

# **Pacific Perspective: Canada's Informal Contribution to the Maritime Defence of the British Empire**

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*This paper examines Canada's attitude and informal contributions towards the maritime defence of the British Empire from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. In the late 1850s, the Royal Navy formalized its training of officer cadets and made special arrangements for colonials to become cadets in the senior service. This paper highlights a few British Columbian born and related Royal Navy officers, how they fit in the patterns of imperial mobility of the time, and their contribution to imperial maritime defence.*

*La présente étude traite de la position du Canada et ses contributions informelles à la défense maritime de l'Empire britannique du milieu du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle au milieu du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. À la fin des années 1850, la Marine royale a officialisé la formation des élèves-officiers et a pris des dispositions spéciales pour que les colons deviennent des cadets dans le service. Cette étude met en lumière quelques officiers de la Marine royale originaires de la Colombie-Britannique ainsi que des officiers apparentés, la façon dont ils s'inscrivent dans les modèles de mobilité impériale de l'époque et leur contribution à la défense maritime impériale.*

“The histories of Canada are numerous and elaborate, but the same cannot be said with regard to the histories of Canadians. The remark refers more particularly to those of our countrymen who have entered the naval

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and military service of the Empire, and have gone abroad.” – John Hampden Burnham, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, 1 December 1890.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

When British Columbia joined the Canadian Confederation on 25 July 1871, Canada obtained a coast in the far west of the North American continent. The additional coastline provided the dominion with access to essential sea lines of communication. Moreover, it opened a part of the world with particular importance for all great powers of the time. In 1880, Canada took on a third coast when Great Britain transferred its remaining Arctic possessions to the young dominion. Canada was not the only dominion with coastlines on multiple oceans. For example, the Indian and Pacific Oceans surround Australia, while South Africa has coastlines on the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The Canadian coastlines, however, were even more widely separated, as the Northwest Passage still had to be found and the Panama Canal dug.

This paper examines Canada’s undoubtedly special place in the maritime defence of the British Empire. With two coastlines separated from each other, core geostrategic questions arise. Firstly, how was Canada’s maritime defence arranged in general? Secondly, what were the Canadian attitudes and government policies towards imperial maritime defence? Thirdly, to what extent and in what way did Canada contribute to the maritime defence of the British Empire? These questions have both a universal security political dimension and a strongly Pacific component. It is the latter component on which this paper focuses to highlight Canada’s informal contribution towards the maritime defence of the British Empire. This informal contribution was made through officer cadets recruited by the Royal Navy in British Columbia.

The recruitment of cadets born in the settler colonies as an informal contribution to imperial maritime defence has never been comprehensively studied. Yet, a recently published paper introduced a few general research findings on “Royal Navy Cadets and Officers of the Empire” to a broader audience.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to continue this research, this paper aims to combine the history of officer training in the Royal Navy with the trans-imperial mobility that existed between British Columbia and Britain. The related questions of mobility, home, and identity are becoming more important to historians to

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<sup>1</sup> John Hampden Burnham, *Canadians in the Imperial Naval and Military Service Abroad* (Toronto: Williamson & Co., 1891; reprinted in Wrocław: Amazon Fulfillment Poland for Hansebooks, 2017), iii.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Doebler, “At Home between Worlds: Royal Navy Cadets and Officers of the Empire,” *Soundings Papers* No. 22, (2021), [https://seapower.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Home\\_between\\_Worlds\\_RN\\_Cadets\\_andOfficers\\_of\\_Empire.pdf](https://seapower.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Home_between_Worlds_RN_Cadets_andOfficers_of_Empire.pdf).

better understand the modus operandi of empires. Tony Ballantyne rightly clarified that “there is a need to reconstruct the networks that structured the empire....”<sup>3</sup> Building off the work of others that have explored the “webs of empire,” this article examines some of the individuals from the settler colony of British Columbia who contributed to the imperial network formed by Royal Navy cadets and officers.<sup>4</sup>

To reconstruct this imperial officer network, this article relies heavily on the *The Navy List, corrected to the 20 March 1861*,<sup>5</sup> which contains the regulations of entry for naval cadets by the Admiralty. Furthermore, the National Archives in Kew, London, holds the service records of various Royal Navy officers held in the series “ADM 196,”<sup>6</sup> which provides the biographical data backbone for my subsequent analysis. This article also uses the conference proceedings of the Colonial and Imperial Conference, the “Papers related to a Conference between the Secretary of States for the Colonies and the Prime Ministers of Self-Governing Colonies, June to August 1902,”<sup>7</sup> the “Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907,”<sup>8</sup> and volume I of the “Minutes of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference on the subject of the Defence of the Empire in 1909.”<sup>9</sup> They give a vivid picture of the arrangements made concerning the maritime defence of the British Empire and of the dynamic discussions and policies around this foreign policy and budgetary question in the one-and-a-half decades prior to the First World War.

Unlike the officers and cadets born in the settler colonies, the recruitment of cadets by the Royal Navy in general and the establishment of naval colleges by the Dominion navies have been subject to various studies. The standard reference is John H. Beattie’s exhaustive work on the Royal Navy’s Special

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire, Locating New Zealand’s Colonial Past* (Vancouver/Toronto: UBC Press, 2012), 46.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45: Patronage, The Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the long nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Lambert and Peter Merriman, eds., *Empire and the Mobility in the long nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *The Navy List, corrected to the 20 March 1861* (London: John Murray, 1861).

<sup>6</sup> Royal Navy officers’ service records 1756-1931, ADM 196, The National Archives (TNA), Kew.

<sup>7</sup> Colonial Conference 1902, Papers related to a Conference between the Secretary of States for the Colonies and the Prime Ministers of Self-Governing Colonies, June to August 1902, CAB 18/10, TNA.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907, CAB 18/11A, TNA.

<sup>9</sup> Imperial Conference on Defence of the Empire 1909, Minutes of Proceedings, Vol. I, CAB 18/12 A, TNA.

Entry Scheme.<sup>10</sup> His thorough analysis allowed me to connect the Canadian component with the imperial umbrella context of officer training. Similar studies to what this article attempts to do can be found for other dominions, such as “Australia’s Argonauts” by Vice Admiral (ret.) Peter Jones, Royal Australian Navy (RAN), which deals with the establishment of the RAN’s naval college and its first intake, or Mary Jones’ “The Making of Royal Naval Officer Corps 1860-1914.”<sup>11</sup> Jones’ focus was on the social and geographical background of cadets from Great Britain, which, although different from any given dominion intake, allows for both context and comparison.

### **Canadian Maritime Defence After Confederation**

With the declaration of the British North America Act in 1867, the British Colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick merged with the interior colonies of Canada East (Lower) and West (Upper) into the Dominion of Canada, making it a semi-sovereign state within the British Empire. The British government realised that its North American colonies would gain sovereignty one day. Efforts were made by the British to reform the way the colonies were governed, keeping them in the Empire while simultaneously granting them more sovereignty. In his work, Nicholas Mansergh quoted assessments by John Lambton, 1st Lord of Durham, on that matter:

“The experiment of keeping the colonies and governing them well,” Lord Durham maintained, “ought to have a trial.” Even if it did, contrary to his own expectation, lead to separation then at least, there would be the satisfaction of a parting in friendship and with the assurance that “the British colonies should not be the only countries on the American continent in which the Anglo-Saxon race shall be found unfit to govern itself.”<sup>12</sup>

Durham’s opinion was both optimistic and realistic at the same time. It is not the purpose of this paper to challenge his opinion. However, it is essential to consider that Durham came to Canada as Lieutenant Governor of Lower Canada in 1838 to clarify the political situation after the Rebellions of 1837. It became rather evident in the decades to follow that the first part of his assessment materialised. The main reason for the British willingness to improve its governmental practices was the strategic value Canada provided

<sup>10</sup> John H. Beattie, *The Churchill Scheme, The Royal Naval Special Entry Cadet Scheme, 1913-1955* (privately published, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Jones, *The Making of the Royal Naval Officer Corps, 1860-1914* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1999); Peter Jones, *Australia’s Argonauts: The Remarkable Story of the First Class to Enter the Royal Australian Naval College* (West Geelong: Echo Books, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience, Vol. 1, The Durham Report to the Anglo-Irish Treaty* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 48.

to the Empire, steadily increasing in the last quarter of the century with the completion of the transcontinental railway that linked to steamship services on the Atlantic and Pacific. As Gilbert Norman Tucker wrote in his official history of the Canadian Naval Service: “From the point of view of naval strategy the primary feature of Canada’s position has been that she is closer to Europe, and except for Alaska closer to Asia, than is any other part of the North American continent.”<sup>13</sup>

The defence of the newly formed dominion was one of many elements treated in the British North America Act. On the one hand, the act clarified that “[t]he Command-in-Chief of the Land and Naval Militia, and of all Naval and Military Forces, of Canada, is hereby declared to continue and be vested in the Queen.”<sup>14</sup> The British monarch, or rather British authorities, had the right to deploy Canadian forces. On the other hand, it stated that the legislative power over “Militia, Military and Naval Service, and Defence” was exercised by the Canadian Parliament.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, these were the only two aspects concerning Canadian defence that the act regulated.

The Canadian government initially showed little to no interest in maritime affairs – at least partially a result of the fact that most of the Canadian population lived further inland and, according to Gilbert Tucker, was “oblivious” to the sea.<sup>16</sup> They were not oblivious to water in general, however. The defence of the Great Lakes as a maritime border with the United States was always of vital interest to Canadian officials, even before Confederation. As Roger Sarty vividly points out, the colonial government consistently stepped up to aid in the defence of the Great Lakes. As a result of the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856, the number of British troops in Canada was reduced to provide reinforcements in Europe. In response, the Parliament of the Province of Canada passed the Militia Act in 1855. This act enabled the colony to raise a volunteer militia and called “[...] for the establishment of seven “naval companies” at Great Lakes ports[,]” in order to man gunboats or artillery.<sup>17</sup> With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, the pressure on the defences of British North America increased again as Great Britain remained officially neutral but continued to trade with the Confederate states. The result of ever-increasing

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada – Its Official History, Volume I – Origins and Early Years* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1962), 7.

<sup>14</sup> *British North America Act, 1867*, paragraph 15, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t11.html>.

<sup>15</sup> *British North America Act, 1867*, paragraph 91, No. 7, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t13.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Sarty, “‘The Army Origin of the Royal Canadian Navy’: Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” *The Northern Mariner* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2020), 345.

tensions between Britain and the United States led the British to reinforce the garrisons along the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes frontier, but also pressed the colonies to do more. Finally, in 1864-5, the colonies did increase spending on the land militia.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this effort by the colonies was insufficient in the view of the British government, particularly when colonial leadership asked for the provision of the substantial naval forces that would be required on the lakes in the event of a major attack by the United States. The British, by contrast, thought the colony should shoulder a large share of the burden, and there the matter rested but only briefly.<sup>19</sup>

The Fenian threat that existed between 1866 and 1869 again highlighted the importance of the Great Lakes to the defence of Canada but against the lesser threat of raids rather than all out invasion. The Fenian Brotherhood aimed to attack the British colonies of North America as part of an effort to liberate Ireland from the British Empire. Colonial authorities feared attacks by armed civilian vessels on the Great Lakes. Although Canadian leaders viewed naval defence as mainly a British responsibility, the colonial government did take steps to charter steamers in case of emergency to counter possible attacks.<sup>20</sup> These measures proved necessary as a force of Fenians crossed Lake Erie and attacked Fort Erie on 1 June 1866. Mobilised militia units from Toronto and Hamilton dispatched to relieve Fort Erie and the town of Ridgeway were defeated. The naval company of Dunnville, assisted by a militia field artillery battery, tried to retake Fort Erie, but this small force was highly outnumbered by the Fenians and had to retreat. Only the Royal Navy, which dispatched a wooden steam frigate and corvette to the St. Lawrence and manned several steamers chartered by the Canadian government with navy personnel, was able to counter the Fenians. It continued to patrol the lakes for the years to come. Sarty concluded that “[t]his short, intense operation [at Fort Erie] marked not only the high point, but virtually the end of the story of the Canadian naval companies” as they were demobilised afterwards.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, the Canadian people feared a land attack from the United States more than attacks from the sea. The fact that the government focused its efforts mainly on the land militia indicates this fear. Moreover, Sarty’s study clearly indicates that the Canadian understanding of the term “maritime” differed from the British point of view: “The Canadians drew a clear distinction between imperial – maritime – interests and capabilities, and

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<sup>18</sup> Sarty, “Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” 348.

<sup>19</sup> Sarty, “Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” 350.

<sup>20</sup> Sarty, “Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” 351.

<sup>21</sup> Sarty, “Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” 352.

Canada's primarily continental interest and challenges."<sup>22</sup> The defence of the Great Lakes was one such continental interest, whereas the British government or Admiralty had a clearly imperial understanding of maritime defence. As a result, Canadian governments maintained land militia forces and fortifications on the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes frontier, but constantly refused to establish naval units for the lakes. Although the Great Lakes are more than 3000 kilometres away from the Pacific coast, this chapter of Canadian naval history is important to understand the Canadian attitude towards the maritime defence of the British Empire and, more specifically, the maritime defence of British Columbia.

Economic and infrastructure considerations also worked against Canadian action on maritime defence, as a navy was relatively expensive in its acquisition and even more costly in its maintenance. Additionally, the Canadian government repeatedly argued that it contributed to imperial defence by providing money for the railway system and relevant infrastructure. According to Sarty, this argument became a "leitmotif," as it was still used in the discussions during the colonial conference in 1902.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the Dominion could have easily appealed to the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865, which allowed the formation of colonial navies for local defence.<sup>24</sup> No application, however, ever materialised. The imperial maritime dimension of the dominion's own existence only slowly arrived in Canada's elites' collective mentality and policymaking.

The dominion's basic security continued to be provided by Britain and, from a maritime perspective, by the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy was not just forced to maintain its presence on the lakes but also at the North America and West Indies Station for maritime defence of the Atlantic coast. In case of an emergency in the area of responsibility of the North American Station, the Admiralty was able to deploy reinforcements directly from British home waters, leaving Canada at the "centre of British seapower."<sup>25</sup>

Like the North America station on the East Coast, the Royal Navy maintained a naval station on the West Coast. It was the duty of this Pacific station to defend the coast of British Columbia against any external threat. The Pacific station was formally created in 1837, protecting British interests

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<sup>22</sup> Sarty, "Canada's Maritime Defence, 1855-1918," 348.

<sup>23</sup> Sarty, "Canada's Maritime Defence, 1855-1918," 348; Colonial Conference 1902, CAB 18/10, TNA.

<sup>24</sup> GL Macandie, *The Genesis of the Royal Australian Navy* (Sydney Alfred Henry Pettifer, Government Printer, 1949), 21.

<sup>25</sup> William Johnston, William Rawling, Richard H. Gimblett and John MacFarlane, *The Seabound Coast, The Official History of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1867-1939* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 4.

mainly in the eastern part of the Pacific from its initial headquarters in Valparaiso, Chile. British influence and interests in this part of the world were constantly contested by American, French, and Russian expansion into the Pacific. Therefore, ships of the Royal Navy's Pacific Station continuously patrolled the area and established logistics sites for replenishment in San Francisco, the Hawaiian Islands, British Columbia, and other locations. The United States, of course, continuously expanded their territory westwards and threatened British interests time and again. France was focused upon the South Pacific, establishing a sphere of influence in what became the colony of French Polynesia. Still, Britain feared that France and the United States could join forces against it.<sup>26</sup> In order to strengthen the British position in the Pacific against those threats, several commanders-in-chief of the Pacific Station advocated for the establishment of additional bases, but all their requests were rejected.

Before the Crimean War, Russian, American, and British trade companies



An unknown Monmouth-class cruiser in Esquimalt Harbour in 1906. (Wikimedia Commons)

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<sup>26</sup> 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 Press, 1974), 76.



extended their influence in the North Pacific region and agreed to remain neutral in the event of war. Yet, when news about the outbreak of the Crimean War reached the Royal Navy's Pacific Station, its ships were concentrated and its commander-in-chief, Rear Admiral Price, searched the North Pacific for Russian forces. On Vancouver Island, the governor and the people were worried about a possible attack by Russian ships against the undefended colony. Governor James Douglas drafted a defence scheme, but his plans were rejected by the War Office in London and the Legislative Council of Vancouver Island.<sup>27</sup> Despite this setback, Douglas found other means to provide security of his colony: the ships of the Pacific Station continuously searched for Russian forces in the North Pacific and blocked the Russian main bases on the Kamchatka peninsula. The challenge for the Royal Navy was to supply her forces adequately over the vast distances of the region. In this situation, Governor Douglas managed to make Vancouver Island indispensable for the Royal Navy as he was able to provide supplies, coal, and facilities to treat the wounded.<sup>28</sup> Douglas made the best of his situation and provided security for his colony with the returning ships of the Pacific Station.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Douglas laid the foundation for the naval base in Esquimalt. During the Crimean War, the Royal Navy finally started to set up a naval base in Esquimalt, British Columbia. In 1865, the Pacific Station's headquarters relocated from Valparaiso to Esquimalt.<sup>29</sup> Throughout this period, the Royal Navy played an essential part in the formation of British Columbia as a colony, providing ships and personnel to retain law and order in the region during the gold rushes of the 1850s and early 1860s, and defending British interests in the region.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Pacific Station and its personnel became community members through cultural and social events such as sporting competitions.<sup>31</sup>

## Great Britain's Expectations of Canada

In the decades following the establishment of the Dominion of Canada, the British government and the Admiralty repeatedly asked Canada for greater contributions towards maritime defence. This paper will summarize these discussions, primarily based on Johnston, Rawling, Gimblett, and MacFarlane's *The Seabound Coast* and Roger Sarty's "Canada's Maritime

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<sup>27</sup> Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Gough, *The Royal Navy and the Northwest Coast of North America, 1810-1914*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Owen Spence, *A History of the Royal Navy: Empire and Imperialism* (Padstow: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 96.

Defence, 1855-1918.”

The way the Canadian government reacted to the Admiralty’s approaches was probably not what the British expected. In 1869, the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, Peter Mitchell, announced the formation of a Marine Police for protection after the Royal Navy informed the Canadian government that it would decrease its presence in North American waters.<sup>32</sup> British budget cuts also had an impact on the extension of the Esquimalt naval base in the same year and probably caused the reduction of presence.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Peter Mitchell’s creation of the Marine Police was without question a pragmatic approach to meet local needs.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Britain and the Admiralty repeatedly demanded Canadian contributions towards an integrated imperial navy. One navy was the best way to defend the Empire. The changing security, political, and strategic situation, and recent technological innovations fuelled the Admiralty’s demands. These technological advancements made warships more expensive. Moreover, other nations such as the United States and Imperial Germany, challenged Britain’s naval supremacy with ever growing fleets. The Admiralty concluded that the maturing settler colonies should take their share either through human resources, subsidies, or ships.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, the threat on both coasts of British North America was not just the growing United States Navy and the American influence in the region, but Russian influence. As previously mentioned, Russian influence in the region fed the fear of attacks against the undefended colony of Vancouver Island. Although Russian forces were inferior to British forces in the North Pacific, the fear of attack remained even after the Crimean War, as the recurring crises in the 1870s and 1880s saw Great Britain and Russia at the brink of war. As a result of concern over Russian raiders, the government in Ottawa agreed to improve British Columbian defences after its entry into Canadian Confederation in 1871. To honour the promises made, the Department of Militia sent men to build shore batteries mounted with Royal Navy guns along the coast of Esquimalt and Victoria. In his paper, Sarty elaborates: “In fact, the outcome of the Russian sea raider scare was a further commitment to land defence.”<sup>35</sup> While the improvement of British Columbian shore defences resulted, in part, from the fear of Russian raids against maritime trade and British posts along the North American West Coast, the way in which the Canadian government addressed the local security needs was how it addressed maritime defence in

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<sup>32</sup> Johnston et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Johnston et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Johnston et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Sarty, “Canada’s Maritime Defence, 1855-1918,” 359.

general. There was a motivation to defend the lakes and shores, but it was the Royal Navy's responsibility to provide ships to protect the seas beyond Canadian shores.

As the British continued to ask for contributions to imperial maritime defence, the settler colonies, especially Canada, began to recognise their local needs and developed their own views on their defence. Canada's main arguments for its effective abstention from peacetime maritime defence were its efforts to build a militia and that the Dominion's public spending was focused on the country's development. At the Colonial Conference of 1902, for instance, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier argued: "We have in Canada contributed largely to the building of the Grand Trunk, we have built the Canadian Pacific Railway almost entirely at our own cost; we are every day spending much more money on railways and public works generally."<sup>36</sup>

### Canada's Informal Contribution to Imperial Maritime Defence

Although the Canadian government refused to contribute formally to imperial maritime defence through subsidies, reserve units, or other means, there was a level of constant contribution, albeit inconspicuous and never formalised. This contribution was made indirectly, as officer cadets of Canadian origin regularly joined the Royal Navy from 1859 onwards. In 1857, the Royal Navy established the training ship HMS *Britannia* for the centralised education of officer cadets. In the *Navy List of 1861*, the Admiralty published its *Circular No. 393* of October 1859, which set out the regulations and requirements the candidates had to meet before being accepted as naval cadets of the Royal Navy. Candidates had to be no younger than 12 years of age, and no older than 14 years. Every candidate who successfully obtained a nomination for a naval cadetship was "required to pass an Examination at the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth, within three months of nomination."<sup>37</sup> The Admiralty made special arrangements for colonial candidates for the first time:

In the special cases of nominations granted to the sons of natives of Her Majesty's Colonies, a Candidate will be allowed to pass a preliminary examination on board the Flag or Senior Officer's ship on the Station; but such examination must be passed in strict accordance with these Regulations, and should the Candidate be found qualified, it will still be necessary that he should be sent to England, to be entered on board a Training Ship, where he will be subject to the same regulations as other Cadets.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Colonial Conference 1902, CAB 18/10, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> *The Navy List, corrected to the 20 March 1861*, 251.

<sup>38</sup> *The Navy List, corrected to the 20 March 1861*, 251.

The distribution of the cadetships was organised by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who performed a balancing act to divide the cadetships according to the size and importance of the colonies.<sup>39</sup> In a previous paper, it was pointed out that “we witness a gradual incorporation of the colonies into the RN’s recruitment schemes[.]”<sup>40</sup> as the number of cadetships for colonials was specified later, and adjusted from time to time. This recruitment continued at least until 1955, with the termination of the Royal Navy’s *Special Entry Scheme*, which will be discussed later in this article.

As mentioned in the introduction, the recruitment of this particular group of cadets has been largely neglected. In the case of Canada, John Hampden Burnham made what was probably the first effort to compile the names and stories of Canadian-born officers. In his rather patriotic publication, of which the quote at the beginning of this paper was taken, he asserted that “[in] visiting the chief libraries it was found that information concerning the subject of this little book is surprisingly scant.”<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, there are no listing of the individuals who joined the Royal Navy as officer cadets from the settler colonies. Therefore, it remains difficult to gather biographical information needed for a comprehensive study even by modern means of research. In the case of Burnham’s collection, the accounts for the different personalities vary in length from a few pages down to a few lines. Although Burnham acknowledged the limitations of his work, he argued that “[it] is a sort of treason to the spirit of a people that the memories of the brave should remain uncherished.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, he gathered the information but did not analyse it within a broader context.

One to whom Burnham was able to dedicate at least one page of his book become one of the best-known Canadians of that particular group of colonial cadets: Charles Edmund Kingsmill, who eventually rose to the rank of admiral.<sup>43</sup> He was born in 1855 in Guelph, Ontario and joined the service as a cadet of HMS *Britannia* in 1868. Kingsmill, the offspring of a well-connected family of Ontario, rose through the ranks in the Royal Navy to rear admiral and served on various ships and stations of the Royal Navy. Amongst others, he served on various ships of the East Indies Station, the China Station, and repeatedly of the Australia Station.<sup>44</sup> After the turn of the century, he became commanding officer of HMS *Dominion* and HMS *Repulse* before retiring

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<sup>39</sup> Doebler, *At Home between Worlds*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Doebler, *At Home between Worlds*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Burnham, *Canadians in the Imperial Naval and Military Service Abroad*, iii.

<sup>42</sup> Burnham, *Canadians in the Imperial Naval and Military Service Abroad*, v.

<sup>43</sup> Burnham, *Canadians in the Imperial Naval and Military Service Abroad*, 199.

<sup>44</sup> WAB Douglas, “Kingsmill, Sir Charles Edmund,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 16 (1931-1940), [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/kingsmill\\_charles\\_edmund\\_16E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/kingsmill_charles_edmund_16E.html)

from the Royal Navy in 1908 and taking up the post of Director of the Naval Service in 1910.<sup>45</sup>

One reason why Kingsmill transferred to Canada might have been his connection to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier. Kingsmill and Laurier met during his time as commanding officer of HMS *Dominion*, on which he took a goodwill cruise to Canada in 1906. *Dominion* ran aground during the visit to Quebec, but no one was harmed. Later, Kingsmill and his navigation officer were court-martialled and, in May 1907, Kingsmill was transferred to the much older battleship HMS



Admiral Sir Charles E. Kingsmill (Library and Archives Canada / 1937-179-1)

*Repulse* in the Reserve Fleet. In his entry on Kingsmill in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, W.A.B. Douglas concluded:

“This demotion was no doubt related to the grounding of the *Dominion*, but the fact that Kingsmill received another command at all could be regarded as an expression of confidence in him, given that the Reserve Fleet was the creation of Sir John Fisher, the first sea lord of the Admiralty...”<sup>46</sup>

Later that year Captain Kingsmill and Prime Minister Laurier met again, during the Imperial Conference of 1907 and had dinner together. Douglas states that “[it] is not known what was said between them on that occasion, but it is clear that Kingsmill, whose qualifications to develop a Canadian navy were unmatched by those of any other person with strong ties to the country, retained the prime minister’s good opinion.”<sup>47</sup> With almost forty years in service of the Royal Navy, during which he served on several major stations and different classes of ships, Kingsmill’s suitability to serve as the head for a future naval service is hardly questionable. However, it was not just about his abilities. There were other Canadian-born Royal Navy officers of nearly

<sup>45</sup> Richard H. Gimblett, “Admiral Sir Charles E. Kingsmill: Forgotten Father,” in *The Admirals, Canada’s Senior Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Michael Withby, Richard H. Gimblett, and Peter Haydon (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), 31-53.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas, “Kingsmill.”

<sup>47</sup> Douglas, “Kingsmill.”

the same age and the same set of skills and experiences, such as Rear Admiral John Denison and Admiral Dudley Rawson Stratford de Chair. Both admirals held influential appointments: Denison served as commanding officer of the royal yacht HMY *Victoria and Albert* from 1893 until 1896 and later as naval aide-de-camp to King Edward VII between 1905 and 1906,<sup>48</sup> while Admiral de Chair went on to become Governor of New South Wales in 1924.<sup>49</sup> Laurier's patronage is therefore the likely reason for Kingsmill's transfer opportunity.

According to Zoë Laidlaw, patronage and the networks to exercise it were "important for an era of small formal government when non-governmental lobbyists could play a critical part in decision-making."<sup>50</sup> Laidlaw's work is focused on the nineteenth century, so she is mainly referring to colonial rule and networks between the metropole and the periphery before the establishment of self-governing colonies. Laidlaw notes that:

Two basic varieties of bonds between individuals are considered in Colonial connections: those which gave rise to symmetric relationships; and those which did not. In the first category (which includes many family relationships and connections between missionaries in the field or military comrades) individuals were roughly equal in standing and power. When one individual acted on behalf of another within a social network it was because of friendship, family obligation or common outlook. ... Asymmetric relationships were those where one individual was subordinate to the other. Examples of asymmetric relationships include those between a high-ranking officer and his former aide-de-camp, or between a metropolitan civil servant and a colonial recipient of his patronage. ...<sup>51</sup>

The case of Kingsmill indicates that both relationship categories may apply simultaneously. Clearly, there was an asymmetric momentum, as the captain was subordinate to the prime minister, however, as Richard Gimblett has pointed out, "Laurier ... appears to have taken to him [Kingsmill] immediately, the ice perhaps having been broken in the knowledge that his uncle, Nicol Kingsmill, was a prominent Toronto lawyer – and good Liberal – with whom Laurier had had business dealings over the years."<sup>52</sup> For this reason there may have also been a symmetric aspect in their relationship.

To retain the focus on the Pacific and British Columbia, it is essential to mention Royal Navy officers born in Canada's most western province.

<sup>48</sup> David Gagan, *The Denison Family of Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973, reprinted paperback 2017), 31; Denison, John, ADM 196/19/126, TNA.

<sup>49</sup> Dudley Rawson de Chair, ADM 196/42/264, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Gimblett, "Admiral Sir Charles E. Kingsmill: Forgotten Father," 39.

Though there is no proper biography of him available, one British Columbian who joined the Royal Navy and likewise rose through its ranks was Vice Admiral Harold Tom Baillie-Grohman. Baillie-Grohman was born in 1888 in Victoria,<sup>53</sup> the son of an Anglo-Austrian author, and he joined the Royal Navy in 1903. During the First World War, he served on minesweeping vessels and held different sea and shore postings afterwards. Before he retired in 1946, Baillie-Grohman became the Flag Officer in Command of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany at the end of the Second World War.<sup>54</sup> Of course, not every cadet or officer spent his whole career in the service of the Royal Navy. Two famous British Columbians with a more complicated career path than Baillie-Grohman were Captain Frederic Thornton “Fritz” Peters and Captain James Douglas Prentice.

Captain Peters, who received the Distinguished Service Order (1915), the Distinguished Service Cross (1918) and Bar (1940), and, posthumously, the United States Army’s Distinguished Service Cross (1942) and the Victoria Cross (1943) for acts of gallantry during his naval service, is considered one of the highest decorated Canadians of all time.<sup>55</sup> Peters was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island on 17 September 1889, to Frederick Peters, a lawyer and later Premier of Prince Edward Island. However, Peters is associated with British Columbia as his family moved to Victoria in 1898, following gold discoveries in the Klondike Creek.<sup>56</sup> His motivation to join the Royal Navy probably originated from the proximity of his new home in Oak Bay, Victoria to the Esquimalt Naval Base, where he was able to observe the ships of the Pacific Station. Furthermore, the influence of his father’s cousin, Colonel James Peters, District Officer Commanding, British Columbia enabled “Fritz” Peters to visit the ships, occasionally.<sup>57</sup> In 1900, his parents sent “Fritz” and one of his younger brothers back to Britain, where they studied at Bedford Grammar School, north of London. It was common practice for colonial families to send their offspring to Britain for further education. His mother’s stepmother used to live in Bedford at that time, and Sam McBride notes in his biography on “Fritz” that the Peters’ boys stayed with her rather than boarding at the school,

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<sup>53</sup> Harold Tom Baillie-Grohman, ADM 196/51/316, TNA.

<sup>54</sup> “Baillie-Grohman, Harold Tom,” *The Nauticapedia*, 18 July 2015, <https://www.nauticapedia.ca/dbase/Query/Biolist3.php?name=Baillie-Grohman,%20Harold%20Tom&id=20080&Page=1&input=Baillie-Grohman,%20Harold%20Tom>.

<sup>55</sup> Sam McBride, “Captain Frederic Thornton Peters, VC, DSO, DSC and Bar, DSC (U.S.), RN,” *CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum*, <https://navalandmilitarymuseum.org/article/captain-frederic-thornton-peters/>.

<sup>56</sup> Sam McBride, *The Bravest Canadian Fritz Peters, VC, The Making of a Hero of two World Wars* (Vancouver: Grainville Island Publishing), 6.

<sup>57</sup> McBride, *The Bravest Canadian Fritz Peters, VC*, 11.

due to financial difficulties of their parents.<sup>58</sup> The following year “Fritz” went on to Cordwalles Boy School in Maidenhead, Berkshire, an institution preparing boys for the Royal Navy’s officer training.

In January 1905, Peters was accepted as a naval cadet and trained at HMS *Britannia*. His subsequent service in the navy was intermittent. After graduating from HMS *Britannia*, Peters served in the Channel Fleet and the China Station until 1912. He then returned to British Columbia to search for a



Commander (later Captain) James Douglas  
“Chummy” Prentice, RCN (Wikimedia Commons)

new profession. Still, he resumed his service in the navy after the outbreak of the First World War, during which he served on and commanded several destroyers. After the war the Royal Navy introduced retirement schemes to reduce its personnel. Peters, despite being asked to continue serving, resigned his commission in 1920. He did not settle down during the interwar years but lived and worked alternately in Britain and the Gold Coast Colony in West Africa, nowadays Ghana. In 1939, he re-joined the navy after the outbreak of the Second World War. Initially, commanding a flotilla of anti-submarine trawlers, “Fritz” transferred back and forth between frontline service in the Royal Navy and Section D of the British Secret Intelligence Service. He died in late 1942 after participating in the Allied landings in Northern Africa and leading the attempt to retake the port of Oran on the Algerian coast from Vichy French forces during Operation Reservist. He earned both the Victoria Cross and the United States Army’s Distinguished Service Cross for this action. During this action, he was captured, but freed after the arrival of American troops. “Tragically, three days later, on Friday, November 13, 1942 he died when the Sunderland flying boat transporting him from Gibraltar back to England encountered fierce headwinds and then heavy fog and instrument failure that resulted in the plane crashing into Plymouth Sound, flipping over and splitting apart.”<sup>59</sup> Celebrations and public recognition usually accompany the awarding of the Victoria Cross, but in his case the Victoria Cross arrived rather unspectacularly by mail at his mother’s residence. According to McBride, British authorities tried to draw the curtain over Captain Frederick

<sup>58</sup> McBride, *The Bravest Canadian Fritz Peters, VC*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> McBride, “Captain Frederic Thornton Peters, VC, DSO, DSC and Bar, DSC (U.S.), RN.”



Thornton Peters' decoration to avoid offending their French allies.<sup>60</sup>

The other naval officer with interrupted naval service that should be mentioned in this paper is Captain James Douglas Prentice. Prentice was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1899 and joined the Royal Navy in 1912. According to an article written by Marc Milner in 2008, his father discouraged him from joining the Royal Canadian Navy.<sup>61</sup> After more than twenty years, Prentice retired from the Royal Navy in 1934, when it seemed impossible for him to obtain a promotion. In 1939, however, after working as a farmer in British Columbia, he joined the Royal Canadian Navy in September after the outbreak of the Second World War. Prentice is mainly remembered for his service with the Royal Canadian Navy corvettes and his successes in the Battle of the Atlantic against German submarines. He achieved the rank of Captain and retired in 1946.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Formation of the Royal Canadian Navy and its Officer Training**

In the early twentieth century, the Canadian government finally undertook the creation of a naval force due to the growing German naval threat. When the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Reginald McKenna introduced the Fleet Unit Concept during the 1909 Imperial Defence Conference, Sir Frederick William Borden, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, rejected it initially. The concept envisaged that Canada and Australia would each build a Fleet Unit of one battlecruiser, three light cruisers, and several destroyers and submarines to relieve British warships in the Pacific for service in European waters. Borden argued that Canada had to defend two coasts, and therefore the Pacific Fleet Unit concept would not meet Canadian needs.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, this time Canada was not entirely unwilling to contribute towards imperial defence, as Borden declared earlier at the conference, "The House [the Canadian Parliament] cordially approve of any necessary expenditure designed to promote the speedy organisation of a Canadian Naval Service in co-operation with and in close relation to the Imperial Navy, along the lines

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<sup>60</sup> McBride, "Captain Frederic Thornton Peters, VC, DSO, DSC and Bar, DSC (U.S.), RN."

<sup>61</sup> Marc Milner "The Newfoundland Escort Force: Navy, Part 29," *LEGION: Canada's Military History Magazine*, 3 October 2008, <https://legionmagazine.com/the-newfoundland-escort-force/>.

<sup>62</sup> James Douglas Prentice, ADM 196/121/196, TNA.

<sup>63</sup> Imperial Conference on Defence of the Empire 1909, CAB 18/12A, TNA, 41: "I think we are bound to consider local conditions in the different Dominions, at any rate we must do it in Canada. We have two coasts; we have the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts, separated by 4,000 miles of territory, and I take it that it would not be at all in accordance with, and it would not satisfy in any regard the ambitions of the Canadian people to a place a Naval unit on one ocean and rely entirely upon the protection to be derived from the great Navy on the other ocean. [...]"

suggested by the Admiralty at the last Imperial Conference.”<sup>64</sup> During the Imperial Conference in 1907, the Admiralty suggested that the Dominions form naval services of their own, consisting of destroyers and submarines.<sup>65</sup> The Canadian Parliament passed the Naval Service Act on 4 May 1910, which created the Department of Naval Service with “a permanent naval force of full-time personnel and the establishment of a naval college to develop Canadian professional officers.”<sup>66</sup> The Royal Navy College of Canada (RNCC) had in fact already opened in January 1910, in anticipation of the enabling legislation, indicating the importance to the government of the the training of Canadian naval officers.

In his book, Gilbert Norman Tucker elaborated that the college provided accommodation for about forty-five cadets from fourteen to sixteen years of age. Similar to HMS *Britannia* and its successor, the Britannia Royal Naval College in the Royal Navy, the cadets had to be examined by the Civil Service Commission before their entry and undertake two years of training at the RCNC.<sup>67</sup> The first intake of cadets arrived in 1911, and despite the outbreak of the First World War, the training continued in Halifax until 1917. At the end of the year, the college was forced to move to Kingston, Ontario, and later to Esquimalt, British Columbia. This was due to an explosion of the freighter SS *Mont-Blanc* in Halifax dockyard on 6 December 1917, which severely damaged the college site.<sup>68</sup>

After the armistice in November 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles, the Canadian government drastically reduced the army and navy. On the future of the navy, there was expert advice from British Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe who in 1919 visited the dominions and India in the battlecruiser HMS *New Zealand*. On his arrival in Esquimalt in late 1919 and during his stay in Canada, he made recommendations on the future size of the navy, its standard of training, its equipment, and the naval college, which he argued should remain active.<sup>69</sup>

In Esquimalt, HMCS *Rainbow* initially served as accommodation for the cadets of the naval college, as a suitable location for a new college site yet had to be found. Through the demobilisation after the First World War and the reduction of personnel from around 1300 down to around 500 officers and ratings, the college remained in Esquimalt in its temporary conditions.

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<sup>64</sup> Imperial Conference on Defence of the Empire 1909, CAB 18/12A, TNA, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907, 18/11A, TNA, 130.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Sarty, “Naval Service Act,” *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/naval-service-act>.

<sup>67</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 155.

<sup>68</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 231-233.

<sup>69</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 323 ff.

Eventually, George P. Graham, minister of the Naval Service, announced the closure of the college in May 1922.<sup>70</sup> From 1911 to 1922, Canada not just maintained its own navy but simultaneously trained its own naval officer cadets.

This circumstance did not mean that the Royal Canadian Navy stopped recruiting cadets for its navy. To maintain its relatively small naval force, Canada continued to recruit small numbers of cadets. Those cadets were sent to Great Britain for their training, quite like in the times before the formation of the Royal Canadian Navy. In Britain, the cadets joined the intakes of the Special Entry Cadet Scheme from January 1924 onwards. As First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill introduced this recruitment scheme in 1913 and aimed to recruit older cadets, graduated from public schools, to expand the Royal Navy's officer corps.<sup>71</sup> After the First World War, the Royal Navy was also downsized, but this scheme provided the possibility for several colonials to join the senior service. The Canadian example highlights that the dominion navies used the scheme to send their cadets to Britain for training. According to John H. Beattie, a total of "138 Royal Canadian Navy cadets (RCN) Cadets trained with the Special Entry from 1924 to 1941 and 21 of these became admirals in the RCN."<sup>72</sup> Rear Admiral Brian Roff Spencer, RCN, of Alberni, British Columbia, was among the first four Canadians who commenced their training in Great Britain from 1924 onwards. This practice continued until 1941, when the Royal Canadian Navy opened the Royal Canadian Naval College in 1941/42 near Esquimalt. Like the Royal Navy cadets of Canadian origin, the cadets of the Royal Canadian Navy who trained as part of the Special Entry Scheme exercised mobility, as they had to leave their home dominion. They also served on board British ships as part of their training, but they returned to Canada after completing their training.

The formation of the Royal Canadian Navy and the establishment of a Canadian naval college in 1910 did not mean that the informal contribution to the British service in the form of cadet recruitment stopped. As mentioned above, the story of Captain James Douglas Prentice, who joined the navy in 1912, highlights that the Royal Navy continued to accept cadets from the dominions, although Australia and Canada began to train their own cadets. Commander James Campbell Clouston, who Rick Munroe named "Canada's unsung hero of the Dunkirk evacuation," in a *Toronto Star* headline in 2017,<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 324.

<sup>71</sup> Beattie, *The Churchill Scheme*, 27. Other than in the "Selbourne Scheme," the Royal Navy sought to recruit not twelve- or thirteen-year-old boys, but young adults between the ages of seventeen and eighteen.

<sup>72</sup> Beattie, *The Churchill Scheme*, 55.

<sup>73</sup> Rick Munroe, "Canada's unsung hero of the Dunkirk evacuation," *Toronto Star*, 7 August

was another cadet who joined the Royal Navy after the establishment of the Royal Canadian Navy's naval college. James Clouston was born in Montreal, Ontario and joined the Royal Navy as Special Entry Cadet in October 1918, rising through the ranks to become commander in 1934.<sup>74</sup> During his service in the Royal Navy, he served among others on board the light cruiser HMS *Capetown* which was part of the America and West Indies Station. Later Clouston was a gunnery instructor at the shore establishment HMS *Excellent*, near Portsmouth. In that position, he participated in the Dunkirk evacuation, where he organised the evacuation from the beach. On 2 June 1940, he died while waiting to be rescued after the Royal Air Force rescue boat on which he was underway was attacked by German Ju 87 Stukas.<sup>75</sup> Clouston's younger brother, William Stratford Clouston, who was also born in Montreal, joined the Royal Navy similarly as a Special Entry Cadet in 1926.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Royal Navy's Officer Training as an Example of Trans-Imperial Mobility**

The reasons why Canadians still joined the Royal Navy rather than the Royal Canadian Navy after 1910 were varied. The example of Captain James Prentice highlights that there were still parents who would send their sons to Britain to become naval officers rather than let them join the Royal Canadian Navy. For most parts of the Empire, the Royal Navy played an important role in developing the colonies. While the Royal Navy provided security and safeguarded British interests, it was also a driving force for economic and social developments in colonial societies. As the example of Captain Frederick Thornton Peters highlights, the proximity of the Royal Navy in the coastal communities of the colonies very much influenced the decision to commence the training to become a naval officer.

The recruitment of officer cadets in Canada before 1910 highlights the need to distinguish between the government's official opinion and public opinion on imperial maritime defence. Without a degree of acceptance for Royal Navy service in Canadian society, cadet recruitment probably would have been impossible. One reason for this acceptance might be that most of Canada's major coastal cities lay in relatively close proximity of a Royal Navy base, experienced some degree of naval activity, or were at least influenced by the sea in daily life. As highlighted above, Captain "Fritz" Peters' motivation

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<sup>74</sup> *The London Gazette*, 1 January 1935, 59.

<sup>75</sup> Walter Lord, *Miracle of Dunkirk: The True Story of Operation Dynamo* (New York: Open Road Media, Reprint 2017), 242 f.

<sup>76</sup> William Stratford Clouston, ADM 196/150/401, TNA.

to join the Royal Navy originated in the proximity of his home to the Esquimalt Naval Base. In their book, Johnston, Rawling, Gimblett, and MacFarlane described with some detail the examples of Halifax on the eastern seaboard and Victoria in the west:

At the other end of the country, Victoria nominally enjoyed a similar relationship with the British service, having the headquarters of the commander-in-chief of the Pacific station in nearby Esquimalt, but in fact the link was much more tenuous. The naval harbour was good, although much smaller than Halifax, and physically separated from the commercial port and social centre of Victoria by a three-mile dirt road. If the climate was more pleasant than Halifax, that was more than offset by the port's isolation.<sup>77</sup>

Another reason for Canadian interest in the Royal Navy might have been the navalism that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Today, navalism is closely linked to the work of the United States Navy Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, who is famous for the books *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890) and *The Interest of America in Sea Power* (1897). Although his focus lies with developments in the United States as a maritime power, his books were well received, for example, in Germany, as well as in Great Britain and its colonies. As a result, the Navy League was formed, which was just one league amongst different associations promoting naval affairs. These movements not only found support in Great Britain, but in the colonies, as well, where they tried to promote the ideas of a federated Empire and naval contribution: "This strange mix of nationalist and imperialist enthusiasm was also evident in Canada. When branches of the Navy League were established in Toronto in December 1895 (in fact, the first branch to be established outside Britain) and Victoria in March 1901, many of their founding members were imperial federationists."<sup>78</sup> Mahan's books and the developments they triggered in Britain and across the British Empire are good examples of how information and knowledge spread between the motherland and the colonies, and vice versa. The New Zealand historian Tony Ballantyne used the metaphor of the webs that braided the empire and simultaneously connected its different parts. In his view webs provide the opportunity to examine not just the connection between metropole and periphery, "the web [rather] reinforces the multiple positions that any given colony, city, community ... might occupy."<sup>79</sup> It was not just ideas and knowledge that passed through these webs and networks, however, but also people who moved from one part of the Empire to another.

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<sup>77</sup> Johnston et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Johnston et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 38.

<sup>79</sup> Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, 46.

Yet, the cadets that went to Great Britain to become naval officers fit perfectly into the mobility patterns characteristic of the British Empire of the nineteenth and early parts of the twentieth centuries. As mentioned in the introduction, for historians, the study of trans-imperial mobility is linked to developing a better understanding of the *modi operandi* of Empires. Two prominent reasons for the mobility between the various parts of the Empire were marriage and education.<sup>80</sup> The latter mostly applied to the cadets, although some of them married in Britain during their lives. While serving with the Royal Navy, cadets and officers stayed connected with their colonies of birth over the vast distances of the Empire. Captain James Douglas Prentice, who retired from the Royal Navy and returned to British Columbia, is an excellent example of how this connection remained intact. In contrast, Captain Frederick Peters, after he departed for Britain in 1900, only returned home briefly before the outbreak of First World War and for his father's funeral in 1919. Although he had plans to return home, he stayed in touch with his relatives in British Columbia by writing letters. Instead of returning to British Columbia permanently, Peters worked and lived in Great Britain and Africa, before re-joining the Navy in the Second World War: "Some of Fritz's friends noticed a pattern with Fritz in the twenties and thirties. He would go to Gold Coast for two or three years to make money, and then come back to England for enjoyable reunions with his navy buddies, returning to Africa when his money ran out."<sup>81</sup> With the prospect of earning money, Captain Peters habits highlight the most common motivations for mobility throughout the history of humankind: wealth and prosperity.

At times, trans-imperial mobility was neither motivated by education and marriage nor by the wish to amass a fortune, but merely by the wish to serve in the His Majesty's armed forces to defend the British Empire. Another recipient of the famous Victoria Cross was Commander Rowland Bourke of Nelson, British Columbia. Bourke, who was born in 1885 in London, came to British Columbia rather late at the age of 17. "When World War One broke out, he left the family fruit farm and volunteered to enlist in the Canadian forces, but was rejected in all three arms of service because of defective eyesight. Undaunted, he returned to England at his own expense and successfully joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve to serve on the motor launches."<sup>82</sup> In this way, Bourke showed an extremely high degree of mobility, and his story highlights again that such mobility was possible from and to the centre of the Empire. He continued to serve throughout the First World War and participated

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<sup>80</sup> Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> McBride, *The Bravest Canadian Fritz Peters, VC*, 72.

<sup>82</sup> CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum, "Commander Rowland Bourke," n.d., <https://navalandmilitarymuseum.org/article/commander-rowland-bourke/>.

in the famous Zeebrugge Raids in April 1918, for which he was bestowed with the Victoria Cross. After the war, Rowland Bourke remained similarly mobile and returned to British Columbia. Though he was demobilised, he started to work at HMC Dockyard in Esquimalt and stayed engaged with the reserves. In the Second World War, he remained in British Columbia but was active as a recruiting officer and then as commander of the naval trawler HMCS *Givenchy*.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to illustrate the attitude the young Dominion of Canada had towards imperial maritime defence. The Dominion's own assessment retained a Canadian outlook, and its politico-military elites were reluctant to adopt British imperial premises and conceptions aimed at the defence of the whole Empire and by logical extension Canada as well. It has become evident that the Dominion's domestic development was of the highest priority to the government in Ottawa. Matters of maritime defence remained marginal by comparison and only gained importance in war and conflict. In this respect, the Dominion of Canada retained the self-conception of a land power not necessarily at ease with the maritime dimension of its geostrategic situation. The general willingness of Britain to assume responsibility for Canada's maritime defence enhanced this attitude and disposition. The primary strategic and logistical expression of the British involvement were the two Royal Navy stations in proximity of the Dominion, one on each of the North American coasts.<sup>84</sup>

Given Canada's continuous rejection of British naval defence, it is

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<sup>83</sup> CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum, "Commander Rowland Bourke," n.d., <https://navalandmilitarymuseum.org/article/commander-rowland-bourke/>.

<sup>84</sup> Canada was quite different from other Dominions such as Australia and New Zealand, which contributed substantially towards imperial maritime defence through respective naval agreements. Another difference from Australia, which established its own navy in the same year as Canada, or New Zealand, which did not have its own navy until 1941, is to be found in the fact that Canada, or more specifically the Royal Canadian Navy, succeeded in placing one of its own at the helm and heart of the imperial defence: Admiral Percy Nelles in 1933. Moreover, Nelles, the third head of the RCN, was the first who solely served in the RCN. In this respect, Canada established itself more swiftly as an indirect player in imperial naval policy and command, compared to Australia and the Royal Australian Navy. The Royal Australian Navy employed officers of Australian origin as commanders of the fleet from 1919 onwards but had its first solely Australian Chief of Naval Staff not until 1948 when Vice Admiral John A. Collins came into office. Despite avoiding binding obligations successfully, Canada's presence within British imperial defence planning and the hierarchies of the naval services does not seem to have suffered – particularly when compared to the role of other more willing dominions, such as Australia and New Zealand.

remarkable that Canadians joined the Royal Navy at all and in rather impressive numbers. By joining the service, they committed themselves to serve the British Empire and be subjected to imperial maritime defence, something their government tried to avoid. As a result, Canada's special place in imperial naval defence is found instead in the tension between the Dominion's official political line, its effective abstention from formal maritime commitments, and the informal, practical contribution Canada afforded, especially in terms of personnel.

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