out Trade functions for much of the trans-north Atlantic trade from New York and further north, as well as providing expert advice and assistance to the USN.

The second type of intelligence that needed to be quickly dealt with for operational

use was signals intelligence. Since the First World War, this field had rapidly become more complex and sophisticated with developments in equipment and technique such as radio finger printing and high frequency direction finding. "As with the rest of the RCN, the new intelligence branch strove to overcome interwar dependence on the Royal Navy. Its realization of full partnership with Allied operational intelligence centers parallels the RCN's struggle to earn a credible operational role in the Battle of the Atlantic."[193] Initially, from 1939 through late 1941, Canada was mainly a gatherer of intercepted messages and direction finding bearings that were passed to the British North American naval intelligence headquarters in Bermuda for information and the Admiralty in London for analysis and processing.[194]

Intercepts included verbatim copies of transmissions with full time and date as well as frequency information. Directional bearings were gathered from various stations on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific and triangulated to determine the approximate positions of enemy vessels. The RCN was able to carry out these functions by tasking the Department of Transport as well as other Canadian government radio stations.[195] This was done by the 'Foreign Intelligence Section' (FIS) of the Naval Intelligence division headed by Commander J.M. de Marbois, RCNR. As the war progressed through 1940-1, de Marbois and his staff began to analyze this information and sent their findings to Canadian and Allied warships in the northwest Atlantic. Under de Marbois' direction, the Atlantic

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[193]Allan. "A Minute Bletchley Park." 158.

[194]Allan 160.

[195]Douglas *et. al.* 490.

coast commanders, first at Halifax, then at St. John's, also began to analyze their intercepts, albeit in a less organized fashion. De Marbois organized FIS into three sections, field officers (e.g. liaison officers who worked with subordinate commands and other government departments to coordinate information sharing), research officers (improving equipment and methods) and watchkeepers (plotting and traffic analysis). He also sought skilled linguists, like Lieutenant-Commander C. H. Little, and envisioned the expansion of the FIS system from four to twelve wireless intercept or 'Y' stations. 'Y' operations against Japan began in July 1941, further expanding the FIS.[196]

After the Americans entered the war in December 1941, signals intelligence conferences were held in Washington and Ottawa in the spring of 1942, where British experts helped both Canada and the United States improve their organizations. Although a US admiral stationed at Argentia, Newfoundland, had taken over the operational control of all Allied convoy operations west of Iceland in September, 1941, Canada had continued its development of the signals intelligence program, mainly because of the Americans' limited experience and capacity in that area and had continued convoy routing until the USN had created their own system. The signals intelligence conferences vindicated de Marbois' efforts. The British encouraged and assisted with the expansion of the FIS for better analysis capabilities and quicker dispatches of operational intelligence signals to Allied ships in the northwest Atlantic, north of New York. The biggest improvement was the installation of a U-boat tracking room at the FIS offices at NSHQ, where all information from Canadian, British and US sources concerning probable U-boat locations

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[196]Allan 164.

was plotted on a central map. The US created a similar system for the waters south of New York.[197]

In the fall of 1942, the United States belatedly, and with British and Canadian help, strengthened the anti-submarine defences, in particular by finally implementing convoys for all merchant ship traffic along their east coast, where the U-boats had had their greatest success since January of that year,. This caused Admiral Karl Dönitz to refocus the weight of the U-boat offensive back to 'pack attack' tactics against convoys on the mid-North Atlantic routes. Most of the German successes came in the western half of the ocean, sometimes just off the Newfoundland coast, where defences were weaker and less well-coordinated than in the British zone. Part of the difficulty was severely divided command. In September 1941, the US had taken control of convoy and anti-submarine operations in the western Atlantic, but had never had enough escorts and aircraft, especially after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and therefore depended upon the RCN and the RCAF.[198] Neither Canada nor the US, however, had been forced fully to integrate their commands, in the way the British had been when they were struggling for national survival in 1940-1. The RCAF's maritime squadrons were therefore not under formal naval control, while the situation was even worse between the US Navy and the maritime squadrons of the US Army Air Force. Operations, as a result, had to be coordinated among US Navy and US Army Air Force headquarters in Newfoundland, New York and Washington, and Canadian naval and air force headquarters at St. John's, Halifax and Ottawa. From this perspective,

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[197]Douglas *et. al.* 491.

[198]Allan 167.

the signals intelligence arrangements made in the spring of 1942 whereby the Foreign Intelligence Section as NSHQ in Ottawa promulgated information to ships and aircraft operation in the western Atlantic north of New York, and the Navy Department in Washington was responsible for the transmission of information to ships and aircraft south of New York, looked unsound.

The British felt that the best solution was to extend their control straight across the Atlantic, reducing Canada to subordinate status yet again, and coordinate particular measures in the western Atlantic directly with the USN. This would close the RCN out of signals intelligence analysis and the dispatch of daily operational intelligence signals to Allied ships at sea leaving Canada in the same position as in the First World War, without the current information and authority needed to exercise control over operations, despite the fact the RCN was providing 45 per cent or more of the naval escorts and a large proportion of maritime patrol aircraft on the RCAF operated North Atlantic routes.[199] Under the British proposals, the US would entirely concentrate on the protection of convoys far to the south, directly from the US to the Mediterranean to support the big Allied offensives that began with the *Torch* landings in early November 1942.

The Canadian naval staff, with strong support from the government, staunchly resisted the idea that the country should relinquish command authority, to either the British or Americans, over the very large national resources Canada had committed to the Atlantic war. Finally, at a big Allied convoy conference in Washington, called in March 1943 when the U-boat packs were at the pinnacle of their success, the USN came around to the

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[199]Douglas *et. al.* 585.

Canadian point of view that the best thing for all concerned was to let Canada continue to carry out important command functions in the northwest Atlantic, but work directly with the British again as they had prior to September 1941.[200] The Americans would withdraw convoy duties from the responsibilities of the USN admiral at Argentia.

The Canadian naval and air force staffs, now determined to demonstrate their capacity to run an efficient unified command, made RCN headquarters at Halifax, under Rear-Admiral Murray, RCN, the supreme Canadian operational command in the Northwest Atlantic, with the RCN command at St. John's directly subordinate to Murray. Murray would also directly command the RCAF organizations in Newfoundland and the maritime provinces.[201] Part of this reform strengthened and clarified Ottawa's role by eliminating 'free lance' intelligence analysis and broadcasts of the results of this analysis to ships and aircraft at sea by the commands at Halifax and St. John's. Ottawa became the sole signals intelligence center, on the model of the Admiralty's centralization of signals intelligence, a model that the Americans also adopted. The key development was the expansion of the FIS into the 'Operation Intelligence Center (OIC)', a full division of the naval staff. The new center became the sole authority for gathering and analyzing signals intelligence and dispatching information on U-boat operations to Admiral Murray's command in Halifax. This complete and digested information allowed Murray's headquarters promptly to dispatch orders and relevant information to all his subordinate commands. The communications staffs at Halifax and St. John's were greatly expanded

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[200]*Ibid.* 586.

[201]Douglas *et. al.* 586.

so that they could quickly decode and distribute the messages from Ottawa, and rapidly amass reports from ships and aircraft and pass these to the Operational Intelligence Centre. The new organization included massive improvements to communication lines between Ottawa, Halifax and St. John's, creating secure telephone and telegraph links in eastern Canada. The poor quality of those lines had led to some of the aforementioned 'free lancing' by Halifax and St. John's in the analysis and distribution of intelligence because of the difficulties in obtaining timely information from Ottawa.

At the convoy conference in Washington, the British and Americans agreed that the new Canadian Operational Intelligence Center should be privy to Ultra intelligence and join in the rapid sharing and analysis of this extremely highly classified information with the Admiralty in London and the Navy Department in Washington.[202] This was a large vote of confidence in Canada, inspired by the performance of the RCN intelligence and signals officers at the conference, and it was the principal reason for the rapid improvements and expansion of communications between Ottawa and the east coast, and between Ottawa, Washington and London. The expanded intelligence and communications facilities caused a manpower crunch for highly specialized and capable personnel in the fall of 1942 through early 1943, when the Battle of the Atlantic had reached its peak, and the Navy was under further pressure to expand and improve the fleet and its supporting dockyards. Fortunately, the first class of the newly formed Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service was ready to begin relieving men and easing the manpower

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[202] *Ibid.* 627-28.

deficit.[203] Wrens, many with backgrounds in teaching, research and business administration that made them uniquely qualified, quickly moved into intelligence and communications positions.

In important respects, the accelerated expansion and improvements of the communications and intelligence system undertaken in 1943 and after built on efforts already underway as a result of advice from the expert British personnel who visited Canada and the US in the spring of 1942. Much work had been underway to develop the RCN's own network of radio intercept and direction finding stations, as the part-time tasking of Department of Transportation and other government radio stations had outlived its usefulness. Particularly important were the large new stations at Gordon Head, BC (1942), Gloucester, ON (1942) and Coverdale, NB (1943).[204]

Improved signals intelligence and communications facilities were crucial to Canada achieving its own 'Canadian Northwest Atlantic' command, the only Allied theatre of war to be commanded by a Canadian.[205] This occurred 30 April 1943 when Admiral Murray at Halifax replaced the US Admiral at Argentia in directing convoy and anti-submarine operations from the North American coast as far south as New York, and out into the central Atlantic. WRCNS personnel formed a large proportion of the

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[203]*Ibid.* 586-9. Tensions were high among Canadian staff as they fought over Wrens, 'stealing' each other's trained and tested staff. This problem was of particular concern to Jock de Marbois who accused Sam Worth of taking his trained staff, blaming him for the drop in intercepts until the newer Wrens gain experience and accuracy. Worth and de Marbois were not on speaking terms for quite some time over the issue.

[204]Allan 167.

[205]*Ibid.* 171.

intelligence and communications staffs in Murray's headquarters, at St. John's, in Ottawa, and the various radio stations and the east coast sub-commands that enabled Canada to play this unheralded command role in the Atlantic war.

Few of the military and political advances in the defence of the northwest Atlantic would have been possible if the RCN had not been using sophisticated technologies to find and identify enemy vessels and it was frequently WRCNS personnel who operated these technologies. There were progressive minds in the RCN from the beginning, including Captain Brand, Commander de Marbois and Captain G.A. (Sam) Worth, director of Signals Division at NSHQ, who pushed the Navy to give Wrens more responsibility and higher security clearances. These men encouraged the employment of women in intelligence and communications roles even before the Navy had considered creating a women's branch. Most Wrens who worked in naval intelligence were wireless telegraphists at 'Y' and direction finding stations. 'Y' stations monitored enemy frequencies and copied the naval traffic for analysis; 'Y' stations were often co-located with H/F D/F stations that took the bearings on enemy transmission to determine the approximate position of the submarine or surface vessels that were signalling. Each additional direction finding station increases the accuracy with which analysts can determine the location of enemy vessels and their possible courses. This is why de Marbois pushed to expand the Canadian naval network to solidify the RCN's position in the Allied naval intelligence organization.[206]

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[206]LAC, RG24, 3807, 1008-75-44 Vol. I. "Operational Y Organization in Canada and Newfoundland in 1939."

Each Wren serving in a 'Y' station was responsible for listening at a specific frequency. Submarines had to surface to transmit a message. Before a submarine would transmit, there would be a squealing sound.[207] This would alert the Wren that a signal was coming and she would ring an alarm, sending everyone into action. Some were tasked with using High Frequency Direction Finding equipment to get a bearing on the U-boat, while other Wrens copied down the message. The Leading Wren or Wren Officer-in-charge would also alert Ottawa that a transmission was imminent. Once the signal was received, a coder Wren would encrypt the contents of the transmission, usually a series of five-letter groups in the German Enigma machine-penetrated code and send it to Ottawa. The bearing was immediately sent to NSHQ, followed later by the contents of the transmission. Wrens who worked in W/T stations were never privy to the information contained in submarine transmissions. They did not decode or translate the signals. This occurred at Bletchley Park in England, and in Washington, which provided the clear texts only to the Operation Intelligence Centre in Ottawa for analysis - in light of all other sources of information, such as bearings and submarine sightings by ships and aircraft operation in the Canadian arena.[208] However, after spending any length of time in a 'Y' station, the WRCNS quickly learned that short burst, five or six character transmissions were weather reports.[209]

After the signal reached the OIC, the information was plotted on a map that

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[207]DHH, 2000/5 18-289. "Irene(Carter) MacLean Biographical File."

[208]DHH, 2000/5 18-292. "Mary Aileen Mason Interview."

[209]DHH, 2000/5 18-290. "Dorothy Robertson Interview."

showed all suspected locations of U-boats. The message, Mary Aileen Mason later recalled, was written down and tied to a string, which was then slipped through a hole in the floor to the Signals section where it was logged and finally sent to England.[210] Mason was a member of the first WRCNS training class and had attended Queens University with Kay Wayling, another member of the first training class. Mason worked as a bacteriologist doing cancer research in Kingston before the war.[211] She was selected as Leading Wren and began officer training in September 1942. After completing her training, Mason was assigned to work for de Marbois and he, recognizing her unusually strong credentials, gave her the important tasks of maintaining the plotting map in the U-boat tracking room.[212]

Information from the enemy signals intercepted and plotted by Canadian stations was interpreted by other technologies, including ones that identified specific transmitters and radio operators so that the location of the submarines and ships carrying these sets of personnel could be determined. For example, R.E.B. (coded British terminology for Radio Finger Printing) was the study of a transmitter's wave form from photographs of the visual presentation of each new transmission intercepted, each new photograph was compared to the files of previously photographed waves to determine whether the enemy craft in question was one already known to naval intelligence. There were difficulties with this technology. Some pictures were distorted by static or interference, making them

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[210]DHH, 2000/5 18-292. "M. Aileen Mason Interview."

[211]*Ibid.*

[212]*Ibid.*

unclassifiable. More importantly, skilled microscopists were needed to act as classifiers and were difficult to obtain. The Admiralty found that those with a background in microgeology or similar training were the most consistently successful, just one example of how women personnel with a scientific background were able directly to apply their abilities to urgent intelligence duties.[213]

TINA was a form of radio finger printing.[214] It was designed to identify the personal characteristics, the unique 'touch' on the morse code key, of individual enemy radio operators. It was generally used in combination with R.E.B. by marking a papter tape during an R.E.B. exposure. TINA equipment was less complex and easier to use from a technical standpoint the the R.E.B. 'scope' and camera, requiring only ticker tape. Precision, nevertheless, was required in setting the correct speed of the tape feed as well as ensuring that the ink marker had a uniform swing for the machine to work with accuracy.[215]

Range Estimation (R/E) was an emerging technology that helped fix the position of a W/T transmitter by relating the wave form as photographed from a cathode ray tube to ionosphere heights (P'f) as obtained from the Ionosphere transmitter (modified form of

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[213]LAC, RG24, 3807, 1008-75-44 Vol. 1. "Operational Y Organization in Canada and Newfoundland in 1939."

[214]DHH, 2000/5 9-142. "Building a Canadian Naval Operational Intelligence Center, 1939-45."

[215]LAC, RG24, 3807, 1008-75-44 Vol. 1. "Operational Y Organization in Canada and Newfoundland in 1939."

direction finding equipment).[216] Much work was also put into P'f, as the weather conditions in the ionosphere altered the speed with which a signal could travel. If ionospheric conditions were not taken into account, the accuracy of 'Y' and H/F D/F would suffer immeasurably as the cloud ceiling modified the size of radio waves and had to be accounted for when determining bearings and intercepts. P'f reports were circulated daily, often more frequently, to assist analysts.

Many of the W/T and H/F D/F stations that employed these technologies were staffed, in some cases entirely, by Wrens. In late 1942, Wrens began work at W/T stations as telegraph operators and coders, having taken courses with male ratings at the Signals school at Ste. Hyacinthe. The women selected for these duties were initially women with previous experience working as telegraph operators for the various private telegraph companies in Canada. The others tended to be better educated, having at least completed high school.[217]

Before the first class of Wrens finished their training at *Ste. Hyacinthe* in late 1942, the requests from various bases far exceeded the number of Wrens receiving training.[218] Wrens were accustomed to regular transfers from base to base, approximately every six months, due to promotion, seniority, etc. However, this was not the case for women who worked in Signals. The communications branch emphasized the importance of continuity

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[216]*Ibid.*

[217]*Ibid.*

[218]LAC, RG24, 3807 1008-75-40 Vol. 1. "D/F and 'Y' Staff, WRCNS." 14 May 1942, Notes from Meeting with Director of Women's Services and Jock de Marbois.

and the increase in efficiency it produced. It was important for both signalwomen and coders to maintain their positions as their job functions were much broader than many other trades and it took considerably longer to master the skills.[219]

Upon completion of their signals training, some Wrens stayed on at *Ste. Hyacinthe* to teach subjects they had just completed, while others were sent out to the various W/T stations cropping up around the country. Most went to *Gloucester*, just outside of Ottawa and some to OIC at NSHQ. A few Wrens were sent to Vancouver Island to serve at *Gordon Head.* The Wrens sent west had extra training to complete. West coast W/T stations worked closely with the Americans, listening to Japanese transmissions. The Wrens had to learn Kana, a code replacing Japanese characters with English letters and words, in Morse code. Overseas opportunities also added a great deal of variety to possible positions available to Wrens. Canada was intending to send a contingent of WRCNS personnel to Australia, after VE day, to work in 'Y' stations as Kana operators. Aileen Mason was to lead the delegation, but once the Americans dropped the A-bomb on Japan, the war ended and the mission was cancelled.[220]

By late 1944, *Gordon Head* was entirely staffed and run by Wrens, with the exception of one ordinary seaman for maintenance duties. Lieutenant Bruce, WRCNS, commanded the W/T station, with 86 ratings in her charge until Dorothy Robertson took

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[219]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1506, 4360-925/600. "Communication Branch, WRCNS." 9 December 1944. *Employment and Drafting of Wren Communication Ratings.* From: Communications Branch, To: Commanding Officers at all W/T stations, Commanding Officer Ste. Hyacinthe and Commanding Officer at *Conestoga.*

[220]DHH, 2000/5 18-292. "M. Aileen Mason Interview."

over in 1944.[221] The location of the W/T station was essential to its abilities to receive messages. This was very dependent upon geography and magnetic interference. *Gordon Head* was an excellent location for clear signals, as was *Coverdale* in Riverview, NB.

Coverdale's location just outside of Moncton, NB promised the best signals reception of all W/T stations in Canada. Construction began in May 1943, with the expectation that it would be operational in three to four months. Through a lack of initiative and poor supervision by the Resident Engineer and various contractors, the operations and quarters buildings were not completed sufficiently to open the station until 2 February 1944. Lieutenant Evelyn C. Cross, WRCNS, arrived 2 December 1943 as Officer-in-Charge of the station.[222] Its mandate was to acquire D/F bearings on German submarines and assist with search and rescue for aircraft in distress.[223]

It took several more months for the D/F shacks to open, the first in May 1944. Wrens began arriving 4 February 1944 to staff the station, straining the abilities of *Ste. Hyacinthe* to supply enough trained WRCNS personnel.[224] Growing pains were experienced by the station when ten W/T experienced Wrens were transferred to *Ste. Hyacinthe* for further training and efficiency dropped dramatically. Lt. Cross noted a

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[221]LAC, RG24, 11770, S 1000-189-167. "Gordon Head Compliment." 26 February 1945.

[222]LAC, RG24, 11053, 30-1-10, Parts 26-34. "Monthly Summary, Atlantic Command." Part 31, April 1944. *History of the Naval W/T 'Y' Station at Coverdale, NB to date.* Written by Lieutenant Evelyn Cross, WRCNS

[223]DHH, 81/520/8000-140-1. "*HMCS Coverdale.*"

[224]Part of the difficulties with supplying trained personnel were due to the lack of accommodations for female staff, both at W/T stations and at Ste. Hyacinthe. This remained a problem for the duration of the war.

difference between male and female ratings at W/T stations. She wrote: "Men take their work as a matter of course, not worrying if they fail to get a shot, but the Wrens feel they are not measuring up to standards when shots are missed and they get much more upset over their failures, which are not usually their fault, but due to short signals, weak signal strength or QRN."[225] By 27 April 1944, *Coverdale* had a complement of 104 ratings and 7 officers.

Technical problems continued to plague the station throughout the summer, resulting in some suspicions of sabotage.[226] However, these accusations were never substantiated. The constant struggle with technology reduced *Coverdale's* efficiency and was hard on morale.

The RCN tried to combat this problem by providing recreational activities and training opportunities. Several sports leagues formed and speakers were brought in on a variety of topics from fashion and hair styles to National Research Council training on new technologies. From June 1944 onward, Wrens from NSHQ in Ottawa began visiting and discussing rehabilitation to civilian life.[227] In July 1944, an influx of new personnel improved the mood. Forty new Wrens arrived at the station, and six left for more training. The complement then included: 1 Lieutenant, WRCNS; 2 Lieutenants (SB) RCNVR; 1

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[225]LAC, RG24, 11053, 30-1-10, Parts 26-34. "Reports of Proceedings, HMCS *Stadacona*." Part 31, April 1944. *Coverdale* had to report to *Stadacona* and was included as a sort-of satellite administration. *Stadacona* submitted Reports of Proceedings for many smaller outposts.

[226]*Ibid.* Part 32, May 1944.

[227]*Ibid.* Parts 33 and 34, June and July 1944.

Lieutenant (SB) WRCNS, 1 Sub-Lieutenant, WRCNS, 1 Nursing sister, RCN; 125 ratings, WRCNS; and 20 ratings, RCN. This meant that Lieutenant Cross was in command of twenty-two men.[228]

A steady stream of visitors continued to *Coverdale* throughout the summer of 1944, including a British engineer (Mr. W. Ross) and Captain Eric S. Brand, O.B.E, RCN, Director of Trade Division from Ottawa. Another interesting event occurred 20 August 1944 when a civilian man dashed out of a car on the main highway and ran into the field in front of the station and took several pictures. The man was noticed by a rating and the RCMP were notified and launched an investigation. The rating noticed the licence plate and make of the car, as well as a description of the man in question. The man was from the Fredericton area. All other information regarding the incident was classified.[229] A large second anniversary party was held 29 August 1944 and the crew from HMCS *Captor II*, the naval base at Saint John, NB, were invited to attend.

By September 1944, the third D/F hut opened, and the fourth was expected to be open by October. The D/F huts were more than a year late in opening, thus reducing the possible operational efficiency of the station. Lieutenant Cross, WRCNS, was replaced by Lieutenant Margaret Stinson in September 1944. The new commanding officer made a fatal mistake by including in her monthly report for September 1944 that it was impossible to efficiently carry out the duties of her job with ". . . but one Executive Officer (Sports

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[228]*Ibid.* Part 34, July 1944.

[229]LAC, RG24, 11054, 30-1-10, Parts 35-40. "Reports of Proceedings, HMCS *Stadacona.*" Part 35, August 1944. The incident still remains classified in RCMP records.

and Recreation) on the staff."[230] The staff at headquarters did agree that another executive officer was needed, but also noted that Stinson had no Signals training.[231] She was replaced by Irene (Carter) MacLean, who was then given an additional executive officer to handle some of the administrative tasks.[232]

By October 1944, the station was working to full capacity and the maintenance problems seem to have abated.[233] Captain de Marbois, RCN, visited and gave a three day lecture series on W/T functions, with special sessions for telegraph operators. Much as this intensive programme by such a knowledgeable and distinguished senior officer contributed to the effectiveness and sense of purpose of the staff, they understandably took greater cheer in the opening of a YMCA leave centre in Moncton for WRCNS personnel.[234]

The station found its stride during the fall of 1944 at the very time it was most needed. The great success of Allied anti-submarine measures during the last half of 1943 and first half of 1944 had depended on the necessity of U-boats running on the surface most of the time, making them vulnerable to ship- and aircraft-mounted microwave radar.

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[230]*Ibid.* Part 36, September 1944.

[231]Had Stinson not complained about her situation, she may have been able to stay on a commander, even without signals training.

[232]LAC, RG24, 1411, 4100-189/166. "Coverdale Complement." 18 September 1944, Memo from GA Worth, A/Captain, RCN, DSD to Sinclair, D/WRCNS.

[233]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1468, 4250-189/166. "Discipline at Coverdale." 28 November 1944.

[234]LAC, RG24, 11054, 30-1-10, Part 37. October 1944.

Only on the surface could the U-boats run their powerful air-breathing diesel engines that allowed them to sustain the high speeds necessary to search out and pursue shipping. At the time of the Normandy invasion in June 1944, however, U-boats began to put to sea with snorkel masts that permitted them to run their diesel engines while cruising about five metres below the surface; the snorkel mast heads were too small to be detected in most sea conditions by Allied radar. The snorkel-equipped submarines were still too slow to pursue most shipping, but because the submarines could remain below the surface for weeks at a time, they could once again penetrate the coastal waters of Allied countries and lurk off ports awaiting targets of opportunity. These new tactics also greatly reduced the effectiveness of Ultra intelligence as less information was passed through signals. German efforts to coordinate large numbers of U-boats to create a patrol line ahead of a particular convoy generated many signals about the massing of submarines in a small area. By contrast, the direction of single U-boats into coastal patrol areas required few signals, and the wide dispersion of the single boats meant that they all but disappeared into the broad approaches to ports, and the adjacent gulfs, straits and estuaries. U-boats equipped with snorkels began to operate in Canadian waters starting in the late summer and fall of 1944, and from that time until the end of the war there were often as many as five German submarines in patrol areas in the Gulf of Maine, along the Nova Scotia coast and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The paucity of Ultra intelligence made prompt, accurate direction bearings on the few signals broadcast by the submarines more essential than ever for counter-measures. These took the form of constant patrols over the suspected U-boat operating area by naval groups and aircraft that served to deter the enemy even if it was

now more difficult than ever actually to locate an attack him. These measures were generally successful in keeping losses of ships in Canadian waters to a minimum, and this success owed much to the accuracy and speed of the new, specialized naval radio stations and their WRCNS staffs.[235]

Early 1945 brought little excitement, a lot of snow and an outbreak of pig cholera at a neighbouring farm.[236] Morale remained high, but the workload was beginning to wane. Spring melted the snow and ushered in several visitors, many of whom spoke of post-war veteran's benefits and readjustment into civilian life.[237] The destruction of the minesweeper HMCS *Esquimalt*, with heavy loss of life, by acoustic torpedoes from *U-190* close off the mouth of Halifax harbour on 16 April 1945 provided a sharp reminder that even as Allied victory approached in Europe, the enemy posed a lethal threat in Canadian home waters. As the end of the war approached and the Battle of the Atlantic wound down, the complement at *Coverdale* was gradually reduced. In December 1944, there were 3 WRCNS Officers, 1 RCN nursing sister and 148 WRCNS ratings. By January 1945, there were 4 officers, 1 nursing sister and 132 ratings, and by April 1945, there was one officer and 60 ratings.[238] The focus of naval intelligence was shifting to the Pacific

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[235]Roger Sarty. "The Limits of Ultra: The Schnorkel U-boat Offensive Against North America, November 1944-January 1945." *Intelligence and National Security*, 12 (April 1997), 44-68. and Sarty. *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*. 144-5.

[236]LAC, RG24, 11054, 30-1-10, Part 40. "Reports of Proceedings, HMCS *Stadacona.*" January 1945.

[237]LAC, RG24, 11055, 30-1-10, Parts 41-44. "Reports of Proceedings, HMCS *Stadacona.*" February-May 1945.

[238]LAC, RG24, 1411, 4100-189/166. "Coverdale Complement."

theatre, and Wrens with W/T training were being sent west.

Once the war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945, the RCN began to express concern about finding enough trained and qualified male ratings to continue staffing the station. Frieda Dougherty took command of the station in September 1945, managing the small Wren staff. Male personnel continued to replace WRCNS staff until February 1946, when all WRCNS members were demobilized and the command of *Coverdale* was handed back to the men.[239] Frieda Dougherty also worked in Naval Intelligence after joining the Wrens. Dougherty was the principal of a small school in Baie Comeau and held a degree from McGill in French and German. After enlisting at age twenty-four in December 1942, Dougherty began her training in June 1943 and went directly from *Conestoga* to Ottawa for officer training at Hardy House. She applied to work in intelligence but was selected for signals and spent three months at *Ste. Hyacinthe* learning coding, ciphering and Morse code. Dougherty was one of four Wren officers sent back to Ottawa to serve as duty officer at NSHQ in Brand's trade division. Her job was to track smaller vessels and send them simple radio signals to make sure that they were alright. She supervised the Wrens working at the NSHQ Signals Distributing office, overseeing teletype links to Halifax and Washington and telegraphs to London. She was also responsible for personally encoding and decoding 'officer only' and 'top secret' signals. In February 1945, Dougherty was transferred to Quebec City where she was in charge of the coding officer under the Port Signals officer. In April 1945, she was sent back to *Ste. Hyacinthe* to learn Kana, but with the war ending, the course lost focus and was eventually cancelled. In August 1945,

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[239]DHH, Frieda (Bindman) Dougherty Biographical File.

Dougherty was sent to *Coverdale* in New Brunswick to act as commanding officer. She served there from August 1945 through the end of January 1946 when the Wrens closed the station and handed its control over to male naval officers.[240]

Irene Carter[241], from Winnipeg, displayed a unique tenacity when approaching the navy about using female telegraphists. She began her solicitations of the Navy on 1 November 1941, before the Wrens were even created, by sending a letter to Lieutenant J. R. Foster, RCNVR, of the Foreign Intelligent Section.[242] Carter, who worked as a telegraph operator for the Canadian National Telegraph, had read a newspaper article championing the work of British Wrens and the need for Wrens trained in Morse code to do intelligence work. She offered Foster the services of female telegraphists in her company to the Navy with the purpose of relieving men for active service, estimating that twenty-fifty women, aged twenty-five to thirty-five, would be willing to serve.[243] These women possessed, on average, a Grade 11 education, could type forty-five words per minute and were already accustomed to shift work. On 7 November 1941, Lieutenant Foster recommended Irene Carter's proposal, noting that these women would, at most,

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[240]DHH, Frieda (Bindman) Dougherty Biographical File.

[241]For the purposes of this discussion, Irene (Carter) MacLean will be referred to as Irene Carter as she did not marry until after the war and all correspondence and records identify her under her maiden name.

[242]LAC RG24 3807 1008-75-40 Vol 1. "D/F and 'Y' Staff, WRCNS." 1 November 1941. Letter from Irene Carter to Lieutenant J. R. Foster, RCNVR.

[243]DHH 2000/5 18-289. "Irene Carter McLean Interview."

require only two months of additional training.[244] Foster's superiors agreed that this was an excellent opportunity and charged Foster with contacting Carter to solicit names and addresses of interested women.

By 14 May 1942, de Marbois was pushing arrangements to bring the women proposed by Irene Carter into naval service for work at the new radio station at Gloucester.[245] Foster was to begin background checks on the list of names given to him by Carter to facilitate ease of entry for the telegraphists, and Carter was to give the women applications to join the RCNVR, an innovative step that showed how anxious de Marbois was to have these qualified women in a position to handle highly classified material.[246] However, Carter, working in Winnipeg, was having difficulty contacting women outside of the city and many of those in British Columbia were not willing to give up their much higher pay for the naval standard. Many girls were also too young to join. By this time, the WRCNS was being formed, which resolved de Marbois's difficulties in finding a means of bringing the telegraphists into the service.

Irene Carter was interviewed by Isherwood at the Fort Gary Hotel in Winnipeg and selected for the first class of Wrens, confident that she could perform her job without

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[244]LAC, RG24, 3807, NSS 1008-75-40 Vol. I. Memo from Lieutenant Foster to Director of Naval Intelligence, 7 November 1941.

[245]LAC RG24 3807 NSS 1008-75-40 Vol. I. "D/F and 'Y' Staff, WRCNS." Excerpts from FIS meeting with the Director of Women's Services, 14 May 1942.

[246]LAC RG24 3807 NSS 1008-75-40 Vol. I. "D/F and 'Y' Staff, WRCNS." Letter from Commander J. M. de Marbois to Irene Carter. 3 June 1942.

training.[247] After completing her basic Wren training in August 1942, Carter was sent to Ste. Hyacinthe to receive wireless training with twenty other Wrens. She then went to *Gloucester* and was in charge of more than twenty women as the Petty Officer in charge of the operations room. After working for several months at *Gloucester*, Carter was sent to open the communications section at the newly constructed *Coverdale* where she commanded 120 women.

Her job was to listen for broadcasts from German submarines. The submarines had to surface to transmit and when beginning a transmission, their transmitters made a distinguishable squeal. The Wrens used High Frequency Direction Finding to try to get a direction on the location of the submarine. The messages were usually short burst transmissions, only five or six letters. Carter would notify Ottawa that an important message was coming by ringing a bell and notifying a teletype operator. As soon as the message was received, Carter would then transmit it to Ottawa. By quickly getting a direction and bearing for the message to Ottawa, the intelligence officers could compare the information to that sent from other stations about the same transmission and try to determine the location of the submarine, taking action when needed.

Carter remained at *Coverdale* for the remainder of the war with Germany and was then sent to Esquimalt to learn Kana. She was preparing to go overseas when the war in the Pacific ended. Carter was awarded the British Empire Medal in June 1945 for "making an outstanding contribution to the training and supervision of telegraphists in the WRCNS at a Naval W/T Station staffed principally by WRCNS personnel. By her

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[247]DHH, 2000/5 18-289. "Irene Carter McLean Interview."

qualitites of leadership and loyalty, she has secured the confidence and respect of those working with her."[248]

Carter's story illustrated the determination shown by many Canadian women to make a larger contribution to the war effort. Carter and her co-workers were so anxious to make a sacrifice for their country that they took severe pay cuts. At Canadian National Telegraph, Carter and her contemporaries were earning $75/week and when they joined the Wrens, their starting salary was $75/month. Despite all of her commendations and experience, Carter never earned more than $90/month working for the RCN. However, she contends that she and many others would have worked for free in order to bolster the war effort.[249]

Although the daily work at W/T stations could be very monotonous, interspersed with periods of frantic activity, the WRCNS personnel posted to these stations demonstrated a great deal of dedication, efficiency and precision. Their role was essential in many ways beyond relieving men for active service, bringing their enthusiasm and drive to W/T stations as well as OIC's and Command centers. These women are representative of the Wrens who worked in communications and intelligence.[250]

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[248]*Ibid.*

[249]*Ibid.*

[250]The women selected to work in signals or intelligence were much better educated than their mess attendant counterparts. Documentation shows that all who completed basic training were eligible for officer training, if they showed an aptitude, but educational level played a large role. If a woman was well-educated in the early 1930s, it signified that her family was part of either the middle or upper class. It should also be noted that those interviewed or those who left diaries, were better educated but also had more interesting jobs. Therefore, the interviews are not representative of Wrens as a whole.

Elsa Porter, of Ottawa, enlisted in the WRCNS in February 1943 at age twenty-one.[251] Her desire to join was prompted by her brother's naval career, he having enlisted in the RCN in 1928. Porter had completed Grade Thirteen at Lisgar Collegiate and worked in the civil service. She began her naval career at *Cornwallis*, the large new training establishment in the Bay of Fundy, working as a clerk. She then continued her training, studying morse code and electronics at *Ste. Hyacinthe*. After completing her training, she moved to *Coverdale* and worked in the U-boat tracking room in Ottawa until the end of the war.[252] Once demobilized, Porter continued a career in electronics until her retirement in the 1970s.

Dorothy Robertson, a teacher with a degree from the University of Toronto, enlisted at twenty-four and began her training in January 1943. She was sent to *Ste. Hyacinthe* for wireless telegraphy training and then worked at *Gloucester*. She was re-trained in Kana[253] in Washington state with the WAVES and sent to Esquimalt in 1944. Her job was to transcribe coded messages including many short burst transmissions and weather reports. She was fortunate to spend a lot of time in Seattle working with the United States Navy. Her work proved to be very challenging as the Japanese regularly changed their code and the format of their messages. In early 1945, she took command of *Gordon Head* W/T station and remained at her post until November 1945. Robertson wished to stay on with the WRCNS after the war, but was demobilized in 1946 when the

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[251]DHH, 2000/5 18-291. "Elsa Porter Interview."

[252]DHH, 2000/5 18-291. "Elsa Porter Interview."

[253]Kana is the name of Japanese morse code.

service was disbanded.[254]

Jenny (née Pike) Whitehead was from Winnipeg. She enlisted at the age of twenty and began her basic training at Galt in July 1943 almost a year after being selected for service.[255] She had a grade eleven education and had studied photography. She had worked as a darkroom assistant for Eaton's Department Store in Winnipeg. Because of her photography training and skills, she continued to work in photography for the RCN and was eventually sent overseas to photograph Canadian Naval activities in London.[256]

Evelyn Mills was a part of the first class of Wrens. Mills had an honours degree in English and History from the University of Toronto and taught school. Mills was the vice-principal in an Ottawa school and celebrated amateur golfer before enlisting in the WRCNS. Within five months of joining the Wrens, Mills was put in charge of officer training at Kingsmill house, taking over for Joan Carpenter. During 1945, she toured WRCNS bases in England and returned to Canada in September to act as Sinclair's executive officer where she served until her discharge in 1946.[257]

Katherine Wayling (Kay) grew up in a military household. Her father was an officer in the Canadian Army and taught at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. Kay graduated from Queens University with a degree in Biology. Wayling was

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[254]DHH, 2000/5 18-290. "Jenny (Pike) Whitehead Interview."

[255]DHH. Biographical File. Pike, P.O. Jenny. WRCNS.

[256]DHH 2000/5 18-290. "Jenny (Pike) Whitehead Interview."

[257]LAC, MG 30, E391. "Adelaide H. G. Sinclair Biographical File."

in the first class of Wrens and then the first officer training class.[258] She began her service before she had received any training, working for Isherwood and Carpenter in the recruiting office. Wayling was posted to Washington, DC and spent the rest of the war out of the country in an administrative position in the Naval Liaison office.

Without the additional manpower provided by the WRCNS, the RCN would not have been able to expand the Naval Intelligence network and therefore, would have lost its bid for autonomy. Naval intelligence played a more crucial role in the Battle of the Atlantic with each passing month. After mid-1943, the Atlantic Ocean was increasingly controlled by the Allies. American and British forces were beginning to divert more resources to the Pacific war and Canada was further called upon to maintain essential shipping lines to Europe with its small fleet. Naval intelligence became much more integral in planning routes and reacting to threats, occasionally providing preemptive strikes. Without the rapid translation of signals and direction finding bearings, continued superiority in the North Atlantic would have been difficult to maintain, causing further loss of supplies and lives. The accuracy and dependability of the WRCNS personnel working in naval intelligence positions played an integral and essential role in winning the Battle of the Atlantic, and therefore, the Second World War, as well as changing the perception of women in the workplace and altering the very institutions within which they worked.

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[258]LAC, MG 30, C183. "Kay (Wayling) Peacock."

Chapter 4: A Wave of Change

Despite the overwhelming successes of the WRCNS and the other two Canadian women's military services, the image of the servicewoman was not universally positive. The manpower needs of wartime Canada pushed gender norms, placing women in jobs that did not fit the domestic sphere of appropriate women's work. Not only were women working outside the home in much greater numbers, but they were working in the industrial sector. This caused a great deal of societal concern centered around the loss of femininity and therefore the unbridled rise of promiscuity. The concept of women in the armed services caused even more concern as young women would be out of their parent's homes, without chaperones, surrounded by young men, fired by the passion and excitement of the times. The morality of the nation was at stake, according to many conservative voices and worried parents.

The idea of women in the armed services, performing men's work surrounded by men was not a palatable image to the greater Canadian populous. At the outbreak of the war. Canada's population stood at approximately 11 million. Women accounted for 17 per cent of the full-time workforce, numbering approximately 600 000. Fully one third of

employed women worked as domestic servants.[259] The other common vocations were clerks, schoolteachers, secretaries and nurses. By 1944, the number of women working full-time doubled to 1.2 million. This did not include the 800 000 women working part-time or on farms. Most of Canada's 3 million adult women, including those with paying jobs, volunteered for war work. Out of all those working women, servicewomen only accounted for 50 000.[260] And although it was stressed that women replace men for active duty, they did not ascend to the higher echelons of military decision-making.[261]

The whispering campaign gained strength in late 1942 and reached a peak in the first half of 1943, as the CWAC and RCAF (WD)s became fully established and their members more prevalent in communities near the many bases where the served across the country. Recruiting numbers began dropping, especially for the CWAC's and rumours were swirling about CWAC's being 'loose' or 'easy'. This resulted in a dramatic drop in recruitment at a time when more and more men were needed in the European Theatre. The rumour had various forms: most servicewomen were girls from 'Red Light Districts', over 18 per cent had become pregnant (unwed) while in the service and that all CWAC's had syphilis. Joining the service was equivalent to enrolling in a life of promiscuity because

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[259]Pierson. *Still Women After All.* 9. This book will be cited repeatedly over the next several pages as it is the only scholarly book to cover many of these issues. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 172-93 deals with many of these issues in stimulating and balanced way, but not in the detail provided by Pierson.

[260]*Ibid.*

[261]*Ibid.* 15.

its unladylike jobs were a licence for loose morals.[262]

The purveyors of these rumours understood that the services required masculine behaviour, such as marching, saluting, etc., and because promiscuity was considered an acceptable masculine behaviour, women in the service were automatically seen as immoral. This is another version of the ages old sexual double standard. Men are expected to be promiscuous and hailed as studs when they are, but women are supposed to remain chaste, or be labeled as 'whores' or 'sluts'. As the government investigated the source of the rumours, they were forced to acknowledge that servicemen were just as critical of change as was the general public. They were not accustomed to women in uniform, nor did they expect to work alongside women when they enlisted. The NSS found that soldiers had been the originators of all of the rumours.[263]

Men were threatened by women encroaching upon their traditional territory. They were jealous when women outperformed them in their duties and wanted to make sure that their women at home stayed at home and did not alter the status quo. The Adjutant-General of the Army had to resort to punishing any serviceman making derogatory

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[262] *Ibid.* 171. The military and Canadian government became aware of the whispering campaign as recruiting numbers for the women's branches began to drop dramatically. A series of interviews and public opinion polls were conducted to determine the reason for sluggish recruitment and then to determine the origins the rumours, which were ultimately traced back to Canadian servicemen. It seemed that they resented women taking their jobs and feared that it would change women if they worked in non-traditional occupations. They were concerned that women would lose their femininity and after the war, would not return to the status quo.

[263] *Ibid.* 174.

comments about service women.[264] Civilian women were also jealous of servicewomen and the propaganda 'glamour shots' released by the military. They did not want their men surrounded by beautiful, young women. They spread these rumours in the hopes of deterring women from joining the services and to help convince men that they were of bad character.[265] The WRCNS was generally exempt from these rumours as they were more selective and thought to employ a 'better sort of girl.'[266] These were Isherwood's views on the subject:

> I suppose that the accusations of immorality will always be made against Service women and feel that Mr. Dunton's remarks as to why these attacks are made are very apt. I must confess however that I have heard none of these rumours myself, nor have any members of the WRCNS mentioned such rumours to me, however, it would I suppose be odd if I had heard them as I have moved in nothing but Service circles since coming to Canada. In Great Britain, rumour was very rife about the immorality of the ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service] but it was generally conceded that the WRNS were exceedingly well behaved; perhaps it was because of this that the WRNS was thought to be snobbish??[267]

From training onward, the WRCNS provided sanitary supplies for each woman and recorded when she picked up her monthly allotment.[268] If she did not come for her supplies, the Commanding Officer was notified and a medical inspection was scheduled.

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[264]*Ibid.* 176.

[265]*Ibid.* 175.

[266]*Ibid.* 173.

[267]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1551, 4430-906. "Medical Services, WRCNS." 27 March 1943. Letter from Dorothy Isherwood to Willa Walker. A. Davidson Dunton was the General Manager of the Wartime Information Board.

[268]Sanitary supplies refer to the monthly dispensation of sanitary napkins, soap, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.

This mistakenly happened when girls had been on leave and had brought sanitary supplies from home.[269] The WRCNS did take the issue seriously as they did not want their reputation tarnished and so provided information and deterrents to its members.

The WRCNS escaped some of this stereotyping as it was a much smaller group that began a full year after the other two women's branches. The Wrens also organized more that they were the most selective service of the three and strongly encouraged their members to be immaculate in dress and comportment.[270] Even so, Wrens were still tarred with the same brush as the other women's services.

The National Selective Service (NSS) hired a public relations firm to do in depth opinion surveys and create an advertising campaign to improve the public image of women serving in the military.[271] The results of the survey showed widespread disapproval of women joining the service. Approximately 39 per cent disapproved of their wives, daughters, girlfriends or sisters joining one of the women's branches (43 per cent approved and 18 per cent was undecided). In French Canada, even greater numbers disapproved.[272] The most common reason given for disapproval was that a woman in military service would lose her femininity.[273] This negative image was fueled by rumours of widespread venereal disease and pregnancies out-of -wedlock.

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[269]Greer 74.

[270]DHH, 81/520/1440-600. Vol. I. "WRCNS."

[271]Pierson. *Still Women After All.* 133-4.

[272]*Ibid.* 136.

[273]*Ibid.* 139.

In order to combat that negative stereotype, the government began a massive publicity campaign of a curiously ambiguous nature. Instead of using 'Rosie the Riveter' type imagery, they began using glamour shots of attractive young women posing at their jobs (jobs that fit into the feminine sphere of domesticity, like secretarial work, kitchen duty or some type of cleaning). They also created a photo story of a young CWAC undertaking various common civilian tasks. The images were layered with stereotypes and mixed messages. A typical example is the young CWAC shoe shopping for the newest spring fashions. She is surrounded by tens of boxes of shoes and an exasperated salesmen, showing that despite her uniform, she retains her feminine inability to make quick decisions and a fickle, flighty nature. These photos were intended to reassure the public that girls would not lose their femininity if they joined the service, that not even the Army can change female nature.[274]

In conjunction with the publicity campaign, the YWCA and the three service branches began offering hairstyling workshops. Local beauticians gave classes on proper makeup application. Fashion experts, along with Eaton's, The Bay and Sears, sponsored fashion shows exemplifying the newest fashions in clothing, hats and accessories.[275] These events were repeatedly photographed for military publicity purposes and covered by the press. The WRCNS and Air Force WD's had hairdressers on each base and the CWAC's were given an allowance for hair care. The military also increased the allotment given to each woman to supply herself with underclothes. The CWAC's went

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[274] *Ibid.* 157.

[275] *Ibid.* 155.

so far as to encourage women to buy fancy robes and nightgowns and gave latrines and common rooms feminine updates with colourful paint, wallpaper, furniture and bric-a-brac. This was their way of easing the difficulties of women who were trying to adjust to a male system which was so against their nature. The CWAC's relaxed uniform regulations, allowing women to wear jewelry, makeup and nail varnish while on duty.[276]

The CWAC's also redesigned their uniform, using one of the 'best designers in the world', to make it more feminine. They also began encouraging girls to send pinup photos in to their monthly newsletter (some of these pictures were found by Canadian troops in German bunkers)[277]. The military was also anxious to enforce a heterosexual, but chaste, environment to ease the concerns of parents. Dates, inter-service dances and groups of servicemen and women picnicking were favorite publicity shots. Press releases and recruiting pamphlets emphasized comradery, not lesbianism..[278] Early on, they lifted bans on marriage. They publicized every marriage, especially those where a servicewoman wed a serviceman.[279] This repeatedly connected women with domestic duties, maintaining the status quo. The Army went as far as to assert that women were happy doing boring jobs that make men unhappy. In fact, the WRCNS's *Tiddly Times* newsletter declared that many of the jobs they were filling were always women's work

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[276] *Ibid.* 154.

[277] *Ibid.* 147.

[278] *Ibid.* 158. If convicted of lesbianism, women were to be given a dishonourable discharge.

[279] *Ibid. 160.* See any issue of *Tiddley Times*, the WRCNS newsletter. Each contains pages of marriage and engagement announcements.

and 'should' have been done by women all along.[280] This furthered the belief that women were not as intelligent or capable as men. The NSS profiled high ranking women in their press releases and newsletters, consciously stressing how "pretty" and "gracious" these commanding women were. They were exceedingly careful to extol the feminine virtues of women who ranked above their husbands, assuring the public that behind closed doors, he was still in charge (no saluting in the bedroom).[281]

The publicity campaign was effective as it reinforced social mores and made the service seem like an exciting, but well-supervised, adventure. The reality of the situation for service women was that they worked hard at their jobs, and in many instances, they outperformed the men they had replaced. Servicewomen were not more apt to have loose morals or act promiscuously than any other group of women. The rumours were a reaction to the war and its destabilizing effect on gender relations.[282] The rumours purporting that nice girls do not join the service were not true in any way. The service was not destroying families as women with dependent children were not allowed to enlist. In order to participate in any of the services, young women had to leave home and live outside of their parent's realm of control. These concerns were evident in WRCNS policy. In order to apply for service overseas, servicewomen had to be at least twenty-one years of age, whereas men need only be eighteen.[283] Even these small measures did not

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[280] *Ibid.* 164.

[281] *Ibid.* 163.

[282] *Ibid.* 168.

[283] *Ibid.* 170.

reassure concerned parents and boyfriends who firmly believed that respectable femininity was equivalent to chastity. The prejudice remained that any role or symbol that could be construed as not traditionally feminine, such as the trouser-wearing Wren signalwomen, would create loose women.

The women's branches were also very conscious of the rumours and the public relations problems. They lectured regularly on proper conduct in public and enforced curfews and uniform regulations. They sent the clear message that the public wanted to see servicewomen as sluttish and therefore, they had to be extra careful in their conduct off-base. The WRCNS had etiquette classes in their basic training, having learned from the ordeals experienced by the CWAC's and WD's.[284] The CWAC administration felt that part of the problem, and the seeming focus of the rumours on CWAC personnel, was due to the massive influx of recruits, not properly screened for proper moral character.[285] The problem was laid at the feet of women with a poor education and low intelligence. This furthered the sexual double standard, making it not only a gender issue, but a class issue. The causes of these problems were chalked up to insufficient facilities coupled with drinking in unsupervised male company.[286] The CWAC's sought to be more selective in their recruiting process.[287]

Rather than blame those who spread the rumours, women in the services were

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[284]DHH, 92/74-6. 'Helen Parson's Training Notebook.'

[285]Dundas 84.

[286]*Ibid.* 84-5.

[287]Pierson. *Still Women After All.* 181.

given partial blame for coming from disadvantaged homes, regardless of their real moral characters. The Army offered an alternate theory for the rumours. They acknowledged, without any formal study, the CWAC's and other service women must be promiscuous and thus, the real root of the rumour problem. Although the Army wanted the rumours stopped as they needed more recruits and punished those they caught furthering it, they thought that perhaps military life was so adverse to weaker women that they snapped and lost their morals. Their spirit was broken, thus compromising their respectability. The Army took some of the blame by saying that they had not made enough considerations for the delicate female constitution.[288] This revelation prompted the redecoration scheme that was so prominent in recruiting pamphlets.

Doilies and floral wallpaper cannot cover pregnancy or venereal disease. Although the public thought that pregnancies out of wedlock and syphilis ran rampant, the statistics paint another picture all together. Rates of venereal disease and pregnancy in the CWAC's were lower than that of the general public. Their venereal disease occurrences were much lower than the Canadian Army's. CWAC and WD rates were even lower when serving overseas, between 1 and 2.8 per cent.[289] The WRCNS was able to escape much of this problem because of its one year delay and its introduction of 'safe sex' lectures from the beginning. Of the illegitimate pregnancies occurring within the CWAC, 86 per cent named the father as a serviceman. A fairly high percentage of the pregnant CWACs joined while pregnant, unknowingly. CWAC administration also

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[288] *Ibid.* 180.

[289] *Ibid.* 172.

increased the thoroughness of their medical entrance examination to hopefully avoid admitting pregnant women. The public ignored the fact that many servicewomen married while in the service and then became pregnant.

By March 1943, the Air Force recorded 465 pregnancies of 5121 members and the CWACs had 361 of 4279 members. The WRCNS had not yet recorded any.[290] Willa Walker, head of the RCAF Women's Division, sent Dorothy Isherwood a copy of the WD's pregnancy policy to put into effect for the newly formed WRCNS. They were to be discharged after filling out a long, extremely personal questionnaire about how they came to be pregnant. There was much debate over whether to send girls home as soon as they discovered they were pregnant or have them stay and work as long as possible.

If pregnant, Wrens were permitted to work until they began to show and were then honourably discharged and sent home, if they decided to continue the pregnancy. All Wrens were required to be questioned by a Unit or Welfare Officer. The officer conducting the interview was responsible for filling out a questionnaire. If she was single, she was asked: where the conception took place, was she in her home town, was she on furlough, week-end leave, after-duty pass or absent without leave when conception took place, had she been drinking, was the father a serviceman or a civilian, had the declaration of paternity been signed, had paternity been acknowledged, how long had she known the father, where did she meet him. There was great emphasis placed on questions surrounding the father's involvement with the Canadian forces. Married women filled out

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[290] *Ibid.* These numbers were based on enlistment numbers as of 31 December 1942. Not all of the pregnancies were illegitimate.

a much shorter questionnaire detailing the date of marriage, location of the service and occupation of the husband.[291] All women in the WRCNS, married or single, would receive a "Welcome to Civilian Life" brochure in the hospital after giving birth. These women, and their children, were eligible for medical care through the military as well as for Veteran's benefits. The military would not pay for women to sue the father of the baby for paternity compensation.[292]

The women's services also had numerous hygiene lectures to help warn young women of the dangers that could result from fornication. The WRCNS offered these courses from the beginning, even though they were not the target of the whisper campaign. They used the same material that was developed by the CWAC Venereal Disease Officer with the additional bolstering of RCN lectures. Many lectures were given by the RCN Venereal Disease Control Officer.[293] The lectures on venereal disease stressed the shame that would be placed upon a girl and her family should she get pregnant out of wedlock or if she had a venereal disease. Syphilis and Gonorrhea were also covered in depth, describing symptoms and long term effects as well as the 'kind of girl' who would contract them. The lectures also covered the seduction techniques unscrupulous men would try on innocent yong women by encouraging them to drink liquor. They advised women not to drink alcohol or to be alone with men in a hotel room

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[291]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1551, 4430-906. 'Medical Services, WRCNS.' *Discharge Procedure for Pregnant WRCNS Personnel.* From D/WRCNS, To all Officers.

[292]*Ibid.*

[293]Conrod 150.

or rooming house. The overall theme to the lecture was that the man has nothing to lose through promiscuity but the girl loses everything.[294]

To further avoid criticism and rumours, the Navy released stories of marriages and good deeds done by Wrens. All of their press releases were feel good pieces, happy and fluffy, heaping praise on the WRCNS and its contribution to the Navy. These press releases encouraged the heterosexual norm and provided good publicity amongst the negative rumours circulating about service women. They were designed to bolster the image of the Wren, while proving that femininity was not lost in the service.[295] Canadians had a very Victorian attitude toward women in the services. Although it was contradicted by government propaganda, the attempt was ambivalent at best. By focusing on the glamour of military life, the government and the military deceived young women about the harsh realities of wartime service. By only showcasing domestic duties in promotional campaigns, the military did a gross disservice to the thousands of women excelling at non-traditional gender roles. The RCN did promote the competence, intelligence and dedication of Wrens working in W/T stations as well as publicizing the various educational and recreational activities available for Wrens.[296]

The WRCNS used activity as a means of preventing pregnancy and venereal disease. They offered a plethora of sports, crafts, educational and musical extracurricular

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[294]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1594, 4478-14. "Venereal Disease."

[295]LAC, RG24, 11754. "Wren Press Releases." January 1944-May 1945. And LAC, RG24, 11724. "Wrens Canada." RCN press releases 3 May 1943 - 10 March 1945.

[296]*Ibid.* 25 May 1944. RCN Press Release.

activities for Wrens to occupy their off-duty hours with wholesome and developmental fun. Various intramural sports leagues were formed, from basketball and softball to swimming and bowling. Bases had team tournaments and Wren teams, in some cases competed again male RCN teams. There were handicrafts, leather working, choral singing, dancing and fencing clubs. Seminars on homemaking, cooking, decorating, care of fabrics, hair and makeup and fashion were also offered. At larger bases and overseas, Wrens could learn French, German, Spanish or Public Speaking. Night courses were also available to enable Wrens to complete high school diplomas or take university courses. There were numerous subjects available: Math, Shorthand, Latin, Economics and Journalism to name a few. Other courses, for Wrens at bases close to universities were also offered and the RCN provided transportation.[297]

Besides the extracurricular opportunities for learning, Wrens could also take WRCNS sponsored courses to prepare themselves for other positions or promotions. There were courses about raising a family with rationing, how young women can help fight inflation and lectures about the services available to WRCNS personnel after demobilization.[298] They could apply to take courses at other bases, such as signals training at Ste. Hyacinthe. Many Wrens learned a trade through their training that they could continue after the war, such as mechanics, drivers, electrical technicians or dental

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[297]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1489, 4340-5. "WRCNS Educational Services."

[298]*Ibid.*

assistants.[299]

The military provided many other benefits to women who had enlisted. Salary was an important issue regarding women's work. Women in the services were initially paid 2/3 the salary of a man in the same position. Some trades did pay equally. This was raised to 4/5 in 1943, after the WRNS officers loaned to the WRCNS returned home.[300] This ratio, although seemingly unfair by current standards, was much better than most women earned. Many women were earning as low as half a man's salary for equal work. The military asked for the endorsement of the National Council of Women (NCW), hoping that their endorsement would add credibility to the women's branches stemming the concern felt by parents over their daughter's enlistment. The NCW began lobbying for an increase in salary, as did many other women's groups. Pay equity was first brought up in the House of Commons in February 1943.[301] The National Council of Women furthered that argument by asserting that women should be given equal pay for equal work, a groundbreaking statement at the time.[302]

When interviewed, former WRCNS members did not feel that an inferior salary was any deterrent, or even an issue for discussion. They were satisfied with their salaries and enjoyed the carefree lifestyle where food and lodgings were taken care of in advance.

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[299]LAC, RG24, 11541, H-1-1-4. "Stadacona Wren Organization." 12 May 1944. Naval Board to all bases.

[300]Pierson. *Canadian Women.* 7.

[301]HOC. *Debates.* 2 February 1943, 101.

[302]Pierson. *Canadian Women.* 7.

Their only worry was pocket money for toiletries. Others said that they would have served for free to make their contribution to the war effort. Before women were eligible to enlist, most were doing volunteer work for the war effort. Joining the service was a continuation of that work for many.

Salary was a bit of an issue for the RCN surrounding commanding officers' pay. There was considerable debate about how to pay women like Isabel Macneill. The WRCNS borrowed its pay regulations from the Air Force WD's and the language did not quite fit the nature of the Navy, nor the WRCNS' unique status as a branch of the Navy and not just an auxiliary. There had to be significant revisions in language of the regulations to allow the Navy to pay Macneill as it wished.[303] In March 1944, Captain Musgrave, RCN, asked the Naval Board to pay Wrens working at 'Y' stations the equivalent of the male ratings that worked there. He was told that the matter would be taken under advisement. No further response was made.[304]

Wrens stationed overseas were also paid more. For the first thirty days, ratings were paid five dollars per diem, then for the remainder of their service overseas, they were paid $3.75 daily. The salary of a Wren rating stationed in Canada was only $3.50 per diem. Officers were given an even greater daily increase.[305] Overall, the increase in

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[303]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1058, 2420-110/2. "WRCNS Command Money."

[304]LAC, RG24, 1983-84/167, 1082, 2420-925/600. "WRCNS Communications Branch." 3 March 1944. Captain Musgrave to Naval Board.

[305]LAC, RG24, 11542, H-1-1-4. "Overseas Regulations." *Pay and Allowances Memorandum.* 7 January 1944. From Secretary of the Naval Board to Commanding Officers outside of Canada.

salary compared to civilian positions was beneficial to women and it raised the standard of women's pay after the war. The money also symbolized the respect held for the contribution made by women to the war effort and to the military itself. In a capitalist society, money equals respect in many cases. Therefore, the fact that Canadian Wrens were paid so well, even better than their British counterparts, speaks highly of their dedication and competence.

Military service also benefitted the Wrens in other ways. They were eligible for full veterans' benefits, including education credits, money, land, health care, dental care and pension. This was not necessarily the case in other countries. Wrens used their discharge money for various purposes. Some went back to university or started a new business. Others gave the money to their families and some used it to help their husbands buy a house.[306] Many Wrens were married during the course of their service and returned home to be housewives, never utilizing the benefits available to them. The Navy set up mechanisms for Wren's Associations to be created after the war, helping former Wrens stay in touch. Many participated in their activities. The Vancouver and Toronto Wren's Associations were particularly active.[307] They gave former Wrens an outlet to discuss their wartime experiences and reminisce.

There were other benefits that could not be quantified. Wrens developed confidence in their abilities and because of the opportunities afforded to them by the Navy, left them with a belief in themselves that altered the course of their lives. They

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[306]Winters. *Wrens of the Navy.* 285.

[307]LAC, MG28, I471, Vol. 2. "Vancouver Wren's Association."

took bigger chances, relying on their intellect and experience to better their lives. This spirit gained from confidence in their competence also changed society's view of women. Because of their hard work and dedication, the military praised the contribution of the brave women who volunteered to serve. The general attitude toward women in non-traditional careers began to slowly change. Some women were able to capitalize on the publicity and make social/professional gains, not only from their newfound connections and work experience, but also because the image of women had become more competent.

After the war ended, ex-Wrens were proud of their achievements. Many had enjoyed their time in the Navy so much that they wanted to make it a permanent career. However, the RCN was not interested in continuing to support a women's branch. They began sending out demobilization orders as soon as the war was over. Married Wrens were given priority discharge, as were school teachers.[308] Several Wren coders and telegraphists were sent to Seattle to learn Kana in preparation for a contingent to head to Australia to continue fighting the war with Japan. By the time they had finished their training, the Americans had dropped the Atomic bomb and the Japanese had surrendered.[309] Upon receiving her discharge notice, each Wren was required to meet with a Rehabilitation Officer who would help determine how best to readjust to civilian

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[308]LAC, RG24, 8186, 1818-9, vol. 2. "Post-War Navy, 1943-45." Memo to all Commanding Officers from the Naval Board. And LAC, RG24, 11489, 1502-65. "WRCNS Temporary Memoranda." Sinclair to all Wren Commanding Officers. 24 July 1945.

[309]DHH, Frieda Dougherty Biographical File.

life and what sort of jobs would be available to her with her current qualifications. Rehabilitation Officers also assisted in making travel arrangements and directed women to their hometown's closest Veteran's Affairs branch.[310] Many Wrens still continued to serve throughout the summer of 1945, W/T operators and coders among the last to receive discharge orders.[311] The RCN was having a great deal of trouble replacing these well-trained and experienced Wrens and continued to require staffing at W/T stations as the war with Japan wrapped up. There was much discussion about continuing to fully operate the W/T network in Canada as Russia became a bigger concern.[312] The RCN recognized that it would be difficult to replace all of the Wrens working in clerical and domestic positions as well. These positions were essential to the Navy for smooth administrative functioning and it had been more than two years since men had trained for these positions.[313]

Adelaide Sinclair was not discharged until 31 May 1946. Before leaving, she wrote a very comprehensive document about the strengths and weaknesses of the organization of the WRCNS and how it could be improved should there be another

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[310]LAC, RG24, 11489, 1502-65. "WRCNS Temporary Memoranda." Sinclair to all Wren Commanding Officers. 24 July 1945.

[311]LAC, RG24, 8186, 1818-9, Vol. 3. "Post-War Navy, 1943-45." Memo from Naval Board to W/T stations and D/WRCNS. 2 October 1945.

[312]LAC, RG24, 8186, 1818-9, vol. 1. "Post-War Navy, 1943-45." Memo on North American Defence.'

[313]LAC, RG24, 8186, 1818-9, vol. 4. "Post-War Navy, 1943-45." Staffing memo.

war.[314] Sinclair came to the following conclusions about the changes required to improve the functioning of a future WRCNS:

> a) that in those categories chosen for women they be treated as interchangeable with men in terms of work, that the same qualifications and training be required for entry and advancement;
> b) that pay and allowances be the same for men and women;
>
> c) that women be subject to naval discipline with possible exception of some unsuitable punishment;
> d) that basic and officers' training be separate from that of the men, but that extension training be shared;
> e) that the policy be maintained of permitting Wrens to serve only in places where service accommodation is provided. While certain exceptions were made to this to meet emergencies, it is felt that much of the success of the WRCNS was due to the fact that this was the general practice;
> f) that the policy of having a Wren administrative staff whose sole duty is discipline and welfare of Wrens be continued, as it also has proved its value;
> g) that great care and proper professional advice be taken in designing uniform. The importance of this in recruiting and in maintaining efficiency and good morale cannot be overestimated;
> h) that the policy of requiring everyone to enlist as a rating and to be prepared to remain one, be modified and that consideration be given to selecting certain women of proven experience and training for specific positions. While they should be required to take all necessary training, their ultimate work should be assured. It was necessary to do this for dietitians, welfare workers and librarians, and it is felt that the executive branch particularly might benefit from similar practice. Mature women filling responsible positions cannot be expected to enlist as ratings on the chance that their talents may eventually be used. It is a wasteful procedure in a small population. Without belittling the work of those who did enter on these terms, the Service would have been more efficient had it been

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[314]DHH, 75/554. "Report on the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service by the Director." Adelaide Sinclair. 31 May 1946. The copy of this document found at DND has comments written on it by J. Hitsman, a researcher in the Army Historical Section. His comments are, in many cases, sexist, rude and derogatory, but brutally honest (e.g. women aren't suited for such work, impossible, already paid too much, etc.). They are an interesting reflection of the attitudes of the times and in a few cases very appropriate, showing him to be an astute editor.

possible to offer suitable appointments to certain key women.[315]

Sinclair further noted the importance of including women in the initial planning process to ensure that the RCN adequately drew the line when treating Wrens as naval ratings and as women. Several of her suggestions were put into use when the WRCNS was called back into action for the Korean Conflict, including her last, where qualified and educated women could be fast-tracked to leadership positions. The Navy still remained concerned about keeping WRCNS administrative personnel to a minimum. Sinclair continued her report in great detail about the duties and responsibilities of each position, and where applicable, the relationships required with underlings. She also suggested a reorganization of the Personnel Officer position and its expansion for the sake of improved efficiency.[316] To complete her report, she listed all of the positions available to ratings and the successes and/or difficulties in recruiting for that trade.

Sinclair's report, above all, praised the hard work and dedication shown by the WRCNS. She complimented the Wrens and reiterates the massive contribution they made to the war effort. Further, Sinclair complimented the Navy on its decision to employ women as a part of the service. This pattern of women's employment did not significantly decrease after the war and has been on the rise since the 1960's.[317] Sinclair's plan also demonstrated a further divergence from the administrative and operation structure of the WRNS, making additional modifications to suit Canadian needs. Her

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[315]*Ibid.* 2.

[316]*Ibid.* 3-4.

[317]Pierson. *Still Women After All.* 215.

requests for equal pay for equal work continued to push the boundaries of women's paid work. This became one of the long term benefits of women's wartime employment.

The case was clearly made by servicewomen during the war that women are capable of doing the same jobs and types of work as men, and that they can do these jobs well. Most ex-Servicewomen look back on their wartime work fondly. It was an exciting, adventurous time. These women, including servicewomen and industrial workers, were well aware that their jobs were only temporary. They understood that their function was to support the war and once the war was over, return to supporting their family. This disproves the argument of recent feminist writers that women's war work was a dramatic emancipation that was suddenly withdrawn at the return of peace, and that women's profound disappointment and resentment spawned second wave feminism and 'the feminine mystique.'[318] The independence and confidence that these women gained from their experiences during the war may have led them to seek paid employment after their children grew up. Former servicewomen, who were given relatively good treatment from the military, may have seen the inequities of the 1960's-70's work world and then joined the feminist movement. Wrens received good pay in comparison to the rates civilian women could expect and their room, board, food and most of their clothing was taken care of. They were also given a monthly toiletries allowance and an annual sum to refurbish their underclothes. This was not the case in the outside world.

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[318]Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson and Naomi Black. *Canadian Women: A History.* 2nd Ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996) 346-9. I am not questioning the validity of the feminine mystique or Betty Friedan's book. Boredom and a lack of personal fulfillment still plague homemakers. I am only suggesting that women's work during the war was not the cause of the problem.

Marlene LeGates argues that women saw their lives as analogous to that of caged birds before the war and were released with their war work.[319] The unequal pay was an issue of contention, as was union representation. LeGates further argues that women's increased participation in the paid workforce is an extension of the Victorian trend of unmarried women working outside the home. The addition of non-traditional job opportunities furthered the feminist charge toward female emancipation.[320] She labels the desire to return home as pronatalist propaganda and bullying by men. However, she does acknowledge that women would have felt torn between home and work, especially if children were involved.

This hard-line feminist stance does not reflect the tone of the interviews given by former Wrens.[321] These women were more than clear that their purpose was solely to relieve men for active duty, although many do admit that they would have enjoyed keeping their positions. They valued the comradery of the Wrens and the excitement and importance of their jobs. When the war ended, they were excited to return home to family and friends, former employers and boyfriends/husbands. The experience of wartime service undoubtedly changed their perspective on women in the workforce. It may have inspired them to seek paid employment after their children were in school.

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[319]Marlene LeGates. *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society.* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 329. The image of women as caged birds became common starting with the early feminist movement in Britain in the nineteenth century.

[320]LeGates 331.

[321]This includes interviews by Donna Porter, Roger Sarty, Catherine Allan, Tony German and Jean Gow at the Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage.

This would also have affected the opinions held by their children about women, paid employment and opportunity.

The power of second wave feminism was not a direct derivative of women's war work. Rather, it was a reflection of society's treatment and compartmentalization of women. It railed against the idea that women can only perform menial, domestic tasks and asserted that there should be equal pay for equal work. For evidentiary support, it drew upon the anomaly of women taking and excelling in non-traditional jobs during the war. This does not mean that women's wartime experiences were the impetus for the feminist movement of the later twentieth century. The cause was the poor treatment women received in the workforce during the mid-1900's. Their awareness of these issues may have been heightened by their wartime experience but that does not imply that the root of the movement came out of women returning to the home after the Second World War.

Women experienced tremendous feelings of accomplishment from their service during the war. They developed self-confidence, independence, job skills and discipline. Their wartime experiences would influence the rest of their lives, encouraging them to achieve their goals. This was important to the next generation, as that attitude was passed on from mother to daughter. The daughters of former servicewomen may have been more likely to become active in the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970's because they had heard stories of their mothers' experiences. They may have even been encouraged by their mothers to seek equality and fair treatment in the workplace. The accomplishments of Wrens and other service women continue to affect policy. Women are now an integral

part of the RCN. They receive equal pay for equal work, a true advancement as civilian women still do not hold that distinction.[322]

The Royal Canadian Navy was understaffed, underfunded and under-equipped before hostilities broke out in Europe in September 1939. They depended on the British for assistance and direction, even in Canadian coastal waters. The RCN was like a satellite operation for the RN, depending upon British technology, training, command structure and intelligence briefings. During the interwar period, it seemed wasteful to continue to develop a navy while the country faced serious financial depression. The prevailing belief that the British navy could and/or would take care of any of Canada's coastal security issues, coupled with the conviction that there was no longer a need for a well-developed military since the war to end all wars had just been fought, instilled a complacency in the public and politicians, which led to cutbacks and apathy.

The Second World War launched a massive expansion of the RCN. The British did not have the resources to defend Canada's massive coastal territory as well as protecting England, the colonies and the North Atlantic trade routes. Based on British direction and input, Canada began building ships to escort convoys, essential to the transportation of raw materials and troops to Europe. During its wartime expansion, the RCN also began making some changes to Command and Control, as well as Naval Intelligence and other departments. The Canadian leadership of the RCN began to see the

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[322]Statistics Canada. *The "Who, What, When and Where" of Gender Pay Differentials.* The Evolving Workplace Series. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 2002) 32. Women currently earn 15% less than men on average. However, because more women tend to work for non-profit agencies, the gap can be reduced to 8% when taking choice of workplace into account.

war as an opportunity to wean its reliance on Great Britain and tailor the navy to best suit Canadian security requirements. One of the biggest challenges to Canadian naval autonomy was staffing. Many of the officers of the RCN were RN officers on loan and the officers that were Canadian had received their training in Britain and on RN ships. Their outlook on naval matters was decidedly British and they did not necessarily recognize the importance of naval autonomy to Canadian international credibility. It wasn't until 1942, when C.H. Little took over from Eric Brand as DNI that the position was actually held by a Canadian. This meant that any intelligence received through Canada's 'Y' and H/F D/F networks were passed on to the British, whether it was in Canada's best interest or not. The other big obstacle faced by the RCN in their bid for autonomy was the lack of rapid, direct intelligence information. Canada was not initially privy to ULTRA decrypts and was dependent upon the British and then the Americans for U-boat tracking information and convoy rerouting.

True autonomy came only in April 1943 when Rear-Admiral Murray took over North Atlantic Command and further expansion of the High Frequency Direction Finding network led to more accurate U-boat tracking. Canada also became party to ULTRA decrypts from Whitehall, truly becoming a partner in the defence of the Atlantic, no longer in Britain's shadow. Canada's naval contribution to the Second World War was its most important and valued achievement, garnering international recognition for bravery, invention and cohesion. The evolution toward institutional autonomy was surprisingly smooth, considering the tumultuous time in which it occurred. The transition was slow and well planned, taking into consideration the delicate nature of Canada's position,

locked between two super powers who may not always agree. The RCN's bid for independence, especially with regards to naval intelligence, meant that Canada could create systems and technologies that could work with both the British and the Americans. The RCN also benefitted from observing the best and worst parts of both systems and tried to make its institutional modifications reflective of their best qualities.

Like the RCN, the WRCNS also worked toward autonomy from British systems. Even its initial set up, as a branch of the RCN, not an auxiliary, was a departure from British sensibilities. However, it made organizational sense to have the WRCNS an integral part of the RCN. It eliminated duality in orders issued and simplified requisitioning, discipline, rules and regulations. The RCN had learned from the RCAF and CWAC and the integration of their women's auxiliaries.. They realized that they could keep administrative costs low by making the WRCNS a branch of the RCN, as this would not require the same amount of Command and administrative staff. It would also blend more smoothly into the RCN as all recruits were held to the same code of conduct, with the exception of certain punishments. It was far easier to amend a few select regulations to accommodate women than to invent an entirely new organization. This was easily done using the WRNS rules and regulations and comparing them the those of the RCN.

It was along this vein that the WRCNS began to depart from its British sister organization. Although the RCN requested that the WRNS send personnel to Canada to assist in the set up and initial operation of the WRCNS, it was never intended that the WRNS officers would stay on to command it. Upon reaching officer status, Canadian

Wrens received the first official commissions from King George VI, becoming the first women in the Commonwealth to hold a King's Commission. Because the WRCNS was not an auxiliary, this meant that Wren officers could command RCN personnel below them in rank. The pay scale was also raised. This was another important step away from the WRNS, making Canadian Wrens much better paid than civilian women.

Many Canadian Wrens had positions that carried a great deal of responsibility. Some were in charge of 'Y' stations, commanding both men and women. These women had to be able to use technologically complex equipment to monitor U-boats and their signal traffic, but also manage a small base, sometimes with only one administrative aide. Because the RCN had the option of allowing the WRCNS to command and staff intelligence gathering stations, it allowed the maximum number of male personnel to be at sea, easing the manpower crunch and running a greatly expanded 'Y' and H/F D/F network. Without the influx of thousands of WRCNS personnel to staff these stations, the Battle of the Atlantic would have been much more deadly for Allied personnel and supplies, reducing North America's ability to supply Britain and fight the war on the continent.

Modern feminist rhetoric labels women's wartime work an emancipation and the start of second wave feminism. They argue that wage disparity during wartime Canada created discontent and led to activism in the 1970's. From a certain viewpoint, the argument is valid but in interviews with former servicewomen, they clearly state that many would have worked for free and that wages were never an issue of discontent. Most were unaware of the discrepancy and many of those who did know, felt that it was only

natural, as they were just temporary replacements. It was more than clear to them that their purpose was to free men for active service, but only during the war. By the end of the war, most were anxious to return home to family, friends, previous employment or married life. It is more likely that their wartime experience inspired their daughters who led the feminist movement of the 1970's. However, this does not detract from the considerable contribution made by women in the armed services during the war.

The WRCNS, and the modifications made in its rules and regulations to separate it from its British counterpart, materially contributed to the Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic. If the WRCNS had not deviated from the WRNS pattern, female command would not have been possible and staffing needs at intelligence stations and in Ottawa could not have been met without sacrificing personnel at sea. This directly impacted the war effort, and followed the spirit of the RCN, as both organizations modified their rules and regulations, the WRCNS and RCN respectively, based on an analysis of Canadian needs. This institutional modification allowed the WRCNS to fill a crucial role during a crucial time in the war, helping the Allies defeat the Germans at sea and ultimately win the war.

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