

“There will be trouble in the North Pacific”: The Defence of British Columbia in the Early Twentieth Century¹

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Events in August 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, dramatically demonstrated the inadequacy of Canada's west coast defences. The presence of a German cruiser in the northeast Pacific touched off such intense popular alarm that Sir Richard McBride, the Premier of British Columbia, purchased two submarines from an American shipyard and arbitrarily assumed control of the military establishment in the province. McBride's "submarine caper" is one of the better known events in British Columbia's history, not least for its comic elements. Yet McBride was responding to widespread and deep-seated anxiety about the province's vulnerability to attack. This sense of military insecurity, as Professors Roy and Ward have shown, stemmed from fears about Japan's burgeoning strength, fears which Japanese participation in the war against Germany scarcely blunted.² But the story does not stop there. The defence of the Pacific coast in the early twentieth century was an important and continuing problem — for the province, for the federal government, and even for Great Britain. Still, the literature is virtually silent on the subject.

British Columbians worried for good reason. From 1906, when the British abandoned the Esquimalt naval base, until the late 1930s the Canadian government had neither a policy nor adequate forces for the protection of the Pacific coast. Protests by the provincial government evoked a response from Ottawa, but domestic politics in the eastern provinces, which ultimately dictated Canadian military policy, severely limited what could be done. In vain, senior officers of the Canadian navy

¹ For assistance with research I am most grateful to Robert Clapp, J. E. Rippengale, Bryon Taylor and Bill Johnston. Norman Hillmer deserves my special thanks for his help with each of the numerous drafts.

² Patricia E. Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians, 1900-1950," in *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, ed. W. Peter Ward and Robert A. J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), pp. 662-63; W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1978), pp. 98-100.

and militia warned the federal government that its gestures to appease British Columbia had utterly failed to create an effective defence system.

By the time the British forces departed from Esquimalt the defence of the Pacific coast had already bedevilled Dominion-provincial and Anglo-Canadian relations for a generation.³ British Columbia attached such importance to the Royal Navy's presence that the province's terms of entry into Confederation in 1871 included the promise that the Dominion government would use its "influence . . . to secure the continued maintenance of the naval station at Esquimalt."⁴ Ships alone were not enough, however. The provincial government demanded that Ottawa supply a garrison of professional soldiers for land defence. British policy, moreover, held Canada responsible for protecting the naval establishment at Esquimalt with troops and fortifications. In 1893, after the Canadian forces had demonstrated their inability to garrison the station, the British undertook its defence even though the Dominion government refused to contribute more than half of the cost. Canadian interests had in fact centred on Vancouver rather than Esquimalt since the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, but the politicians in Ottawa never considered undertaking the expenditure necessary to establish a base on Burrard Inlet. The Dominion government probably participated

³ On the defence of British Columbia prior to 1906 see R. H. Roy, "The Early Militia and Defence of British Columbia, 1871-1885," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 18 (January-April 1954), 1-28; D. M. Schurman, "Esquimalt: Defence Problem, 1865-1887," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 19 (January-April 1955), 57-69; Peter Guy Silverman, "A History of the Militia of British Columbia 1871-1914" (unpublished MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1954); C. S. Mackinnon, "The Imperial Fortresses in Canada: Halifax and Esquimalt, 1871-1906" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1965); Peter N. Moogk with R. V. Stevenson, *Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859-1949* (Surrey, B.C.: Antonson, 1978); Ronald Lovatt, "Militia Gunners of Victoria, 1883-1956" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1975); F. V. Longstaff, *Esquimalt Naval Base: A History of its Work and its Defences* (Vancouver: Clarke and Stuart, 1941); Barry M. Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914: A Study of British Maritime Ascendancy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1971). For a summary, with some fresh material, see Roger Sarty, "Silent Sentry: A Military and Political History of Canadian Coast Defence 1860-1945" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1982), pp. 58-72. Ronald Lovatt is now at work on a series of studies which will probably be the definitive history of the Victoria-Esquimalt defences. Thus far we have: ———, *A History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, 1846-1893*, Manuscript Report Series No. 426 (np.: Parks Canada, Environment Canada, 1890); ———, "History of the Defence of Victoria and Esquimalt: Royal Marine Artillery Period 1839-1899" (to be published by Parks Canada).

⁴ M. Ollivier, ed., *British North America Acts and Selected Statutes 1867-1962* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), p. 177.

in the defence of Esquimalt because it was the cheapest way to keep British Columbia quiet.

By the early 1900s Esquimalt was efficiently if modestly defended. Some 350 British troops of the Royal Garrison Artillery and the Royal Engineers were on strength; they also trained the local militia — primarily the 5th (British Columbia) Regiment, Canadian Artillery — which the Dominion government had committed to the station in the event of war. Guarding the harbour mouth were five coast artillery batteries; in addition the engineers were ready to lay submarine mine fields. Mobile artillery and machine guns were available to cover the landward approaches to the port. The 6-inch guns on disappearing carriages at Forts Rodd Hill and Macaulay were becoming obsolescent (and would be declared obsolete in 1913), but work was under way on a new fort at Signal Hill for two powerful 9.2-inch guns. These defences were designed to meet only a raid by one or two cruisers,⁵ the Imperial authorities having decided that an establishment able to withstand heavy attacks from the United States would be excessively large and expensive. Nevertheless, the American threat was a central problem for the British services in their efforts to deal with the Esquimalt question.

Before the defences were fully completed, Imperial policy changed radically. In 1904 the British government ruled out the possibility of war with the United States as part of an effort to trim the Empire's excessive military commitments. The Admiralty promptly abolished the Pacific and the North America and West Indies squadrons and closed the dockyards at Halifax and Esquimalt. The War Office decided to reduce the number of troops at Halifax and wanted to withdraw altogether from Esquimalt, but was bound by the arrangements with Ottawa to maintain the garrison until 1909. It came as a pleasant surprise when in December 1904 Sir Wilfrid Laurier intimated that Canada was ready to take full charge of both stations.⁶ In the eastern provinces this was a popular policy which squared English Canadian demands that the Dominion contribute to the defence of the Empire with French Canada's insistence that no Canadian troops or military expenditure should go overseas.⁷

From Victoria things looked rather differently. McBride, who had led

⁵ D Hist 77/352, "Esquimalt, B.C. Defence Scheme Revised to January, 1902."

⁶ Samuel F. Wells Jr., "British Strategic Withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere, 1904-1906," *Canadian Historical Review* 49 (December 1968), 335-56; Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (London: Longmans, 1967), chaps. 9-10.

⁷ Sarty, "Silent Sentry," pp. 123-26.

British Columbia's Conservative party to victory in 1903, sharply reminded Laurier of the Dominion government's obligation under the terms of union to "make the strongest efforts possible towards securing the maintenance of this Naval Station."⁸ The American consul in Victoria reported that there was a pall of gloom over the city.

These reductions in the naval station seriously effect [*sic*] Victoria, while Esquimalt will be thereby almost wiped out of existence. The existence of the dock yard and presence of the British Fleet, have been most important factors in the business and social life of Victoria. At times the squadron here has numbered eight cruisers, gunboats, and sloops, besides two torpedo boat destroyers, manned by nearly two thousand officers and men. And till within the past two years, there have always been an average of one thousand officers and men in Esquimalt harbor. One of the local papers estimates the funds spent here per annum for the flag ship alone at \$350,000 and the balance of the fleet as fully as much more, making the amount of cash expended in this port not less than \$700,000 per annum, and affecting all the business firms of this small city of Victoria, many of whom will doubtless suffer severely the loss of patronage. . . . A great deal of feeling has been aroused thereat, bitter language used toward the Imperial Government, and even threats made by prominent members of the Dominion Parliament, that it presages dissolution of the connection with Great Britain. Denunciation is also made of the Dominion authorities that they have steadily refused to make any appropriation towards the British fleet heretofore kept in Canadian waters for the defense of Canadian ports.⁹

The Dominion took over Esquimalt in the most awkward of circumstances. During 1905 the Committee of Imperial Defence, where the British Prime Minister consulted ministers, officials and experts about defence policy, concluded that Esquimalt should "be no longer retained as a fortified port."¹⁰ As luck would have it, Sir Frederick Borden received this ruling when he was in Victoria facing delegations of citizens worried about the future of the base. Appalled at the news, Borden wrote to Laurier:

. . . it appears that Esquimalt is to be abandoned by the Imperial Government as a naval station. I will say nothing at present about the extraordinary delay in informing us of their intentions and thereby placing the Government in an awkward position before Parliament and the country in taking

⁸ Public Archives of Canada (hereafter, PAC), Manuscript Group 26G, Sir Wilfrid Laurier papers (hereafter, Laurier papers), reel C-818, pp. 92880-1, McBride to Laurier, 21 December 1904.

⁹ PAC, MG 10A1, reel M-4468, United States Consul in Victoria to Assistant Secretary of State, 12 January 1905.

¹⁰ Great Britain, Public Records Office (hereafter, PRO), CAB 5-1-02918, CID paper 29-C, CDC 247M, 26 May 1905, "Esquimalt. Strategic Conditions."

over a station which is abandoned!! What I wish to call your attention to is its relationship to the "Terms of Union" between Canada and BC as shown in article 9 . . . — You may be quite sure BC will raise a howl when the news comes out as it certainly will very soon . . . ¹¹

Laurier's government bluntly informed the Imperial authorities that they must have realized Esquimalt was useless before Canada was asked to take over the base; both governments would be embarrassed if the truth came out now. Ottawa, therefore, would keep quiet and attempt to placate British Columbia by establishing a small permanent force garrison of about 120 engineers and gunners to maintain the defences and train the local militia.¹²

The Canadian government had assumed full financial responsibility for Esquimalt from 1 July 1905, but did not take charge of the station until 1 May 1906, after the long process of transferring Halifax was nearly complete. The new garrison largely comprised seventy-nine troops who had taken discharges from the departing British units and enlisted in the Canadian militia's permanent force. The officers were also British, on loan to the permanent force from the Imperial army for a term of two years. Canada simply did not have enough troops or the technical experts needed to maintain and operate sophisticated coast defence armaments.¹³ In Parliament the government fended off questions from British Columbia's members about Esquimalt's decline with assurances the base was being kept up to the "standard mutually agreed upon with the Imperial government."¹⁴ There were few military secrets on the west coast, however; the press accurately reported that the Canadian garrison was a shadow of the Imperial establishment.¹⁵ Much comment was excited by the hulking components of two 9.2-inch guns strewn in public view along the road to Signal Hill where the Royal Garrison Artillery had abandoned them when the War Office ordered work to stop on the new fort in 1905. The British Army Council agreed with the Canadian militia staff that the guns should be moved to Halifax where they were

¹¹ PAC, Laurier papers, reel C-826, pp. 101368-72, Borden (at Government House, Victoria) to Laurier, 20 September 1905.

¹² PAC, Record Group 24, Department of National Defence, reel C-5052, HQS 318, Chief of the General Staff (hereafter, CGS) to Minister of Militia in Council, 6 April 1906, PC 946M/30 April 1906.

¹³ PAC, RG 24, box 6428, HQ 280 vol. 2; *ibid.*, box 6553, HQ 856-2-1 vol. 1.

¹⁴ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 20 February 1907, columns 3370-71; see also PAC, RG 24, box 6428, HQ 280 vol. 4, acting Adjutant General (hereafter, AG) to Deputy Minister of Militia, 20 February 1907.

¹⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, 6 October 1906, p. 12; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 24 February 1907, p. 12, 16 May 1907, p. 7, 30 May 1907, p. 8.

urgently needed. Arrangements had nearly been completed in September 1907 when anti-Japanese riots broke out in Vancouver and Sir Frederick Borden called a halt. The guns stayed at Esquimalt for another generation, as things turned out, despite complaints from the soldiers that policy had been changed for "entirely sentimental reasons."¹⁶

Borden's political instincts were sound. The crisis over Asiatic immigration greatly increased concern in British Columbia about defence, particularly against Japan, which had shown herself to be a great and aggressive power in the Russo-Japanese war. The press and the politicians pilloried the federal government for neglecting Esquimalt and hoped that the British would put things right by returning.¹⁷ In March 1908 a large public meeting in Vancouver, chaired by the mayor, demanded that the government invite the United States Navy's Atlantic fleet to include the city in its Pacific cruise.¹⁸ Australia had already asked the Americans to come and later enthusiastically greeted the warships as the defenders of the white race against the yellow peril.¹⁹ The British government, not wishing to strain relations between Japan and the Empire or to encourage dependence by the largest Dominions on American protection, asked Laurier not to extend the invitation.²⁰ William Lyon Mackenzie King, then Deputy Minister of Labour, who was travelling as Laurier's emissary to Washington and London to discuss the Japanese immigration crisis, agreed with the British. He believed that the presence of the American fleet would stimulate annexationist sentiments in the western provinces; the time had come, he concluded, for

¹⁶ Quote from Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, *Minutes of the Militia Council*, 13 March 1912, para. 193; PAC, RG 24, reel C-5052, HQS 318, Lt.-Col. English to Master General of the Ordnance, 21 November 1906 and following correspondence to 1909; House of Commons, *Debates*, 15 January 1908, column 1293, 3 February 1909, columns 474-75, 9 March 1909, columns 2301-02, 8 February 1911, column 3220.

¹⁷ *Victoria Daily Times*, 11 October 1907, p. 7; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 12 July 1907, 1 November 1907, p. 4, 23 October 1908, p. 3; *Daily Province* (Vancouver), 8 January 1909, p. 7, 1 February 1909, p. 6, 3 July 1909, p. 15; PAC, RG 25 A-2, Department of External Affairs, box 210, file M17/63; J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1908* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing, 1909), pp. 217-18.

¹⁸ PAC, Laurier papers, reel C-860, pp. 137422-24, Mayor of Vancouver to Laurier, 11 March 1908; *ibid.*, reel C-861, W. Templeman, Minister of Inland Revenue to Laurier, 9 April 1908.

¹⁹ Thomas W. Tanner, *Compulsory Citizen Soldiers* (n.p.: Alternative Publishing Co-Operative, 1980), pp. 125-30.

²⁰ Charles Neu, *An Uncertain Friendship: Theodore Roosevelt and Japan, 1906-1909* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1967), pp. 205, 229-31.

“our doing something in the way of having a navy of our own.”²¹ Laurier bowed to pressure from the west coast and made the invitation, but the situation had been defused by Japan’s request for the American warships to visit. In the end, the fleet went directly across the Pacific without lingering on the North American coast.²²

British Columbia was not alone in its concern about naval defence. The Anglo-German naval race revived both the question of Canadian assistance to the Royal Navy, and the old fear that fast enemy raiders might strike at Canadian trade and ports while British warships were engaged thousands of miles away. Australia led the way by winning the Admiralty’s agreement at the Imperial Conference of 1907 that she should establish her own coast defence fleet of submarines and destroyers. Initially both federal parties found the Australian approach appealing, because a coast defence navy would not arouse anti-Imperialism in Quebec as direct contributions to the Royal Navy most certainly would. On 29 March 1909 the House of Commons unanimously endorsed a resolution that promised the “speedy organization of a Canadian naval service.”²³ Amid growing controversy as the Conservatives pressed for contributions to the Imperial navy in the wake of Britain’s dreadnought crisis, the Naval Service Act, which established the Royal Canadian Navy, was proclaimed on 4 May 1910. Under Laurier’s program, Canada’s coasts would be protected by a force of five light cruisers and six destroyers.

In the debate on the naval legislation both parties had appealed to British Columbia’s fear of the yellow peril. Rodolphe Lemieux, the Liberal cabinet minister who had gone to Japan in 1907 to resolve the immigration crisis, warned that the Anglo-Japanese alliance would not endure forever.²⁴ Robert Borden, the Conservative leader, pointed to “the

²¹ Quoted in Richard Howard Gimblett, “‘Tin Pots’ or Dreadnoughts? The Evolution of the Naval Policy of the Laurier Administration, 1896-1911” (unpublished MA thesis, Trent University, 1981), p. 124; also see R. MacGregor Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1958), pp. 159-65.

²² Neu, *Uncertain Friendship*, p. 231; PAC, Laurier papers, reel C-1162, pp. 205308-11, Grey to Laurier, 12 May 1908.

²³ Gimblett, “‘Tin-Pots,’” pp. 135-45; PAC, MG 26H, Sir Robert L. Borden papers (hereafter, Borden papers), vol. 316, pp. 187861-63, unidentified newspaper clipping, “Canada and a Naval Confederacy,” pp. 187864-68, unidentified newspaper clipping, “A Navy for Canada,” p. 187871, clipping from *Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 19 January 1909; House of Commons, *Debates*, 29 March 1909, columns 3491-92, 2389-90, 3487-89, 3498; Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography, vol. 1: 1854-1914* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 152-53.

²⁴ House of Commons, *Debates*, 3 February 1910, column 3030.

pressure of Oriental nations upon our western coast"²⁵ in arguing that Canada's effort should be more closely associated with the Royal Navy. McBride and various British Columbia newspapers and boards of trade endorsed the Laurier navy, but also demanded a cash contribution sufficient for the construction of at least one dreadnought to the Imperial navy.²⁶ Opinion on the west coast had always tended to favour assistance to the Royal Navy, a legacy, no doubt, of the Pacific Squadron's central place in the province's history.²⁷

Laurier, in fact, did not believe that British Columbia needed to be defended against the Japanese. He had long supported Anglo-Japanese friendship and heartily endorsed the alliance. Part of the reason was economic, for the prime minister was convinced that Japan would become a great market for Canadian wheat and thereby underwrite the construction of the new transcontinental railways.²⁸ Nor was Laurier much interested in Canada's defence requirements. Domestic political pressures had largely moved him to agree to take over Halifax and Esquimalt and to build a navy. He saw the forts and warships as symbols of Canadian sovereignty rather than as the foundation stones of a coast defence system that had to be expanded to protect all of the Dominion's major ports and modernized to keep pace with rapidly changing military technology.²⁹

The government's military advisers were acutely aware that in modern warfare an attack on the coasts could come swiftly, without warning, and that small forces could do a great deal of damage. Despite the Anglo-Japanese alliance, moreover, they did not trust the Japanese. In August

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1910, column 1741.

²⁶ J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1909* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing, 1910), pp. 50, 93, 100-01; ———, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1910* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing, 1911), pp. 179-80; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 21 March 1909, p. 8, 2 April 1909, p. 1, 11 March 1910, p. 3; Clive Phillipps-Wolley, *The Canadian Naval Question* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1910), pp. 52-63; Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter, PABC), Add. Mss 347, vol. 1, file 5, McBride to Borden, 8 January 1910.

²⁷ Gimblett, "Tin-Pots," pp. 41, 55-59.

²⁸ Robert Joseph Gowen, "Canada's Relations with Japan, 1895-1922: Problems of Immigration and Trade" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1966), esp. pp. 63, 79, 81, 83, 131, 139-40, 182-83; ———, "Canada and the Myth of the Japan Market, 1896-1911," *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (February 1970), 63-83.

²⁹ Gimblett, "Tin-Pots," esp. pp. 77-82, 126-30, 140-42, 145, 177-79, 225-26; Sarty, "Silent Sentry," pp. 113-17, 122-33, 145-46, 160-71.

1908, Colonel Willoughby Gwatkin, an exceptionally capable British staff officer on loan to militia headquarters, warned his superiors that:

The Japanese in British Columbia are very numerous. The great majority have served in the Japanese Army. They are in possession of arms and ammunition. In a military sense, they are organized; and they are in close touch with their own Foreign Office.

Had war broken out a year or two ago between the United States and Japan, the Japanese residents in the United States would have cut the transcontinental railways, and a contingent from British Columbia, it is said, was ready to cross the frontier.³⁰

The district intelligence officer in British Columbia could find almost no evidence to support these rumours, other than the fact many Japanese lived in boarding houses run by old soldiers, but concluded nevertheless that the Japanese were a "menace."³¹ This correspondence appears on secret militia department files, but on a few occasions senior military officers did make their concern public. The most notable instance was in February 1909 when Major-General Percy Lake, Inspector General of the Militia and a British officer with long and distinguished service in Canada, told an audience at the University of Toronto that "unless all that the white man stands for is to be overwhelmed by an influx of Asiatic hordes, then Canada must stand ready to appeal to the arbitrament of war."³² Popular opinion was not galvanized in support of a coast defence program. The Liberal press in the east criticized the general, and in British Columbia the Conservative *Victoria Daily Colonist* alone among the major newspapers noted the speech, merely taking it as an endorsement of Oriental exclusion.³³

Almost invariably, the military pressed its schemes through official channels and was rewarded with frustration and inaction. While condemning Esquimalt in 1905, the Committee of Imperial Defence had

³⁰ PAC, RG 24, reel C-5055, HQC 828 vol. 1, Director of Operations and Staff Duties to CGS, 10 August 1908.

³¹ *Ibid.*, correspondence 5 September-14 November 1908.

³² Quoted in Desmond Morton, *The Canadian General: Sir William Otter* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974), p. 299.

³³ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 12 February 1909, p. 4. In their suspicion of the Japanese, Gwatkin and Lake were fairly typical of British officers: Philip Towle, "The British Armed Forces and Japan before 1914," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 119 (June 1974), 67-71. Interestingly, Brigadier-General W. D. Otter, Chief of the General Staff, 1908-1910, and the only Canadian to hold the appointment prior to 1920, took a more moderate view of the Japanese threat than his British colleagues: PAC, RG 24, reel C-5055, HQC 828 vol. 1, Otter to minister's private secretary, 16 September 1908.

advised that if a "great commercial port" did develop on the Pacific coast, the place should be defended. The future seemed to hold exciting prospects for Prince Rupert, which was to become the terminal of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway.³⁴ In May 1908 Colonel Gwatkin suggested that officers should visit the port and reserve sites for coast defences before all of the land around the harbour was tied up in speculation.³⁵ Brigadier-General W. D. Otter, Chief of the General Staff, thought that Vancouver should be surveyed as well. Sir Frederick Borden intended to join the party, perhaps because he wanted the British Columbia voters to see him attending to their interests, and he did not go only because he had to participate in the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909.³⁶ The militia staff planned to make a confidential reconnaissance, but someone alerted the press six weeks before Otter's group arrived in British Columbia.³⁷ Although the military was annoyed, the government had every reason to be pleased at the favourable attention the survey received in the west coast press.³⁸

After approving Otter's report on Prince Rupert the naval and militia staffs asked that the Committee of Imperial Defence lay down a scale of attack for the port. The Colonial Defence Committee, a subcommittee of the CID, took the opportunity to review the situation of the whole Canadian Pacific seaboard. The committee ruled against preparations to meet an American attack because of the "remoteness of the contingency of war with the United States."³⁹ Although the alliance had neutralized the Japanese threat, the committee warned that "Should the Treaty be determined . . . the possibility of Japan being ranged against us, either alone or in combination with some other naval Power, cannot prudently be disregarded."⁴⁰ Even in that unhappy situation "a raid by one or two unarmoured cruisers" was all that need be anticipated. Japan, after all, would have to strike across 4,000 miles of ocean and would be "incurring

³⁴ Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 345-46, 355.

³⁵ PAC, RG 24, box 2394, HQC 161 vol. 1, Gwatkin to CGS, 7 May 1908.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Secretary of the Militia Council (hereafter, SMC) to CGS, 19 November 1908, CGS to minister's private secretary, 21 April 1909.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, clipping, *Ottawa Free Press*, 15 June 1909, "Fortifying of Prince Rupert," unidentified clipping, "Chain of Forts for the Coast. Free Press Special, Victoria, B.C., July 21 [1909]," minute on same sheet.

³⁸ Morton, *The Canadian General*, p. 300.

³⁹ PRO, CAB 5-2-02918, CID Paper 65C, CDC 430M, 30 January 1911, "Canada. Scale of Attack on Pacific Coast," para. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 10.

the risk of embroiling herself with the United States.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, the committee advised that 6-inch guns should be mounted at Vancouver and Prince Rupert to protect the port facilities under development at the two harbours.

The Committee of Imperial Defence considered this paper in January 1911, along with another, nearly as optimistic, that evaluated the scale of attack for Australia. General Sir William Nicholson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, objected strenuously that the memoranda would discourage the development of land forces in the Dominions on the basis of an unsound navalist view of Imperial defence.

The British fleet is no longer supreme in all waters. In the Western Atlantic it is admitted that in certain eventualities we might not be able to assert our supremacy over the United States fleet. The situation in the Pacific seemed to him to be similar. If we should find ourselves involved in a war with Japan, the attitude of Germany being uncertain or hostile we might be forced to maintain a fleet in European waters so strong that it was very doubtful if we should be in a position immediately to dispatch naval reinforcements to Far Eastern waters sufficient to enable us to assert our superiority over the fleet of Japan.⁴²

The papers were revised before they were presented to the Imperial Conference in May 1911, but the conclusions about British Columbia were unaltered in substance and were more clearly stated.⁴³ Pleased with the British assessment, Laurier paid tribute to the Anglo-Japanese alliance which “has made us absolutely free from fear of invasion from that country . . . if it were renewed for even a longer period than ten years, I think it would be all the better.”⁴⁴

Robert Joseph Gowen has written that the British raised the Japanese bogey at the Imperial Conference of 1911 through “‘deceitful and sometimes untruthful misrepresentation.’ . . . to induce the Dominions, on the one hand, to give their blessings to the second renewal of the alliance with Japan and, on the other hand, to persevere in the defence preparations which ultimately paid such handsome dividends for Britain in the First World War.”⁴⁵ In Professor Gowen’s opinion, the British

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para. 15.

⁴² PAC, reel B-3820, PRO, CAB 2-2, f. 63, minutes 108th meeting CID 26 January 1911.

⁴³ PRO, CAB 5-2-02918, CID Paper 75C, CDC 430M, 24 April 1911, “Canada. Scale of Attack on Prince Rupert.”

⁴⁴ PAC, reel B-3820, PRO, CAB 2-2, ff. 84, 90, minutes 111th meeting CID 26 May 1911.

⁴⁵ Robert Joseph Gowen, “British Legerdemain at the 1911 Imperial Conference: The Dominions, Defense Planning, and the Renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance,” *Journal of Modern History* 52 (September 1980): 385-86.

"sanitized"⁴⁶ the papers on the scales of attack to inspire greater home defence efforts in the Dominions and thereby ensure that trained troops would be available to join a British expeditionary force in Europe. While the argument is persuasive for Australia, it does not hold for Canada: the revisions of the memorandum tended to strengthen the impression that British Columbia was quite safe. Certainly the Dominion government was not moved to erect the modest defences recommended for Vancouver and Prince Rupert.⁴⁷

By default Esquimalt remained the guardian of the Pacific coast despite the deep reservations of the Canadian forces. The militia department attempted to maintain 150-160 regular troops at the station because experience had shown that the establishment of 120 proposed in 1906 was too small for routine duties. These efforts strained the manpower of the small permanent force which, in the face of recruiting problems and restrictions on military spending, was already unable to find enough personnel for the much more important garrison at Halifax. Geographical isolation and the heavy labour required to maintain the forts and works made Esquimalt an unpopular station where men frequently deserted or requested early discharges. Often the garrison was 30-40 men under strength and useful military training became impossible.⁴⁸ In 1910 a gunner murdered a corporal and then committed suicide; the board of inquiry attributed the tragedy to low morale caused by the fact the garrison "had become practically a body of caretakers."⁴⁹

The navy, which took charge of the dockyard at Esquimalt when the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁴⁷ At Prince Rupert all that the Militia department could do was to obtain the agreement of the agencies that controlled the land selected for coast defence sites that the sites would not be sold without prior notice to the department. Vancouver posed greater difficulties. One of the principal sites selected was Point Grey, a former British military reserve that had passed under the control of the Dominion government. The British Columbia government, believing it had title to the land, began to develop the point as a campus for the provincial university. On learning of the federal claim late in 1911, McBride protested, and Colonel Sam Hughes, the minister of Militia, quickly agreed to give up the federal title in exchange for other lands of equal value. Only three acres on the foreshore of Point Grey were reserved for military purposes: Sarty, "Silent Sentry," p. 213.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-89, 213-16; also see PAC, RG 24, reel C-5052, HQS 318, correspondence between headquarters and District Officer Commanding Military District No. 11 (hereafter, DOC 11) 31 January-24 February 1908; PAC, RG 24, reel C-5059, HQC 824, Inspector General of Canadian Militia to SMC, 10 July 1908; PAC, RG 24, reel C-8271, HQC 1193, Deputy Minister of Militia to Chief of the General Staff, 29 November 1911.

⁴⁹ *Minutes of the Militia Council*, 19 January 1911, paras. 5-6.

training cruiser HMCS *Rainbow* arrived there on 7 November 1910, joined the militia in condemning the base. Early in 1911 the British Columbia Marine Railway company proposed to build a modern dry dock at Esquimalt. The naval and militia staffs wanted the dock to be built at another port more suitable for development as a naval base. To this the deputy minister of the Naval Service responded, incorrectly, that under the British North America Act the Dominion government was obliged to maintain Esquimalt.⁵⁰

By August 1911 Major-General Colin Mackenzie, Otter's successor as Chief of the General Staff, had lost patience with the situation. He wanted to remove the permanent force units at Esquimalt to Halifax where the men could be properly trained; in a crisis the troops could quickly return to the west coast by rail.⁵¹ The Conservative government that came to power in the general election of September 1911 did not heed the advice, perhaps because of pressure for the refurbishment of the base from the Conservative press in Victoria, G. H. Barnard, the city's Conservative MP, and McBride, who had strongly supported Robert Borden's campaign.⁵² After visiting Victoria to proclaim the government's concern for the west coast, Colonel Sam Hughes, the minister of Militia, ruled that the garrison would be maintained and announced that the 9.2-inch guns would at long last be mounted on Signal Hill. This was a purely political decision. The object of the exercise was merely to give the battery a "finished and neat appearance"; no urgency was attached to procuring ammunition for the guns, and so little money was supplied for the work that in 1917 the fort still had only an inadequate, improvised fire control system.⁵³

Hopes that the Conservatives might improve the Pacific coast defences were scuttled by the politics of the naval question. Borden met the demands of his English Canadian supporters by giving first priority

⁵⁰ Canada, Public Archives Records Centre (hereafter, PARC), box 394884, HQC 1009 vol. 1, Military Secretary, Inter-departmental Committee (hereafter, IDC) to Director of the Naval Service, 9 August 1910; Deputy Minister of the Naval Service to Deputy Minister of Militia, 1 March 1911, proceedings 6th meeting IDC 9 January 1911; Director of the Naval Service and CGS, IDC memorandum, 17 February 1911, "Proposed Construction of a First Class Graving Dock at Esquimalt," Deputy Minister of the Naval Service to Naval Secretary IDC, 20 April 1911.

⁵¹ PAC, RG 24, reel C-8271, HQC 1193, CGS to AG, 2 August 1911.

⁵² *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 30 June 1911, p. 4, 27 August 1911, p. 2, 22 October 1911, p. 1.

⁵³ PAC, RG 24, reel C-8271, HQC 1193, CGS, memorandum, 22 November 1911, "Esquimalt, Policy in regard to" and following correspondence; Canada, National Defence Headquarters, Directorate of History (hereafter, DHist), 332.009(D740).

to an "emergency" contribution to the Royal Navy; he attempted to appease the Quebec wing of his party by not proceeding with the development of the Laurier navy, and promising to submit his "permanent" policy, that is, the construction of a Canadian fleet, to the people. Borden's English Canadian supporters, including McBride, however, pressed the Prime Minister to get on with the permanent policy so that the coasts would be secure.⁵⁴ To Borden's request for advice, the Admiralty responded in October 1912 by expanding on what the Committee of Imperial Defence had said the year before. Prince Rupert and Vancouver each needed coast batteries of 6-inch guns, while Vancouver, the best site for the development of a major naval base on the west coast, would also require a local defence flotilla of four torpedo boats and three submarines. Significantly, the Admiralty now judged that Esquimalt had value as a "subsidiary" naval base, and that the existing armament was adequate. An American attack was not a contingency worth planning for, and a massive effort would be required if it was to be taken into account. (Less ready to write off the American threat, the Canadian services were not willing to take such a positive view of Esquimalt.) More likely was Japanese abrogation of the alliance, in which case a base as strongly defended as Halifax and a dozen large destroyers would be needed.⁵⁵

The defeat of Borden's Naval Aid Bill by the Liberal majority in the Senate in May 1913 also placed his permanent policy in limbo. Aside from two diminutive British sloops, the only naval force on the Pacific coast was the obsolescent cruiser *Rainbow*, confined to port much of the time as desertion and the departure of ratings borrowed from the Royal Navy thinned her crew and the Conservative government made no effort to recruit replacements. Convinced that the government was incapable of making defence policy, the naval and militia staffs lobbied for the creation of a Canadian version of the Committee of Imperial Defence. In July 1914, a few weeks before the outbreak of war, Colonel Gwatkin, now the Chief of the General Staff, wrote prophetically to a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence secretariat: "Sooner or later there will be trouble in the North Pacific, and we shall require a

⁵⁴ Brown, *Borden*, 1, pp. 235-36; J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1912* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing, 1913), pp. 36-37; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 25 January 1912, p. 1, 31 January 1912, p. 4, 31 May 1912, p. 5; *Daily Province* (Vancouver), 25 October 1912, p. 1; PAC, Borden papers, reel C-4460, pp. 187945-50, n.s., n.d., "White Navy Memo"; *ibid.*, reel C-4348, pp. 67191-94, Sifton to White, 17 July 1912.

⁵⁵ DHist 81/744.

naval base either on the mainland of BC or on Vancouver Island [to take the place of Esquimalt]. . . . I give you solemn warning that unless you stimulate us into activity, we shall surely drift.”⁵⁶ Developments in Victoria, moreover, suggested that British Columbia was willing to take independent initiatives in default of action by the federal government. Following Borden’s decision not to complete the naval organization planned by Laurier’s administration, a group of enthusiasts formed a naval reserve company and began to drill regularly in the Esquimalt dockyard in July 1913. With support from McBride and many leading citizens, the company played a central role in persuading Borden, against the advice of his ministers from Quebec, to organize the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve in May 1914.⁵⁷

While bemoaning the absence of ships, forts and a coherent government policy, the naval and militia staffs did good work in making sure that Canada’s limited resources could be readily used to the best effect in a crisis. Mobilization began at Esquimalt when the British government despatched the “warning” telegram on 29 July 1914 and was well advanced when the “war” telegram arrived in Ottawa on 4 August. By 10 August some 530 non-permanent militia infantry and artillery had joined the permanent garrison in manning of the defences and guarding such “vulnerable points” as the city water works and power plant, the cable station at Bamfield and the wireless station at Pachena. Unfortunately, one of the 9.2-inch guns at Signal Hill was out of action for the first months of the war because part of the recoil system had been sent to England for repairs.⁵⁸

The naval situation left no room for confidence.⁵⁹ The Admiralty knew that the powerful light cruiser *Leipzig* was probably operating off the American Pacific coast, and suspected (incorrectly) that the light cruiser *Nurnberg* might be there as well. At the Admiralty’s request, *Rainbow*, with obsolete ammunition and half of her proper wartime crew, sailed south at 1 a.m. on 3 August to protect British trade and try to find

⁵⁶ PAC, RG 24, box 2541, HQS 2027 vol. 1, Gwatkin to Major S. H. Wilson, 1 July 1914.

⁵⁷ Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Vol. 1: Origins and Early Years* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1952), pp. 158-59; PAC, Borden papers, reel C-4362, pp. 78649-85, Thomas Chase-Casgraine to Louis Pelletier, 22 January 1914 and following correspondence.

⁵⁸ Sarty, “Silent Sentry,” pp. 217-18, 284-85; PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 1, DOC 11 to SMC, 10 August 1914, telegram.

⁵⁹ Naval developments on the west coast during the First World War are well covered in Tucker, *Naval Service, 1*, pp. 261-303.

Leipzig. Alarm spread through the province. Reports about the German cruisers had begun to appear in the press on 1 August; on 3 August the *Victoria Daily Colonist* published a story about *Leipzig* next to a summary of international law concerning the bombardment of coastal towns.⁶⁰ Prince Rupert's citizens, isolated from even the limited defences in the south, despatched their mayor to the provincial legislature to demand protection. Showing both daring and courage, McBride spent \$1,150,000 in provincial funds to buy two small submarines which had been built at Seattle for Chile; thanks to the Premier's initiative the vessels arrived at Esquimalt on the morning of 5 August, just as the American proclamation of neutrality that would have prevented the sale came into force. The Admiralty agreed that the submarines were a valuable addition to the coast defences, and a grateful Dominion government reimbursed the British Columbia treasury. Local volunteers trained and led by retired and reserve Royal Navy officers manned the boats.⁶¹

In the wake of this achievement, McBride made himself commander-in-chief of the Pacific coast, much to the chagrin of the services. He first took charge of the naval organization, which was in chaos. Commander Walter Hose, the senior Canadian naval officer on the coast, held dual appointments as commander of *Rainbow* and the dockyard at Esquimalt; in his absence with *Rainbow* at the outbreak of war, charge of the dockyard passed to a Royal Navy lieutenant who, overwhelmed with work and expecting the Germans to arrive at any moment, had a breakdown. On 6 August McBride insisted he take leave and arranged for another officer to take over.⁶² The militia organization was much stronger, but neither headquarters nor McBride had confidence in the district commander, Colonel Alexandre Roy, who was not a forceful personality.⁶³

As news of the enemy became more ominous, McBride took firmer hold of the defence organization. On 7-8 August *Rainbow* signalled to Ottawa that two German cruisers had been seen heading north from San Diego. *Leipzig* was indeed in the vicinity of San Francisco on 11-17 August, and made no secret of her movements, which were accurately

⁶⁰ *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 3 August 1914, p. 2; also see Moogk, *Vancouver Defended*, p. 32; *Vancouver Sun*, 6 August 1914, p. 9.

⁶¹ PAC, Borden papers, reel C-4234, p. 20770, Borden to McBride, 5 August 1914, telegram, p. 20774, Harcourt to Governor General, 9 August 1914, telegram, pp. 20785-86, E. Marsh, Admiralty to Sir George Perley, 21 August 1914.

⁶² PABC, Add Mss 347, vol. 1, file 2, p. 168, McBride to Borden, 6 August 1914, telegram, p. 170, same to same, 7 August 1914, telegram.

⁶³ PAC, RG 24, reel C-5055, HQC 854, Inspector General of the Canadian Militia to SMC, 25 October 1913.

reported in the British Columbia press. The services responded to *Rainbow's* initial warning by considering the reactivation of the British submarine mines at Esquimalt which had been dismantled in 1906, but no technicians were available to do the job. Gwatkin did, however, order Colonel Roy to prepare to call out militia units along the coast to guard the harbours where the Germans might come to demand coal.⁶⁴ On that same day, 8 August, Borden nervously wired McBride that *Rainbow* and the two British sloops based at Esquimalt "may be captured today or tomorrow," and asked if the Premier could use his connections in Seattle to find submarine mining experts.⁶⁵ This cry for help opened the way for McBride to take dramatic action. No submarine miners were to be had, but on the next day, 9 August, the Premier summoned together the senior naval and militia officers and persuaded Colonel Roy to call out immediately every militia unit in the province, not just the guards for coastal coal stocks, as Gwatkin had wished. McBride was at least as concerned about fifth columnists and public morale as about the enemy cruisers; he explained to Borden that the mobilization was necessary "in view . . . probability raids by Germans from Puget Sound cities and waters and to relieve growing tension and unrest Vancouver and Victoria. . . . Splendid results will come from mobilization both in our own and nearby American towns."⁶⁶ Borden had Hughes issue confirming orders.

Mobilization brought out two cavalry regiments and six battalions of infantry, in addition to the infantry battalion and artillery regiment already on duty at Esquimalt. Over 4,000 militiamen were now on active service in British Columbia, most of them quartered in parks and local exhibition buildings. Roughly a third of the troops were on Vancouver Island, largely in the expanded garrison at Victoria-Esquimalt. The bulk of the troops on the mainland were in the New Westminster-Vancouver area, under the command of the 23rd Infantry Brigade headquarters in Vancouver. In addition to guarding vulnerable points in the vicinity, the Vancouver garrison provided detachments for the defence of Nanaimo and Prince Rupert, and assisted units in the interior in protecting railway bridges against dynamite attack, which McBride particularly feared. Though the mobilization had been ordered for home defence, much of

⁶⁴ PAC, MG 30E51, W. G. Gwatkin papers, Gwatkin to Director of the Naval Service, 8 August 1914; PAC, RG 24, box 860, HQ 54-21-15, AG to DOC 11, 8 August 1914, telegram; PAC, RG 24, box 2503, HQS 1066 vol. 1, CGS to DOC 11, 8 August 1914, telegram, DOC 11 to CGS, 8 August 1914, telegram.

⁶⁵ PABC, Add Mss 347, vol. 1, file 7, Borden to McBride, 8 August 1914, telegram.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, McBride to Borden, 9 August 1914, telegram; also see PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 1, DOC 11 to CGS, 10 August 1914, telegram.

the public excitement had been generated by the expectation that the units would soon go overseas. As it happened, British Columbia's share of the first Canadian Expeditionary Force contingent came from the militia on active service. Some 1,700 men entrained for Valcartier, P.Q., during the last ten days of August. Further recruits, however, kept the strength of the force in British Columbia at 3,500. Vancouver's citizens were also reassured by the installation of extemporized coast batteries — two 60-pounder field guns on Point Grey and two 4-inch naval guns in Stanley Park — even though they would have had little chance of hitting an attacking ship.⁶⁷

Gwatkin, who for six years had urged the government to make precisely the preparations that would have prevented panic on the outbreak of war, was entirely unimpressed by the excitement. He himself wanted nothing more than to join his regiment at the front, and stayed in Canada only because he was indispensable to the organization of the country's military effort. There was never any doubt in his mind that the threat to the Dominion was small and that home defence measures should not interfere with the despatch of troops overseas, where the outcome of the war would be decided. As he explained to the Governor General:

Most of us, just now, are suffering from nerves; and there are some, no doubt, who are frightened. There are others who pretend to be frightened because they have axes to grind. The presence of troops being grist to the mill of tradesmen and contractors. There is much unemployment and military service offers relief. Wires are pulled; the politician sees his chance; and the journalist gets busy.

But I feel sure there is no real cause for alarm.⁶⁸

From the first, Gwatkin was determined to reverse the mobilization in British Columbia. Not having much faith in Roy, on 8 August he had despatched Major L. J. Lipsett, a British officer and trusted associate, to Victoria. Within a few days Lipsett coolly reported that the militia should be gradually demobilized with the exception of the Esquimalt defences, the Prince Rupert detachment and guards at certain essential vulnerable

⁶⁷ House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 March 1915, p. 1544; PAC, RG 24, box 452, HQ 54-21-4-1, vol. 5, strength returns for Military District No. 11, 5 and 19 September 1914; *Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1914, pp. 1, 5, 24 August 1914, p. 2, 25 August 1914, p. 2, 28 August 1914, p. 2; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 26 August 1914, p. 1; A. F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919, vol. 1 Appendices* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), p. 32; Moogk, *Vancouver Defended*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ PAC, RG 24, box 6402, HQ 95-1-11, Gwatkin to Governor General's secretary, 15 November 1914.

points which could not be adequately protected by the police. The appreciation reassured McBride, for the moment anyway, and he approved it. Gwatkin pressed Hughes who, after several weeks, agreed that Lipsett's recommendations should be carried out. On 10 September headquarters telegraphed Roy to go ahead with the demobilization.⁶⁹

The Chief of the General Staff had put his foot into a hornets' nest. On 12 September Roy plaintively wired: "By request of Premier BC a conference was held at which local federal members, commanding officers and Colonel Stuart [commanding the 23rd Infantry Brigade at Vancouver] were threatened with result men volunteering for overseas will remain mobilized."⁷⁰ No doubt it was this meeting that Dr. Walter Bapty, then a major commanding the Victoria Independent Squadron of Horse, so vividly recalled over forty years later:

... all Commanding Officers gathered in the office of the Premier ... since he was the power behind the Government, and had been responsible for the initial calling out of the Militia. When we were all seated and Sir Richard understood what was happening [concerning demobilization], he personally phoned the D.O.C., inviting him to come to the Premier's Office.

... Perhaps the poor D.O.C. should have been warned but when he walked in, his expression was a study, first coming in full assurance, then realizing he was before a court of the Premier and his own Officers, now his accusers. ... Sir Richard took things in hand, explaining everything to Col. Roy and ... getting an assurance from him that all units would remain in Camp.⁷¹

After consulting the Prime Minister and Martin Burrell, the federal Minister of Agriculture and British Columbia's representative in the cabinet, Gwatkin confirmed the orders for demobilization but told Roy "when in doubt you are to seek the advice of Sir Richard McBride."⁷² None the less, substantial reductions were carried out, largely among the forces on the mainland: the strength of the troops under the 23rd Infan-

⁶⁹ PAC, RG 24, box 2510, HQC 1509 vol. 2, CGS to DOC 10, 8 August 1914, telegram; PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 1, DOC 11 to SMC, 15 August 1914, Lipsett, 14 August 1914, "Report on the situation on the Pacific Coast," and following correspondence to 10 September 1914. PABC, Add Mss 283, file 3, "Memoirs — Walter Bapty M.D.," Part II, chap. IX, pp. 38-40, Part III, chap. I, pp. 1-4 is an excellent personal account.

⁷⁰ PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 1, DOC 11 to SMC, 12 September 1914, telegram.

⁷¹ PABC, Add Mss 283, file 3, Bapty Memoirs, Part III, chap. I, p. 2. I am grateful to Patrick Dunae for drawing my attention to the Bapty papers.

⁷² *Ibid.*, CGS to DOC 11, 14 September 1914, telegram, also see correspondence 12-14 September 1914.

try Brigade fell from 2,037 on 19 September to 1,092 on 3 October.⁷³

Demobilization met determined resistance from municipal, provincial and federal politicians. A renewal of the cruiser scare in late September was only part of the reason. Mainlanders were angry to see their garrisons run down while the island's force remained intact.⁷⁴ Militia commanders, men of no small political influence, were not about to watch the disbandment of their units without protest. Most seriously, the outbreak of war had brought British subjects from all parts of the province, Alaska, the western United States and the Pacific islands streaming into Vancouver: demobilization cast over 1,000 men into the streets and onto the welfare rolls in a city already troubled with unemployment.⁷⁵ A report from a censor in Victoria wove together the many threads of unrest in the province:

Apprehension attack general. . . . Local Hotel men say California and Washington hotel men divert tourist travel saying dangerous to come to Victoria. Excitement fostered by attitude local militia and politicians. Act and talked as if German fleet in Straits. Roy except. He cool, but baited by officers and politicians whose aid officers enlist. Barnard [G. H. Barnard, MP for Victoria] and McBride told me they consider Roy absurdly economical. . . . Unemployment one of arguments against demobilization frankly and universally used. . . .⁷⁶

British Columbia politics neutralized the best efforts of the staff officers in Victoria and Ottawa. During the first week of October Gwatkin consulted with Borden and agreed that demobilization should be stopped: up to 2,500 men would be retained on active service subject not to military needs but the employment situation.⁷⁷ Early in November, when 2,947 militia were still on duty in British Columbia, Gwatkin remarked: "In my opinion the number of men under arms is in excess of military requirements. . . . But as I believe it would be worse than useless to advo-

⁷³ PAC, RG 24, box 453, HQ 54-21-4-1 vol. 6, strength returns for Military District No. 11, 3 October 1914.

⁷⁴ E.g., PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 2, H. H. Stevens to acting Minister of Militia, 8 October 1914, telegram.

⁷⁵ PAC, RG 24, box 837, HQ 54-21-10-4; there is also much good material in PABC, Government Records 441, vol. 126, e.g., file 1, Russian, Servian and Montenegrin Committee to Cecil Hoseason, 24 August 1914, warning that 500 men in Vancouver who have offered to serve are rapidly running out of money to support themselves.

⁷⁶ PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 2, Chambers to Militia headquarters, 7 October 1914, telegram.

⁷⁷ PAC, RG 24, box 837, HQ 54-21-10-4, correspondence 2-7 October 1914.

cate any reduction, I propose to hold my peace." To this, the deputy minister responded "I entirely concur."⁷⁸

Within two weeks of the militia mobilization on 9 August the naval situation in the north Pacific had started to become much more favourable. The good news, however, was somewhat bittersweet for British Columbians and, for entirely different reasons, galling to the navy. At the height of the cruiser panic, on 12 August, McBride warned Borden that regardless of the alliance Japan would join Germany if the war did not go well for Britain. Borden sent the message, along with a note dissociating himself from McBride's views, to Winston Churchill, First Lord of Admiralty. Churchill quickly responded that Japan would soon be entering the war at Britain's side "of her own free choice. She must be welcome as a comrade and an ally. . . . entry of Japan will make Pacific absolutely safe very soon." He also asked Borden to reassure McBride with word that the Royal Navy would be sending cruisers to British Columbia.⁷⁹ The province that had taken a dim view of the Anglo-Japanese alliance was delighted to learn on 18 August that the powerful Japanese cruiser, *Izumo*, which had been in Mexican waters at the outbreak of war, was under orders to shadow *Leipzig*. Japan entered the war on 23 August and two days later *Izumo* arrived at Esquimalt to begin patrols based on that station. She was warmly received, though the *Vancouver Sun* added that the gratitude did not mean that barriers to oriental immigration would be lowered in the future.⁸⁰ Another welcome visitor turned up at Esquimalt on 30 August when the modern light cruiser, HMS *Newcastle*, arrived from the Royal Navy's China Station. Her commanding officer, Captain F. A. Powlett, as the senior naval officer in the area, took charge of all naval operations on the British Columbia coast.

Once again Naval Service headquarters was losing its grip on developments out west. At the end of September there was some chance that Admiral Graf von Spee's Pacific Squadron, which *Leipzig* had run south to join, might come north and overwhelm Powlett's three cruisers. In conference with McBride, the Canadian naval officers and Colonel Roy,

⁷⁸ PAC, RG 24, box 2513, HQC 1522 vol. 2, Gwatkin to Deputy Minister of Militia, 5 November 1914, Deputy Minister of Militia to CGS, 6 November 1914.

⁷⁹ PABC, Add Mss 347, vol. 1, file 7, McBride to Borden, 12 August 1914, telegram; PAC, Borden papers, reel C-4238, pp. 22902-03, Borden to Churchill, 13 August 1914, 2 telegrams, p. 22907, Churchill to Borden, 14 August 1914, telegram.

⁸⁰ *Daily News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), 31 July 1914, p. 1; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 18 August 1914, pp. 1, 4; *Vancouver Sun*, 18 August 1914, p. 1, 19 August 1914, p. 7, 20 August 1914, p. 7, 24 August 1914, p. 4, "Our Japanese Allies."

Powlett decided to reload the old submarine mines and hold them ready, aboard a Canadian government ship, to block the northern approach to Vancouver. He also had two 4-inch naval guns set up in a shore battery at Seymour Narrows, and torpedoes fitted on three commercial motor launches. Even though the scheme depended upon Canadian resources and used Canadian naval and military personnel, Powlett consulted only the Admiralty. Neither Naval Service nor Militia headquarters believed the danger great enough to warrant such precautions; a sharp telegram from Gwatkin prevented Roy from remobilizing the militia, but there was nothing the naval authorities could do, save to hire a retired British Rear-Admiral to command Esquimalt dockyard and watch out for headquarters' interests.⁸¹ A few days later, on 17 October 1914, Militia headquarters retired Roy eight years before he would have normally left active duty; Major A. T. Ogilvie, the artillery commander at Esquimalt, assumed the district command with the local rank of colonel.⁸²

There was another flurry of excitement in the second week of November. Intelligence suggested that von Spee was sailing towards British Columbia after his victory over Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock's cruisers at Coronel, off the coast of Chile. The naval staff at Esquimalt arranged for the submarine mines to be laid on short notice, and to have extinguished all lights that aided navigation. By this time, however, strong reinforcements, including an obsolescent Japanese battleship, a Japanese cruiser and the battlecruiser HMAS *Australia*, had hurried across the Pacific and were about to join with *Izumo* and *Newcastle* off the Mexican coast (*Rainbow* cruised to the north, acting as a communications link with Esquimalt). The German squadron in fact went around the Horn to the South Atlantic, where it was destroyed by Vice-Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee's battlecruisers near the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.⁸³

With serious danger to British Columbia at an end, the Canadian services immediately dismantled Captain Powlett's improvised defences.

⁸¹ PABC, Add Mss 347, vol. 1, file 2, p. 182, McBride to Borden, 26 September 1914, telegram; PAC, RG 24, box 3967, NSC 1047-7-5; *ibid.*, NS 1047-7-8, Captain F. A. Powlett to Secretary, Admiralty, 27 October 1914; DHist, 81/520/1440-7, Esquimalt, B.C., 1914-18, "Papers 1914-18 re appt's R-Adm W. O. Story. . . ."

⁸² Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to 1st January, 1915)*, p. 31; ———, . . . *Militia List (. . . 1st October, 1915)*, p. 432.

⁸³ DHist, Naval Historical Section, 24 March 1961, "Brief History of HMCS *Rainbow*"; PAC, RG 24, box 2967, NSC 1047-7-5, Admiral Superintendent Esquimalt to NSHQ, 8 November 1914, telegram; Great Britain, Admiralty, Training and Staff Division, "The German Cruiser Squadron in the Pacific, 1914," in *Naval Staff Monographs (Fleet Issue) vol. 1; C.B. 917* (London: 1920), pp. 115-22.

The militia garrisons in the province crept back up to some 3,500 troops in August 1915, but heavy pressure from Gwatkin and the merciless demands of the overseas effort for manpower then steadily reduced the numbers; only 1,267 militia and permanent force troops remained on duty at the end of February 1918. By that time *Rainbow* was out of action, her crew having gone to the east coast; the submarines had gone as well, and only three guns were still manned at Esquimalt. The reductions brought inevitable complaints from businessmen and local governments, but there was nothing like the furore of 1914; McBride retired as Premier in December 1915, and his successors appear to have nothing like his interest in defence.⁸⁴

What of the future? In the fall of 1914 McBride strongly supported popular demands for the expansion of the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve in British Columbia partly because he wanted to lay the foundation for a permanent coast defence organization. The Royal Navy, however, could not supply the required instructors.⁸⁵ McBride was also in touch with his friends at the Seattle shipyards in November-December 1914 making arrangements for the Americans to supply components for eight submarines which would be assembled at Yarrows yard in Esquimalt. As it happened, Borden at that time wanted to build destroyers and submarines at Vickers in Montreal for the defence of the Atlantic coast, but the Admiralty discouraged the proposal and advised that Canada should concentrate her war effort on land forces. With this news, Borden rejected McBride's scheme.⁸⁶ The Premier responded that "our great concern is that just as soon as the war ends we shall find Japan in complete control of the Pacific." At the very least additional submarines, one or two cruisers and new forts at Esquimalt and Prince Rupert were needed.⁸⁷ Borden could give only vague assurances that "a Canadian

⁸⁴ PAC, RG 24, box 494, HQ 54-21-4-160, strength return for troops in Canada, month ending 28 February 1918; PAC, RG 24, box 2503, HQS 1066 vol. 1, esp. correspondence from 7 February-3 November 1917. Significantly, in April 1916 H. H. Stevens, the Conservative MP for Vancouver who had vehemently opposed demobilization in 1914, forwarded, "but did not agree with . . . at all" a resolution from the Vancouver and New Westminster city councils opposing the removal of troops from the area: PAC, MG 27IID9, A. E. Kemp papers, vol. 111, file 32, Stevens to Kemp, 14 April 1916.

⁸⁵ J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1914* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing, 1915), pp. 704-05; PABC, Government Records 441, vol. 125, file 804-880, Vice-Admiral C. E. Kingsmill to McBride, 3 November 1914.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, J. V. Paterson to McBride, 28 November 1914, McBride to Borden, 5 December 1914, telegram, Borden to McBride, 8 December 1914, telegram.

⁸⁷ PABC, Add Mss 347, vol. 1, file 2, McBride to Hon. J. D. Hazen, 21 December 1914.

Division of a United Empire Navy” might be established.⁸⁸ The militia and the navy, however, were clear on one point: Esquimalt, with its small harbour and close proximity to the United States, had to be replaced. Throughout the war Gwatkin refused to spend large sums to improve the forts, and in 1917 and 1918 the services searched for a site for a new Pacific base.⁸⁹

After the armistice, when tensions grew between Japan and Britain and, more particularly, the United States, while anti-Japanese agitation flared up again in British Columbia, Canadian officers readily saw the “faithful ally” as a threat. From the beginning of 1919 naval and militia intelligence officers (one of the latter was fluent in Japanese) investigated reports that Japanese were crowding whites out of the British Columbia fisheries, buying strategic coastal properties, and had established a large network of army and navy agents in the province.⁹⁰ By May 1919 the naval staff had concluded “that Japan is the enemy.” With Germany, the common foe, now banished from the Pacific and the Japanese fleet able to muster superiority over the Royal Navy in the Far East, the alliance “appears to have lost its main value for us, and may be even looked upon more in the light of an encumbrance, as it is a means of embroiling us with the United States.”⁹¹

Confirmation of these views came from Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa, former Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy’s Grand Fleet and First Sea Lord at the Admiralty, who visited Canada in November-December 1919 during his tour of the Dominions to give advice on naval policy. He agreed with the Canadian staff that the Dominion should at least have light cruisers, destroyers and submarines concentrated, for the most part, on the west coast, and urged that two squadrons of naval aircraft should also be established there. Victoria-Esquimalt, Vancouver and Prince Rupert would need coast artillery, mine and anti-aircraft defences. Because the British effort in a Pacific war would be based at Singapore or Sydney, the Admiral did not think the Royal Navy would require a big dockyard in British Columbia, nor did he believe that the Canadian navy needed a new base if only light cruisers

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, file 8, Borden to McBride, 28 January 1915.

⁸⁹ PAC, RG 24, box 3846, NS 1017-12-2; PAC, RG 24, box 2541, HQS 2027 vol. 1.

⁹⁰ PAC, RG 24, reel C-5055, HQC 828 vol. 1, ff. 52-176; PAC, RG 24, box 3899, NSC 1035-3-1; also see Patricia E. Roy, “The Oriental ‘Menace’ in British Columbia” in *The Twenties in Western Canada*, ed. S. M. Trofimenkoff (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1972), pp. 243-58.

⁹¹ PAC, RG 24, box 5696, NS 1017-31-2, Naval War Staff, 28 May 1919, “Occasional Paper No. 1. Remarks on a Canadian Naval Base in the North Pacific.”

and smaller vessels were procured. Esquimalt, moreover, was still useful as an advanced base for flotillas screening the Strait of Juan de Fuca.⁹² Significantly, the senior militia artillery officers who accompanied Jellicoe judged that heavy guns mounted to the south of the existing Esquimalt forts so as to cover the strait would effectively and economically protect the main approach to the southern mainland.⁹³ Jellicoe's mission, in fact, marked the end of efforts by the Canadian forces to abandon Esquimalt. If the politicians had avoided decisions about west coast defence by mindlessly repeating British Columbia's terms of union, so too had the military treated the condemnation of the base by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1905 as gospel writ in stone.

The militia staff agreed with Jellicoe's views on coast defence while refusing to accept his contention that the contingency of war with the United States was too remote to consider. In the spring of 1920, Major-General J. H. MacBrien bluntly told senators from Nova Scotia who protested post-war reductions in Halifax's permanent garrison that "since Germany collapsed, the strategic importance of the fortress has declined: the centre of interest has shifted from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific."⁹⁴ Notes written by senior members of the militia staff in the early 1920s reflected a deep concern about the Japanese menace:

Across the Pacific Ocean there exists a virile people, industrious and war-like, with an ancient civilization modernized by contact with the Western races, but different in many fundamentals from our own.

This nation is becoming the intellectual reorganizer of untold millions in its adjoining countries, and it is not inconceivable that it will require force of arms to prevent its encroachment upon our shores.

War with the yellow races might very well mean the invasion of our Pacific provinces. . . .⁹⁵

Whether or not Japan could mount a strong attack across the Pacific, the expansion of the Japanese population in British Columbia posed a serious threat:

Low standard of living and overcome competition in any industry they

⁹² *Report of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa on Naval Mission to the Dominion of Canada (November-December 1919)*, vol. 3, pp. 3-51.

⁹³ PAC, RG 24, reel C-8272, HQC 2732, Master General of the Ordnance to CGS, 16 November 1920.

⁹⁴ PAC, RG 24, box 2324, HQS 66 vol. 11, CGS to Secretary of the Militia Department, 30 April 1920.

⁹⁵ PAC, MG 30E133, A. G. L. McNaughton papers, vol. 109, file "Otter Committee," n.s., n.d., "Draft for Otter Committee. Canadian Military Forces. General Appreciation of the Problem of Reorganization."

penetrate. Live and group in little colonies expanding like fungus driving out the European.

If left undisturbed would swamp us — ultimate annexation.⁹⁶

Thus by early 1922 the militia staff decided that a defence scheme had to be developed for mobilization against a Japanese attack. Like the naval staff, moreover, the militia staff believed that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was an embarrassment. Japanese expansion in the Pacific had brought many Canadians to regard “America as the champion of western civilization,” and the Dominion could therefore probably not remain neutral in a war between the United States and Japan.⁹⁷

Certainly the Canadian government was acutely aware that the alliance, which was extremely unpopular in the United States, threatened the Dominion’s most fundamental interests by putting the Empire and the Americans at loggerheads. Sir Robert Borden had, in the words of two recent historians, “dreamed of a world . . . in which order would be preserved by the alliance of the world’s two most powerful states, the British Empire and the United States of America. In this happy arrangement Canada would play the role of interlocutor — an American nation that could yet boast of a connection with the Old World.”⁹⁸ Arthur Meighen, Borden’s successor as leader of the Unionist government, followed in his old chief’s footsteps by stoutly resisting renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and supporting a conference of the Pacific powers at Washington. The meetings at Washington in November 1921-February 1922 replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance with treaties under which the Pacific powers agreed to consult in a crisis. In the naval limitations phase of the conference Britain conceded naval parity to the United States. Here was an acknowledgement of Britain’s declining power and America’s growing strength.

In opposing the Anglo-Japanese alliance and endorsing naval limitations, the Canadian government gave no thought to the defence of the British Columbia coast or to the Dominion’s strategic position. With the widespread anti-military spirit in post-war Canada, and the urgent need for government economy, there was no political support for an expansion of the navy, or substantial expenditures on the militia. The unionist

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, n.s., “Statement made at the Staff College on 8 December 1921, showing the relation of the Canadian Policy to the Pacific question.”

⁹⁷ PAC, RG 24, box 2643, HQS 3497, n.s., “Precis of a Lecture delivered at the Royal Military College, to the Staff College Preparatory Course, 3 February 1922.”

⁹⁸ Robert Bothwell and Norman Hillmer, *The In-between Time: Canadian External Policy in the 1930s* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970), p. 9.

government quietly shelved Jellicoe's report and slashed defence spending; Mackenzie King's Liberal administration, which came to power in the general election of December 1921, further cut the navy's budget to the point where the service could keep only two destroyers and a handful of trawler minesweepers in commission.⁹⁹ In these circumstances, the armed forces struggled to maintain the essential elements of their organizations and gave little thought to strategic questions. Esquimalt returned to its pre-war somnolence, with a small permanent garrison and a skeleton naval establishment; the station was in a worse state than it had been because much of the equipment and armament was now thoroughly obsolete, and there was less money than in 1906-14 to train non-permanent coast defence units.¹⁰⁰

British Columbians continued to believe they were facing a menacing world alone. When Mackenzie King's government began to rebuild the armed forces in 1937, the Pacific coast had first priority, but rearmament proceeded slowly. By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Victoria-Esquimalt were protected by modern fortifications; over 7,000 operational troops were available in the province and a chain of air force stations had been built along the coast. But it was not enough. There were serious deficiencies in aircraft, warships, long-range coast guns and anti-aircraft artillery.¹⁰¹ Just as they had done at the beginning of the First World War, British Columbians panicked in 1941, expressing their complete lack of confidence in the military and the federal government.¹⁰² Buffeted by demands from the province's political leaders and fearing civil violence, Ottawa despatched excessively strong reinforcements and reluctantly evacuated 22,000 people of Japanese ancestry from the coast. This was the legacy of long-standing racial prejudice, but it was also caused by years of insufficient attention to Pacific coast defence.

⁹⁹ Barry D. Hunt, "The Road to Washington: Canada and Empire Naval Defence, 1918-21" in *RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*, ed. James A. Boutilier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1982), pp. 44-61.

¹⁰⁰ Sarty, "Silent Sentry," pp. 390-402.

¹⁰¹ T. Murray Hunter, "Coast Defence in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities," *BC Studies* 28 (Winter 1975-76): 3-28; Sarty, "Silent Sentry," pp. 633-34; DHist 322.009(D401) "Military District No. 11. Daily Strength Return — Canadian Army, Active, July 23rd. 1941."

¹⁰² See, e.g., PAC, MG 26J1, William Lyon Mackenzie King papers, box 325, pp. 276657-58, *Vancouver Sun*, 13, 14 March 1942, "The Derelict Defense"; *ibid.*, pp. 277066-67, Bruce Hutchison to King, 19 March 1942.