

# **Service Cultures, Personalities, and the Struggle to Establish a Joint Headquarters in Halifax during the Second World War**

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*The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) sought to emulate their British counterparts in joint defence of convoys. However, a strange omission was the inability of Canadian aviators and sailors to come together in a joint headquarters in Halifax until July 1943 – fully five years after the British and one year after the United States. Why was this so? Many factors account for this failure. They include resource constraints, physical location issues, and communications systems considerations. However, the most important factors were service culture and individual personalities, notably conceptions regarding air-naval jointness and command and control.*

*L'Aviation royale canadienne et la Marine royale canadienne cherchaient à imiter leurs homologues britanniques dans la défense conjointe des convois. Cependant, l'incapacité des aviateurs et des marins canadiens à se réunir dans un quartier général interarmées à Halifax avant juillet 1943, cinq ans après la Grande-Bretagne et un an après les États-Unis, semblait des plus étranges. Pourquoi en était-il ainsi? De nombreux facteurs expliquent cet échec, notamment les contraintes au niveau des ressources, les questions d'emplacement physique et les considérations relatives aux systèmes de communication. Pourtant, les facteurs les plus importants étaient la culture de service et les personnalités individuelles, notamment les conceptions de l'interarmisation de l'armée et de la marine, le commandement et le contrôle.*

## Introduction

During the Battle of the Atlantic, the Western Allies struggled to protect shipping from attacks by German U-boats. Such an effort required effective jointness at the tactical level between naval escort ships and land-based air force maritime patrol aircraft. However, centralized command and control (C2) and effective jointness was also needed at the operational level.<sup>1</sup> In the Western Atlantic, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) lagged behind their British counterparts “across the pond.”

The Royal Air Force (RAF) Coastal Command-Royal Navy (RN) joint partnership was one to emulate. Part of the reason for their success against German U-boats in the eastern and mid-Atlantic during the Second World War is that their staffs effectively worked together in a centralized C2 arrangement in a joint headquarters called an Area Combined Headquarters (ACHQ).<sup>2</sup> Although the RCAF and RCN attempted to model themselves on their larger British counterparts, one strange omission was that the two Canadian services did not establish an ACHQ at the important convoy port of Halifax until July 1943 – fully five years after the British and one year after the United States. Why was this so? This article addresses the many factors that account for this development. These include resource constraints, physical location issues, and communications systems considerations. However, the most important factors were service culture and individual personalities, notably conceptions regarding air-naval jointness and C2.

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<sup>1</sup> This article uses modern doctrinal definitions of military terms to ensure currency and relevance. In this case, “jointness” or “joint” will mean two or more military services. Canadian Armed Forces, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication CFJP 3.0 – Operations Keystone*, B-GJ-005-300/FP-001, September 2011, Chapter 1, para 0101, p. 1-1. This definition contrasts with “interoperability,” which is an essential aspect of jointness and joint operations but goes far beyond two or more services to include different units, systems, partners, and actors working well together. As one recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) publication notes, interoperability is:

the ability for Allies to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational and strategic objectives. Specifically, interoperability enables forces, units and/or systems to operate together, allowing them to communicate and to share common doctrine and procedures, along with each other’s infrastructure and bases. Interoperability reduces duplication, enables pooling of resources and produces synergies among all Allies, and whenever possible with partner countries.

NATO, “Interoperability: Connecting Forces,” 11 April 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_84112.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84112.htm), accessed 26 July 2023.

<sup>2</sup> On the RN-RAF ACHQ system, see Richard Goette, “The British Joint Area Combined Headquarters Scheme and the Command and Control of Maritime Air Power,” *Royal Air Force Air Power Review* 14, no. 3 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 119-135.

In exploring these issues, it is hoped that this article will make an important contribution to the history of the RCN and the RCAF in the Battle of the Atlantic, and in particular to maritime air power history. Although some good accounts of maritime air power in the Battle of the Atlantic have been written in recent years,<sup>3</sup> for the most part this subject has been under-studied, especially compared to the naval aspects of the war against German U-boats. This is remarkable, for, as Canadian naval historian Marc Milner has observed, “it was air power, after all, which shaped the pattern of the U-boat war.” Maritime air power is not specifically naval, nor does it focus on the traditional air force history of fighters and bombers. The result, as Milner has noted, is that it has become “a subject [that] mainstream air enthusiasts ignore utterly and naval historians treat only in passing.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, as better coordination between naval and maritime air forces is a necessity in an increasingly tense international climate, it is also hoped that this article will provide insights into operational-level jointness and service relationships from which modern military forces can take lessons.

### Preparing for War

At the beginning of the Second World War, the RCAF and the RCN were still considered relatively young services. This dynamic was reflected in their service culture. As historian Roger Sarty has noted, “both were small, new services whose foundations were as yet insecure and they jealously guarded their independence.”<sup>5</sup> This factor proved to be detrimental in the efforts to establish a joint headquarters on Canada’s east coast, as it caused the RCAF and the RCN to insist on maintaining their own headquarters to ensure the independence of their commands.

As war clouds began to gather during the summer of 1939, the RCAF began planning the construction of a new headquarters in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for Eastern Air Command, its operational-level formation on Canada’s east coast. The Officer Commanding Eastern Air Command (EAC), Group

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<sup>3</sup> Examples include (but are not limited to): Chris Bell, “Air Power and the Battle of the Atlantic: Very Long Range Aircraft and the Delay in Closing the Atlantic “Air Gap,”” *Journal of Military History* 79, no. 3 (July 2015), 691-719; Roger Sarty, “The Royal Canadian Air Force’s First Catalinas and Cansos,” in *Sic Itur Ad Astra: Canadian Aerospace Power Studies Volume 6: From Hot War to Cold War*, eds. Mike Bechthold and W.A. March (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2017), 51-56.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Milner, “The Battle of the Atlantic,” in *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War*, ed. John Gooch (London: Frank Cass Publishing, 1990), 59.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Sarty, *The Maritime Defence of Canada* (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996), 206.

Captain (G/C)<sup>6</sup> N.R. Anderson, understood that the main wartime role of his maritime air<sup>7</sup> forces would be to assist the RCN in its efforts to counter the German Navy in the Western Atlantic. He therefore stressed that the “closer Eastern Air Command can work with the Navy the more efficient will be our combined forces.”<sup>8</sup> A vital consideration was a joint operations room with the navy in Halifax to coordinate the RCAF-RCN effort to protect ocean shipping from attack.

There was vacant ground next to the naval headquarters at His Majesty’s Canadian (HMC) Dockyard where a new Eastern Air Command headquarters could be erected. Anderson did not, however, feel that Eastern Air Command and the RCN should work in the *same building* in the Dockyard because he feared that such proximity to the RCN headquarters would result in his losing his authority over his command. “The individuality of the Air Command,” he

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces in the mid-1960s, the RCAF used RAF ranks based on its cultural British connection (the current RCAF essentially uses United States Air Force ranks for officers). A comparison of historical RCAF senior and flag officer ranks to today and with naval equivalents are:

Historical RCAF	Current RCAF	RCN
Air Marshal	Lieutenant-General	Vice-Admiral
Air Vice-Marshal	Major-General	Rear-Admiral
Air Commodore	Brigadier-General	Commodore
Group Captain	Colonel	Captain
Wing Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel	Commander
Squadron Leader	Major	Lieutenant-Commander

<sup>7</sup> This article conceptualizes naval air power as aircraft (fixed- and rotary-wing) that fly from ships, while maritime air power consists of fixed-wing land-based aircraft and flying boats. Maritime air power is known as maritime patrol in current military terminology. During the Second World War, the Canadian military followed the British tradition whereby naval air power was owned and operated by the navy, while the air force owned and operated maritime air power aircraft. This differed slightly from the American experience at the time: the US Navy owned and operated naval air power plus a number of land-based maritime patrol aircraft and flying boats, while the United States Army Air Forces also owned and operated some land-based maritime patrol aircraft. See: *Joint Action of the Army and the Navy*, FTP-155, Prepared and Revised by the Joint Board, 15 November 1935, RG 165, WPD 2917-35, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland (NARA); Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces In World War II, Volume I: Plans and Early Operations, January 1939-August 1942* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 62, 520; Max Schoenfeld, *Stalking the U-boat: USAAF Offensive Antisubmarine Operations in World War II* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Eastern Air Command, Air Vice-Marshal N.R. Anderson, to Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) Air Marshal L.S. Breadner, 23 August 1939, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence, Ottawa [hereafter DHH], file 181.009 (D4979). Note that at the time, military officers oftentimes used the terms “joint” and “combined” interchangeably. Anderson was referring to modern jointness. “Combined” in modern parlance refers to multilateral (two or more nations) interaction, usually in a coalition or an alliance.

explained to the RCAF Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), “must be preserved by insisting on our own Headquarters building with Flag Staff however close the building may be located to Naval Headquarters.”<sup>9</sup> Anderson therefore suggested that the RCAF contribute funds together with the RCN to construct a new air headquarters building *beside* the naval headquarters with a joint operations room built *between* the two buildings underground.<sup>10</sup> The challenge was that resources were not available at that time to construct a new headquarters next to the Dockyard for Eastern Air Command. Anderson therefore had to settle with moving his growing command organization across town into the Navy League Building at the corner of South and Barrington Streets in Halifax.<sup>11</sup> Anderson was thus able to keep his command separate from the RCN, although this did not bode well for operational-level cooperation of Eastern Air Command and the RCN protecting convoys.

### Early Efforts to Counter the Enemy Attack on Shipping

The RCAF-RCN C2 arrangement in Halifax largely remained the same until the Germans began to increase U-boat operations in the Western Atlantic in early 1942. To prepare for the onslaught, the Canadian services requested advice from the other side of the Atlantic. The British sent two experienced Coastal Command staff officers, Air Vice-Marshal (AVM) G. Bromet, RAF, and Captain G. Creasy, Royal Navy (RN), to Halifax in February 1942 to address the command situation. They immediately insisted that the Canadians form a joint headquarters, based on the British ACHQ model, where both the operational air force and naval commanders would work together side-by-side.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the commander of Eastern Air Command at the time, Air Vice-Marshal A.A.L. Cuffe, and the Canadian naval commander, Rear-Admiral G.C. Jones, still refused to leave their respective operations rooms.<sup>13</sup> Deciding against establishing a joint headquarters, Cuffe and Jones instead implemented a system of exchanging liaison officers in the operations rooms

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson to Breadner, 23 August 1939, DHH 181.009 (D4979).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> DHH 74/2 “History of Eastern Air Command,” DHH narrative (1945), 75

<sup>12</sup> Meeting between AVM Cuffe, AVM Anderson, AVM Bromet, RAF, and Captain Creasy, RN, 11 February 1942, Department of National Defence Record Group [hereafter RG] 24, Vol. 11022, file CNA 7-6-2, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (LAC).

<sup>13</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, *The Creation of a National Air Force: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force Volume II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Department of National Defence, 1986), 490. Because of the distance and poor communications between Halifax and St. John’s, Cuffe delegated operational control in Newfoundland fully to the air officer commanding no. 1 Group, Air Commodore C.M. McEwen, shortly after taking over as the air officer commanding Eastern Air Command.

of their respective command headquarters.<sup>14</sup>

This arrangement seemed to suffice for the moment. However, it was only the case because the German navy at that time was focusing the bulk of its U-boat fleet against vulnerable shipping off the American Coast.<sup>15</sup> After this successful submarine offensive, in late spring of 1942 the Germans re-directed their submarines against convoys on the main North Atlantic shipping lanes. The Canadian liaison system on the coast proved to be inefficient, as escorts complained of scanty air coverage and communications problems.<sup>16</sup> Better cooperation between Eastern Air Command and the RCN was clearly needed. The British thus sent another Coastal Command officer to Canada to assess the situation and make recommendations for improvement.<sup>17</sup>

Coastal Command staff officer Commander P.B. Martineau, RN, visited the North American east coast in October 1942. He was especially critical of the RCAF and RCN commanders' insistence of remaining in their own headquarters instead of establishing a joint operations room. After discussing the matter with the RCN and Eastern Air Command staff, Martineau was able to convince the Canadians to agree in principle that a joint operations room should be established in Halifax. Until one was in existence, they concurred that "a temporary Operations Room should be immediately provided for the conduct of RCN and RCAF anti-submarine operations."<sup>18</sup> The Naval Staff in Ottawa agreed that it was important to establish a joint operations room in Halifax. They went so far as to stress that even if the RCAF opposed establishing one in the Dockyard that this "should not be a stumbling block in the establishment of Joint Operations, as the actual location thereof was not a matter of primary importance."<sup>19</sup> As we shall soon see, the RCN operational commander in Halifax did not share this view.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting between AVM Cuffè, AVM Anderson, AVM Bromet, RAF, and Captain Creasy, RN, 11 February 1942, RG 24, Vol. 11022, file CNA 7-6-2, LAC. At the same time, an ACHQ was being built at St. John's, Newfoundland, and it was planned to have liaison officers at the headquarters of the American admiral in Argentia (Comtask 4) and the headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Air Force at Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 4, "Failure to Learn: American Antisubmarine Warfare in 1942," in *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*, eds. Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1990).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, "Review of Conditions by Local Escorts (March to September, 1942) and Suggestions for Increasing the Effectiveness," Memorandum by Commander J.M. Rowland, RN, captain of HMS *Walker*, DHH 181.002 (D121).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; Douglas, *Creation of a National Air Force*, 523.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes of Meeting held 1 and 3 November 1942, to Consider the Present Methods Employed in Anti-Submarine Warfare in the Northwestern Atlantic and to Make Recommendations for Improvement Thereof, 5 November 1942, Air Ministry [hereafter Air] file 15/217, The National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereafter TNA], Public Records office [hereafter PRO], Kew.

<sup>19</sup> 131<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Naval Staff, 5 November 1942, Naval Staff Minutes, DHH.

Cuffe immediately offered to make Eastern Air Command's current operations room into the new *joint* operations room. This could be accomplished by moving the submarine plotting room there, installing the necessary naval communications, and providing accommodation in his headquarters for the necessary naval staff.<sup>20</sup> However, it was at this time where service culture and individual personality, notably conceptions regarding air-naval jointness and C2, began to further delay the establishment of a joint RCAF-RCN headquarters.

### The Ozone in the Air?

I have sometimes found it a bit difficult to understand why an Admiral commanding from a shore-based headquarters a vast area of ocean should find it necessary to be able to smell sea-weed from his office window – any more than an Air Marshal need be able to smell kerosene. But it is always difficult to get an Admiral farther away from the sea than the west side of Whitehall ... perhaps it is the ozone in the air.

-Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief  
RAF Coastal Command<sup>21</sup>

The new RCN commander on the east coast, Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray, did not like the idea of moving to the RCAF headquarters across town in the middle of a very demanding maritime campaign. He instead felt that Eastern Air Command should come to the RCN Dockyard to form a joint operations room. In Murray's view, moving to the air force headquarters on the other side of Halifax would "sacrifice the close cooperation with the Merchant Navy with which he must be in closer contact than with the Royal Canadian Air Force." Since the navy had the most direct link to the convoy system, Murray felt that any sacrifice of this close connection would be "dearly bought."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he contended that he and his staff *must* be in the Dockyard in order to maintain the closest contact with the operations of the merchant vessels, and so that the senior officers of naval escort groups could get last minute briefings, meetings, and one final look at the charts just before sailing.

Murray then argued that Eastern Air Command had grown to be too big to either accommodate *his* entire naval staff in the air force headquarters or

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<sup>20</sup> AOC EAC, AVM Cuffe, to C.G. Power, Minister of National Defence for Air, 20 November 1942, DHH 79/184.

<sup>21</sup> Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections* (London: Cassel and Company Limited, 1956), 485.

<sup>22</sup> Commanding Officer, Atlantic Coast, Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray, to Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), Vice-Admiral P. Nelles, 30 November 1942, DHH 193.009 (D14).

for the navy to accommodate the *air force's* entire staff at the Dockyard. Moreover, Murray felt that Eastern Air Command's wide responsibility for air power operations in all of eastern Canada and Newfoundland, which included maritime air operations but also bomber, army co-operation, and air defence, plus responsibility for British Commonwealth Air Training Plan stations, would distract attention away from the efficient prosecution of war against the U-boats.<sup>23</sup> Given these reasons, the Canadian admiral advocated that a joint operations room should be set up in the Dockyard and that a separate RCAF "Coastal Command Group" focusing completely on anti-submarine warfare should be created in Halifax to work in close cooperation with himself and his staff.<sup>24</sup> Such a maritime air-focused group, however, was not feasible for the RCAF at the time.



Photograph of Rear Admiral Leonard Murray taken in April or May 1943 when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief Canadian North West Atlantic. (Department of National Defence)

The challenge had to do with the organization of the RCAF in Canada. Unlike the RAF, which was organized into functional commands (i.e., Fighter Command, Bomber Command, Coastal Command, etc.), the RCAF was organized into geographical commands. The reason for this was the size of the RCAF in Canada: because it was so small, the Air Staff felt that there

<sup>23</sup> COAC to CNS, 20 November 1942, DHH 193.009 (D14); COAC to Secretary of the Naval Board, NSHQ, 8 February 1943, DHH 81/520/8000, Box 161, File 5 "Flag Officer Atlantic Coast 1943"; W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, Michael Whitby, with Robert H. Caldwell, William Johnston, and William G.P. Rawling, *Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 2* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2007), 64. The multiple air power responsibilities of Eastern Air Command at the possible expense of the anti-submarine war were also a concern that Coastal Command staff officers Wing Commanders (W/C) S.R. Gibbs and P.F. Canning pointed out in their tour of eastern Canada and the United States the previous summer. See W/C S.R. Gibbs, RAF, "Report on Visit of EAC Halifax and RCAF Station, Dartmouth, NS," n.d. [July 1942], Air 15/217.

<sup>24</sup> COAC to CNS, 20 November 1942, DHH 193.009 (D14). To make room for Anderson's staff, Murray suggested that the RCN Captain (Destroyers) and his staff could move to the nearby Stadacona Barracks.



was simply no justification in separating it into functional groups.<sup>25</sup> Eastern Air Command would have to maintain its geographical organization and responsibility for multiple roles, including maritime air power. The result of the situation was continued RCAF-RCN disagreement on a joint operations room and headquarters throughout the winter of 1942-43.

### **Crisis in the North Atlantic**

The situation began to change in March 1943 when the western Allies met at the Atlantic Convoy Conference in Washington. With the Battle of the Atlantic reaching a crisis point, American, British, and Canadian military leaders recognized that effective, centralized C2 of joint naval-air forces in protecting shipping was a vital requirement to counter the U-boat scourge. At the conference, these leaders agreed to grant Canada operational control over all air and surface escorts in a new Canadian Northwest Atlantic theatre of operations.<sup>26</sup> One of the conditions was that the RCN and Eastern Air Command finally had to establish a joint headquarters in Halifax. RCN Chief of the Naval Staff Vice-Admiral P. Nelles was well aware of Murray's preference for having such a headquarters in the Dockyard. However, Nelles also understood that "in view of the lack of space in the Dockyard" he had to agree with the air force that it would be best if Murray moved to Eastern Air Command headquarters on across town and establish a joint headquarters there.<sup>27</sup>

Shortly after the Atlantic Convoy Conference ended, Eastern Air Command began facilitating the move of Murray and his staff to the headquarters on South Street. This included clearing out the third floor (minus the RCAF Signals Section) to make it available to the RCN. Reflecting Murray's desire for a more functional focus on maritime air power, the new commander of Eastern Air Command, Air Vice-Marshal George Owen Johnson, reorganized both his forces and his headquarters to give primary focus to the anti-submarine war. No. 12 Training Group Offices were removed from the building altogether, and a completely new building was erected on the adjoining property to house the new Filter and Fighter Operations Rooms. To address Murray's concerns

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<sup>25</sup> AVM Anderson, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (DCAS) Memorandum to Minister of National Defence for Air, 4 Feb 1943, DHH 77/528.

<sup>26</sup> The story of the establishment of the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command is well told. See, in particular, the RCN and RCAF official histories: W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, 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, Volume II, Part 1* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2002), Chapter 11; Douglas et al., *Blue Water Navy*, Chapter 12; and Douglas, *Creation of a National Air Force*, 546-551.

<sup>27</sup> CNS to COAC, 4 February 1943, LAC RG 24, Vol. 5270, S.28-1-2.

about communications facilities, the headquarters' canteen was transformed into the Naval Signals Section. Lastly, the existing RCAF Operations Room became the new Combined RCAF-RCN Operations Room, complete with a massive map of the North Atlantic on one of its walls.<sup>28</sup>

Murray, however, was unmoved. He still did not like the idea of going away from the RCN escorts and merchant vessels to go to South Street, and he did not budge from his headquarters in the Dockyard. This excuse was not good enough for the Chief of the Naval Staff. Nelles ordered Murray to move to the new joint headquarters as soon as possible. Nevertheless, citing delays in installing communications systems at the joint headquarters and insisting that "any responsibility for failure [in the anti-submarine war] falls on me," Murray argued that he "should be allowed to delay transfer to [the] A.C.H.Q. until I consider it is efficient to do so." It was therefore not until 20 July 1943 that Murray finally transferred his flag to the air force building.<sup>29</sup>

### **Flexibility is the Key to Air Power**

Air force service culture, plus C2 and operational opportunities were all factors that eventually made it easier to form the joint headquarters in Halifax. Significantly, Eastern Air Command softened its stance on maintaining the independence of its command. In February 1943, the Air Staff got word from Washington that the Americans would look more favourably at the RCAF's request to acquire Very-Long-Range B-24 Liberator maritime patrol aircraft, which would provide better air coverage for convoys farther out into the Atlantic. However, this would only be the case *if* the RCAF and RCN centralized their forces on the east coast and made one person responsible for the anti-submarine effort in the area.<sup>30</sup>

The RCAF did not want to lose this opportunity to both secure the long-

<sup>28</sup> Part of the reorganization of Eastern Air Command forces included the relaxation of "immediate readiness stand-by" for fighter aircraft because it was "tying up a considerable number of non-productive maintenance work" that was badly needed for the maritime squadrons. Furthermore, the Senior Air Staff Officer recommended that "all fighter squadrons in EAC be put on OTU [Operational Training Unit] basis with a high rate of low trainees." "Minutes of Staff Officers' Meeting in the Office of the AOC, EAC, at 1400 hours, Saturday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1943," DHH 79/193.

<sup>29</sup> Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray, Commander-in-Chief Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command (CinCCNA) to Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ), 12 July 1943 and CinCCNA to NSHQ, Admiralty, COMINCH, CinC Western Approaches, and British Admiralty Division Washington, 19 July 1943, DHH 81/520/8000, Box 161, File 5 "Flag Officer Atlantic Coast 1943"; Marc Milner, *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive against Germany's Submarines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 28; Douglas et al., *Blue Water Navy*, 65.

<sup>30</sup> Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ), Ottawa, to ROYCANAIRF [RCAF Overseas Command – the CAS at the time was in Britain], London, 4 February 1943 and AFHQ to AOC EAC, 3 February 1943, LAC RG 24, Vol. 5270, S.28-1-2.



Air Commodore G.O. Johnson (1940) by Yousuf Karsh. (Library and Archives Canada)

desired Liberators and obtain control of operations in the Northwest Atlantic under a Canadian officer. The Air Staff therefore commenced discussions with the Naval Staff on changing the joint C2 relationship between the RCAF and RN commanders in Halifax. The system they devised was that only Eastern Air Command's *anti-submarine aircraft* would be under the *operational direction* of the Commander-in-Chief of the new Canadian Northwest Atlantic theatre of operations, Rear-Admiral Murray. The commander of Eastern Air Command, Air Vice-Marshal Johnson, would therefore retain *operational control* of his forces.<sup>31</sup>

The basis that the air force utilized for this proposed C2 structure was its understanding of the RAF Coastal Command-RN ACHQ arrangement in Britain. Admiralty operational control over Coastal Command entailed the RN operational commanders being responsible for operational direction of maritime air power by stating their requirements for air coverage to the Coastal Command operational commanders. It was therefore RAF operational commanders who exercised actual operational control of their air forces – the “day-to-day detailed conduct of the air operations” – that were employed on anti-submarine operations. Coastal Command was able to operate this system by working directly with the navy commanders at joint RN/RAF ACHQs. At the operational level, Coastal Command and Royal Navy staffs worked together in the operations rooms of joint headquarters and each air and naval commander was responsible for the operational control of their own forces following cooperative consultation with their opposite number.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum from DCAS to Minister of National Defence for Air, 4 February 1943, LAC RG 24, Vol. 5270, S.28-1-2. The arrangement also included Canadian operational control of American naval and air forces. Richard Goette, “The Command and Control of Canadian and American Maritime Air Power in the Northwest Atlantic, 1941-1943,” *Canadian Military History* 26, No. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2017): 1-27.

<sup>32</sup> RCAF HQ Ottawa to AFCS Washington, 5 February 1943, DHH 77/528. For details on the RAF-RN C2 system, see Goette, “British Joint Area Combined Headquarters Scheme,” especially

The RCN Chief of the Naval Staff, however, made a key error in the wording of his letter to Murray regarding the proposed new C2 arrangement. Instead of explaining that Murray would have operational *direction* of air assets, Nelles informed him that “it is agreed by the two staffs that Murray should become the Canadian Commander-in-Chief having under his *control* all air forces assigned by the Air Officer Commanding Eastern Air Command for anti-submarine purposes in the Atlantic.”<sup>33</sup> Although nuanced, such wording was crucial, as it led to a huge disagreement between the RCAF and Murray on exactly what degree of C2 authority he had over Eastern Air Command’s anti-submarine aircraft.

### **The Importance of Maritime Air Power Expertise**

On 5 May 1943, Murray submitted an operational directive to Johnson on how to employ aircraft in the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command. Murray had a specific idea of how aircraft should be employed on convoy operations. Given that he was now responsible for all anti-submarine resources in the new command, Murray’s directive focused air operations largely on close aircraft sweeps around convoys.<sup>34</sup> Although very valuable for psychological reasons for sailors to see anti-submarine aircraft flying near the convoy, this was not necessarily the most effective use of maritime air power. The best approach was to have aircraft patrol a short distance away from the convoy just over the horizon at dusk to catch the U-boat “Wolf Packs” on the surface concentrating for a night attack.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, there were other service culture and C2 factors at play that made Murray’s directive problematic.

The timing of Murray’s action was crucial. Shortly after he issued the directive to Johnson, the Allied Anti-Submarine Survey Board visited the Canadian coast. Among the Board’s members was Coastal Command staff officer Group Captain P.F. Canning, who a year earlier had toured the Canadian east coast. He had the opportunity to view Murray’s directive, and he believed the RCN flag officer was exceeding his authority. Canning felt that Air Vice-Marshal Johnson needed to assert himself, making it “absolutely clear that he is the Master and is in complete control.”<sup>36</sup> The Coastal Command officer deemed that a large reason for the problem with Murray had to do with expertise in maritime air power

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pp. 124-126.

<sup>33</sup> CNS to COAC, 4 February 1943, LAC RG 24, Vol. 5270, S.28-1-2. Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> CinCCNA to AOCinC EAC, 5 May 1943, DHH 118.002 (D122).

<sup>35</sup> DHH 181.003 (D309), “Submarine Warfare, World War II,” Report, prepared by Wing Commander C.L. Annis, RCAF, 29 January 1943. For sailors’ accounts of the positive psychological impact of seeing maritime patrol aircraft flying over a convoy, see J. Gordon Mumford, *The Black Pit... and Beyond* (Burnstown: General Store Publishing House, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Canning to Slessor, 27 May 1943, TNA, PRO, Air 2/8400.

and C2 of it. In particular, he noted “a definite lack of full appreciation of the air problem on the part of the RCN Staff Officers at operating Headquarters” and that this was “largely due to their lack of experience in air operations.”<sup>37</sup> The problem, however, was not solely with the RCN, for Canning also noted that both the RCAF *and* RCN had “no clear understanding of the problems of control.”<sup>38</sup> This was indeed an accurate assessment: Johnson clearly did not



Operations monitoring at the Eastern Air Command HQ, Halifax, 9 January 1943 Library and Archives Canada, PL-14623

realize that Murray was overstepping his authority. In fact, Johnson had “fully agreed” with Murray’s directive; and even went further, noting that the directive “will make a good and clear working basis for our air anti-submarine operations.”<sup>39</sup>

To solve the issue, the Commander-in-Chief of RAF Coastal Command, Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, came to Halifax himself to speak with Johnson. In addition to each aviator being senior operational air force commanders responsible for major maritime air power operations, the two were also acquaintances since Johnson had served under Slessor in the First World War. Nevertheless, Slessor also understood that he had to be very careful about any Canadian perceptions of British high-handedness by the visit of such a high-ranking British officer as

himself. Thus, he noted in a letter to RAF CAS Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Johnson was “likely to pay some attention to what I have to say – though one never knows with the Canadians, they are a bit liable to get on their high horse.”<sup>40</sup> To solve this issue, or at least to bypass it, Portal suggested to Slessor that, “in order to avoid any question that the Canadians want teaching, why not arrange the visit to America first and then ask Johnson if you can drop in on your way?”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Allied Anti-Submarine Survey Board to CNS, 19 May 1943, TNA, PRO, Admiralty collection 1/13746.

<sup>38</sup> “Extract from [Allied Anti-Submarine Survey Board] Report by G/C Canning,” 27 May 1943, Portal Papers, copy in DHH 87/89.

<sup>39</sup> AOCinC EAC to CinCCNA, 10 May 1943, DHH 118.002 (D122).

<sup>40</sup> Slessor to Portal, 1 June 1943, DHH 87/89, Portal Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Portal to Slessor, 1 June 1943, DHH 87/89, Portal Papers. Emphasis in original.

Slessor agreed with this idea, adding that “they are so touchy,” and decided to arrange a visit to the United States and “stop by” at Eastern Air Command on the return voyage.<sup>42</sup>

When Slessor visited Canada in June, he spoke with both Johnson and Air Vice-Marshal Anderson, the former commander of Eastern Air Command who at the time was on the Air Staff at Air Force Headquarters in Ottawa. Anderson understood that the navy exercised *operational direction* by indicating which convoys needed protection, and Eastern Air Command made plans and issued the orders for the air coverage required by its aircraft. He therefore felt that making decisions on conducting other anti-submarine operations such as offensive sweeps against U-boats *apart* from protection of shipping was solely an Eastern Air Command responsibility and thus did not come under the operational direction of the RCN.<sup>43</sup>

Slessor agreed with this view. In describing the Coastal Command-Royal Navy C2 arrangement, he added “as I understand it (and as I think the Admiralty now understand it) the definition of operational control is that the sailor tells us the effect he wants achieved and leaves it entirely to us *how* that result is achieved.”<sup>44</sup> In Slessor’s view, Murray’s directive went “a very long way beyond anything I should expect to receive from the Admiralty.” He felt it was wrong for the RCN admiral to want Eastern Air Command to implement close escort of any convoy. Instead,

what he should tell us is that he wants that convoy protected; and he should give us an order of priority for the convoy; and he should tell us whether in his view, convoy protection at any given place or time should have priority over offensive sweeps; but how you protect [the] convoy is entirely a matter for Johnson.<sup>45</sup>

Slessor advised the RCAF officers not to raise the matter as a policy issue, but instead advised that Johnson should work it out by building a constructive working relationship with his naval counterpart in Halifax. Specifically, Johnson should “gradually try to get the thing on the right lines by the ordinary informal day-to-day discussions which will become a matter of course as soon as Murray has been winkled out of his dock yard [sic] and put in the Combined HQ in

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<sup>42</sup> Slessor to Portal, 3 June 1943, DHH 87/89, Portal Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson to Slessor, 21 June 1943, DHH 181.009 (D6734).

<sup>44</sup> Slessor to Anderson, 24 June 1943, DHH 181.009 (D6734). The astute reader will note that this sounds remarkably similar to the cornerstone air power tenet of centralized control, decentralized execution. Royal Canadian Air Force, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Air and Space Power 4th Edition*, B-GA-400-000/FP-001 (Trenton: RCAF Aerospace Warfare Centre, 2023), 2-2.

<sup>45</sup> Slessor to Anderson, 24 June 1943, DHH 181.009 (D6734). Emphasis in original.

Halifax.<sup>746</sup> The two RCAF aviators, astutely, adhered to this advice.

Anderson and Johnson were able to discuss the matter with Murray and clarify the issue. In the military documents there were no reported instances of Murray exceeding his authority by giving Johnson any more specific directives on aircraft sweeps for convoy protection.<sup>47</sup> The result was a workable and indeed successful centralized command and control organization. Murray and Johnson were able to work well together in the joint headquarters to ensure that the convoys received the air coverage they needed.

## Conclusion

Although resource constraints, physical location issues, and communications systems considerations were crucial reasons for the delay in establishing a joint headquarters in Halifax for the conduct of the maritime conflict against German U-boats, the most important factors were service culture and personalities. In particular, differing service views between Canadian sailors and aviators on air-naval jointness and C2 meant that the operational-level effectiveness between the RCAF and RCN was not as good as it could have been. This changed in July 1943 when Rear-Admiral Murray and his staff moved from the Dockyard to the ACHQ at South and Barrington Streets in Halifax. Still, the fact that it had taken so long for the two services to finally work together in the same operations room is lamentable.

The joint headquarters was the correct move. As Roger Sarty has noted, once Murray “finally did move into the new facility in the summer of 1943, his instincts for the offensive soon grasped the possibilities.”<sup>748</sup> Rear-Admiral Murray as the commander-in-chief Canadian Northwest Atlantic and Johnston as the air officer commanding-in-chief Eastern Air Command now had a centralized command structure to maximize efficiency and a common operational picture with modern communications and the latest intelligence (likely including Ultra) to ensure military effectiveness. These factors, combined with a strong operational-level working relationship in the ACHQ, enhanced RCAF-RCN jointness. As Commander Martineau reported on 6 August after a visit to the joint headquarters in Halifax, the “general situation has improved out of all recognition.... The co-operation between the RCN and RCAF is excellent.”<sup>749</sup> It was therefore not

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Murray did, however, lament that on his staff there was “no [Canadian] naval officer with a thorough understanding of air operations.” Quoted in Douglas et al., *No Higher Purpose*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Sarty, “Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray and the Battle of the Atlantic: The Professional Who Led Canada’s Citizen Sailors,” in *Warrior Chiefs: Perspectives on Senior Canadian Military Leaders*, eds. Lieutenant-Colonel Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), 184.

<sup>49</sup> Martineau quoted in Douglas et al., *Blue Water Navy*, 65.

surprising that this joint arrangement between the two Canadian services saw the successful protection of shipping from U-boat attack during the last two years of the Second World War.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, the ACHQ in Halifax had an important legacy for RCAF-RCN cooperation in maritime operations. The joint headquarters remained at the corner of South and Barrington Streets in Halifax and the two services continued to work together in the maritime defence of Canada. It became an important part of the centralized control arrangement and operational-level coordination between the RCN and the RCAF's Maritime Air Command during the Cold War.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, with the Canadian Armed Forces currently re-assessing its approach to jointness in a pan-domain environment, it is hoped that this article has provided insights into operational-level services relationships in general, and specifically those between the RCAF and RCN from which today's joint naval and air forces can learn.

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<sup>50</sup> Although shipping tonnage losses were low, the RCAF and RCN did, however, have difficulty in sinking U-boats in the Canadian Northwest Atlantic Command theatre during this time. See: Douglas et al., *Blue Water Navy*, 62-65, 100-102; Douglas, *Creation of a National Air Force*, Chapter 17; Sarty, *Maritime Defence of Canada*, Chapter 7.

<sup>51</sup> See: Peter Haydon, "Canadian Involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis Reconsidered," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* XVII, no. 2 (April 2007): 39-65; John Orr, "Some Policy Aspects of Canadian Involvement in Strategic ASW, 1945-1968," in *People, Policy and Programmes: Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> Maritime Command (MARCOM) Historical Conference (2005)*, ed. Richard H. Gimblett and Richard O. Mayne (Ottawa: Canadian Naval Heritage Team, NDHQ, 2008), 183-203; and Michael Whitby, *Canada's Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis October-November 1962* (Ottawa: Directorate of History and Heritage, 2022), <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/official-military-history-lineages/commemorative-histories/exceptional-circumstances-cuban-missile-crisis.html>.