

Only "A Foolish Escapade by Young Ratings?" Case Studies of Mutiny in the Wartime Royal Canadian Navy

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One of the characteristics of good leadership is the ability to anticipate trouble and devise solutions before problems become so serious as to imperil a mission. The reverse - refusing to acknowledge pitfalls even when on their very edge - has led to such infamous catastrophes as the raid on Dieppe and the fall of Singapore. Another possible consequence of poorly-informed management is the sudden eruption of mutiny; commanders, especially in wartime, seldom consider the frightening possibility that their soldiers, sailors, or aircrew would simply refuse to perform their duties and hence place a mission - and perhaps their own physical well-being - at substantial risk. Two such cases involved RCN ships in the summer of 1944 and early days of 1945, each of which was temporarily put out of action when a large part of its complement simply put down their tools to engage in what the Congress of Industrial Organizations would have called a "sit-down strike" - what the navy condemned as mutiny. Although the ships in question cannot be named under Canada's Privacy Act, all the details concerning the actions of the mutineers and authorities can be studied in detail to better understand the anatomy of such incidents.¹

"Confidence between officers and men," insisted the 1933 Admiralty publication, *Mutiny in the Royal Navy*, "is of the first importance, and want of confidence lies at the root of discontent. To explain the circumstances when hardship or discomfort has to be faced invites trust and implies it, raising the spirits of the men and putting them on their mettle."² As we shall see, shipboard mutinies were more likely to be triggered by grievances which individually may have seemed insignificant but which cumulatively could lead to a loss of confidence in command and a breakdown of discipline. Incidents arising from group discontent were certainly not very rare. Joseph Schull in *The Far Distant Ships*, an account of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in the Second World War, allocates a few pages to "Crew Trouble in *Iroquois*" in 1943. Tony German in *The Sea Is at Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy* also describes the *Iroquois* mutiny, as well as troubles in *Nabob* and a series of mutinies in the late 1940s.³ What these authors (and others) do not discuss because of their focus on the RCN is how such incidents fit into the context of the history of the Royal Navy (RN), from which the RCN derived so many of its traditions, procedures and attitudes, and which had a long history of rebellion and protest in the lower decks.

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Examples abound of how RN officers could find themselves opposing men they thought were their loyal subordinates. Some outbreaks centred on pay, such as in 1781 in *Canada*; in a general mutiny of the fleet at Spithead in 1797; and in another large-scale incident at Invergordon in 1931.⁴ A more common cause of group insubordination, however, was a breakdown in relations between officers and men. Discussing why *Pomone's* 270-man complement refused duty off Newfoundland in 1812, the RN's official historian suggested that it was because of "Frivolous complaints of ill treatment" and objections to going to sea with the First Lieutenant in charge. There was no punishment, although the vessel was eventually re-commissioned and the old crew reassigned.⁵ Similarly, over a century later HMS *Zealandia* was hit by a work stoppage when stokers refused to perform extra duty assigned as punishment for slowness during coaling operations. Eight men were convicted by a court-martial called on the spot, but this incensed the rest of the crew, "whose dissatisfaction apparently focussed upon the vessel's newly appointed executive officer." Given the Admiralty's penchant for enforcing the authority of its officers, it surprisingly "wasted no time before relieving him [the executive officer] of his post - in mortifying fashion because the order to that effect was read aloud before the ship's officers assembled on deck. The stokers' prison sentences were set aside."⁶

Perhaps the best modern example of protest in the RN resulting from loss of confidence in an officer occurred in HMS *Lucia* in 1931. The mutiny began on 4 January when the complement, having missed Christmas leave, was ordered to paint ship the following weekend instead of going ashore. Some sailors closed the main hatch, sealed themselves below and refused to work. In a naval vessel, the officer immediately responsible for discipline is the First Lieutenant, also referred to as the Executive Officer in more recent times, and he was singled out for blame for the mutiny in *Lucia*. An inquiry appointed by First Lord of the Admiralty, A. V. Alexander, concluded that:

The causes of discontent mentioned were undoubtedly aggravated by the lack of tact and organizing ability on the part of the First Lieutenant, accompanied by an unfortunate manner towards petty officers and men which was deeply resented. This was partly unchecked because of frequent changes in Commanding Officers, of whom there had been four in the past eighteen months.⁷

Whether the cause was lack of pay or perceived mistreatment, in all the above incidents the mutineers used similar methods. When *Canada's* recalcitrant sailors were asked if they were unanimous in their work stoppage, they answered in writing:

Resolved that the *Canada's* crew will not consent to be drafted on board of any other of his Majesty's ships of war.

2ndly: That we will not deny any duty belonging to the ship, excepting unmooring or going to sea until we receive all our money that's due.

3rdly: That we will not deny any station that's allotted by the Court of Admiralty.

4thly: That the company's determination not to suffer any one or more of them to be pointed at as ringleaders of this just proceedings. And if any individual in future is brought to the gangway on any slight protest, it will

be always looked upon as spurious method to be obtained over his Majesty's Protestant subjects on board.
5thly and lastly is "One and All."⁸

The other events were equally non-violent and quasi-legalistic (though by no means legal), in keeping with their nature as forms of protest rather than rebellions against authority.

The outbreak of the Second World War both diminished and increased the chances of such incidents. While sailors who might adopt extreme methods in peacetime were less likely to do so at war, huge expansions in the various Commonwealth navies led to the promotion of thousands of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers with little leadership experience. The RCN, which increased its strength fifty-fold, was certainly not immune to discontent, as evidenced by mutinous protests in *Athabaskan*, *Iroquois*, and *Richelieu* in 1943 alone.⁹ Another incident occurred during Operation Overlord, the 1944 summer campaign to push the Germans out of Normandy, and the timing makes it especially interesting to the naval historian. The episode began at lunchtime on 18 August.¹⁰ At 11:55 the order was piped to change into rig-of-the-day to shift the ship from the oiler, where it was refuelling, to its proper anchorage. Hands appeared at 12:30, but since they had not changed into their proper clothing, the captain, an acting lieutenant-commander:

had then fallen in the ship's company on the quarter-deck, pointed out this mass disobedience and stated to the ship's company that those ratings who were not prepared immediately to change into the rig-of-the-day to shift ship were to take one pace forward, whereat all the Seamen (excluding Petty Officers and Leading Hands) and a proportion of the Telegraphists, Signalmen, Coders and Stewards, had taken a pace forward and their names were taken...These ratings were then ordered forward to the mess-deck and the ship shifted to her anchor berth without their aid.

The captain then reported the incident in person to Commodore G.W.G. Simpson, the Commodore (Destroyers) for Western Approaches. Ordering the acting lieutenant-commander back to his vessel, the commodore decided to speak to the ship's complement by divisions in hopes of convincing the recalcitrant men back to work. As he later wrote, "in anticipation of mass refusal, I took the precaution of having 14 File of Royal Marines and 25 File of Seamen under arms out of sight in the Gunnery School; also to have my remarks to all Divisions taken down in shorthand." According to those notes, the experienced RN officer granted that "the orders piped were not perhaps well thought out." Given just as the men were sitting down to lunch, piped instructions gave the impression that they were to skip their meal in order to shift the ship back to its anchorage, but there was a procedure they could follow for just such grievances.

If you have a complaint to formulate you know very well that you have only got to go to your Divisional Officer to get advice as to how to formulate it, but you can put down your complaint on paper, take it to your Divisional Officer who sends it to the First Lieutenant and Commanding Officer and then it can be brought to me, provided it is a bona-fide complaint and not frivolous and formulated by an individual and not a mass representation.

The latter, of course, was mutiny, at a time when "the RCN are distinguishing themselves in the Channel and in the Escort duty, whilst the Canadian Army and Air Force are fighting like hell in the final stages of the Continental War."

Whether because of the commodore's speeches or a cooling-off over time, the protesters returned to work. The ship then underwent cleaning and harbour drills, and Simpson reported to the Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches that:

The general impression the ship's company gave was that they realized they had behaved stupidly, but were out to try and make amends. They all appeared to be quite keen to learn and although they were exercised most of the time during the two days I heard no complaint. The only thing which seemed to irritate them a little was the fact that they were being rather over-organized by the First Lieutenant. He has the right ideas but is very bad at putting them across and the men are irritated by his manner [which tends toward sarcasm].

In fact, Simpson placed the blame not on the men but on their superiors, though not those in command at the time of the protest. It seems that some months before the mutiny an inspecting officer had found the ship to be:

the least efficient of the whole Group in Fighting Efficiency, Gunnery, Escort Efficiency, Radar, Care and Maintenance, Cleanliness and General Organization, whilst [it] is bracketed with one or two other vessels as lowest in Communications, A/S [anti-submarine], and bottom but one in D/C [depth charge] and Torpedo Drill. The ship's engine-room Department was considered average.

The vessel's condition was surprisingly poor. The inspecting officer reported that:

It is difficult to understand how a ship, commissioned only a few months ago could be in such a low condition. The ship was dirty, disorganized and slack and it was obvious that the Commanding Officer and the First Lieutenant had made little effort to organise or supervise the Officers and men. There had been a definite apathy as regards discipline by the Commanding Officer which was freely admitted, for he was fully aware of the necessary action needed, yet little was done to rectify matters.

A complete change of officers was initiated, but turning things around took time, as Simpson admitted in a speech to the ship's complement: "it is perfectly obvious to me that you have started wrong...when you commissioned and you have been allowed to rot. That has just made low morale and unhappiness." He added, however, that to improve matters the new captain had to apply regulations, including abolishing the illegal procedure that had developed of serving the rum ration neat and allowing sailors to hoard their share. Thus, "it is unfortunate that, with the situation realised and the steps being taken to improve matters, this serious incident should have occurred, and it appears to me to have been easily avoidable and almost entirely caused by lack of foresight and inconsiderate orders piped to the ship's

company during the dinner-hour." The First Lieutenant was advised that he had incurred Simpson's severe displeasure, which was basically a reprimand. Simpson also recommended that the previous captain and executive officer be investigated to determine whether they should continue to hold positions of authority. The ratings, on the other hand, were in effect let off with a warning. He suggested a note be placed on each mutineer's personal file stating that "This rating refused duty...As circumstances were mitigating no charge was laid...This notation is made for the purpose of record in the event of another refusal." The matter essentially was closed.

The precedent was unlikely to have averted future mutinies; indeed, it may actually have encouraged them by inflicting light punishment as long as no violence was involved. This description certainly characterized the work stoppage of January 1945, which was described in some detail by Rear Admiral R.H.L. Bevan, the Flag-Officer-in-Charge (FOIC) Northern Ireland. In this case, the ship's captain had left the vessel for treatment of an infected hand. He left the vessel, which was due to leave its berth at 07:30 on 10 January, in the command of the first lieutenant. But he soon had cause to regret that decision when he received word that over forty of the ship's complement had locked themselves in the forward mess deck. Getting permission from the senior medical officer ashore to return to his responsibilities, the captain made his way back to his ship, where he tried to contact the barricaded sailors by shouting through the bolted door. Receiving no reply, he attempted unsuccessfully to contact the men over the broadcast system. Finally, he tried but failed to force open the hatches. By this time there could be no doubt that this was a *bona fide* mutiny.¹²

By this time Bevan had made his way to the ship and concluded that it was best to wait matters out. "I decided on this course," he later wrote, "because there was very little food or water on the mess decks and because a forced entry might have caused violence and further acts of insubordination."¹³ An escort was brought from another vessel, and the incident ended peacefully a few hours later when the protesters surrendered. Posted in the mess, though unsigned, was a list of complaints for the FOIC explaining in detail the reasons for the peaceful mass disobedience. First, the protesters considered the senior officers inept in that on the morning of 17 November they had allowed the ship to drift several miles out of station while escorting a convoy, and on another occasion had brought the vessel's engines to a dead stop to investigate Carley floats (which were empty of survivors). For good measure, the author or authors also mentioned incompetence and confusion at action stations, though without providing details. Second, the men charged that foul language was often used to address ratings, a complaint that may seem surprising to anyone who has ever served in the navy or another armed service. Third, the mutineers charged that officers entered the mess decks without removing their hats, although tradition in neither the RCN nor the RN required it. The fourth complaint was far more serious: that officers gave orders while under the influence of alcohol. Fifth, the crew claimed that the officers were disrespectful towards ratings. Sixth, the men complained that action bells were used improperly. The final complaint cited an unwillingness to listen to capable ratings when they had suggestions to offer concerning routine.¹⁴

Since for the Flag-Officer in Charge the first order of business was to replace the just-arrested mutineers so that the ship could leave for operations, he approached the captain of a vessel that had "a fine team proved by recent spirited action in sinking" a U-boat." Within ten minutes of making the request - at least as far as the FOIC's report for

distribution was concerned - the necessary officer and forty-six ratings came forward, in part because they had been promised the week's leave in the UK that was due them.¹⁶ According to Bevan the mutineers' ship needed a new first lieutenant because the officer was required to serve as a witness at a quickly-convened board of inquiry but, as we shall see, his leadership style would become an important focus of the deliberations to follow when higher command again proved willing to consider the imperfections of officers when investigating mutinous behaviour.

As it transpired, there was a lack of trust not only between officers and ratings but also among the officers. Two of the latter submitted written statements which could be interpreted as indictments of how the ship was run and the role of the First Lieutenant in fostering discontent. According to one lieutenant, who had joined the vessel in the fall of 1944:

I have found that this has not been a happy ship, due mostly I believe to a lack of confidence in the Captain and the 1st Lieutenant. This has not been caused by any major incident since I've been aboard, but seemingly by a number of small incidents noted by the crew...I believe the trouble lay mostly in the attitude of the 1st Lieutenant towards the men. Although the feeling of mutiny was a sudden surprise to us all [the officers] it may be that the sympathies of the whole crew [Petty Officers and Leading Ratings] were with the offenders.¹⁷

A sub-lieutenant agreed, stating that after joining the vessel in November 1944 he could hardly help but feel the tension among the crew:

During subsequent weeks, I found that this tension was due to a great dislike for the 1st Lieutenant by the majority of the crew. Naturally, there must be a reason behind such a state, but inasmuch as I joined the ship only 2 months ago, I can offer no defence for either party. During the short period I know the 1st Lieut, he performed his duties satisfactorily in my estimation, but due to the passive hostility of most of the crew, maximum efficiency was impossible. The ship was definitely an unhappy ship.¹⁸

While the captain, still nursing an infected hand, gave his opinion in some detail, he refused to make his First Lieutenant the scapegoat, although he did preface his comments with the statement that "I received various intimations both from officers and loyal ratings that this whole unfortunate occurrence would not have occurred if I had been on board."

I am aware that the First Lieutenant was not popular on board amongst a few members of the ship's company and I think one of the reasons for this was that he had been carrying out certain orders that I had given him to tighten up on the discipline of the ship. This seeming slackness being caused by the large amount of time the ship had been in port as compared with sea time. Also, there had not been much opportunity for the First Lieutenant to conn the ship and I think certain members of the crew lacked confidence in his ability to take the ship to sea. A further point is that there

happens to be some officers on the ship who lack sea experience and this may have contributed to the ratings' distrust. I have known the First Lieutenant since 1926 and his work has been very satisfactory and he has my complete confidence.

He suggested that the matter had been instigated by no more than a half dozen malcontents "who have influenced the others and due to their forcefulness have led the others astray."¹⁹

The chief petty officer, interviewed in hospital and unaware that a mutiny had taken place, suggested that "[t]he crew as a whole did not like the First Lieutenant." This lack of confidence was also very much in evidence during the formal questioning of other men. A leading telegrapher stated that "[f]he main thing I noticed about the whole ship was a lack of spirit. I think if the leadership had been something more inspiring - well, they just were not organised as a real good fighting unit, having no confidence in the officers." Similarly, a signalman, when asked why he refused duty, replied that "I didn't want to go to sea. I hadn't the confidence in the officer who was taking us to sea, and putting it frankly, sir, I was afraid to go to sea under these circumstances."²⁰

Asked to give specific examples as to why they had lost confidence in their officers generally and the First Lieutenant in particular, many mentioned the incident in which the ship had drifted away from its station while escorting a convoy. These included a leading signalman who, as a member of the communications staff on the bridge, was privy to messages from the escort's senior officer warning of the crucial importance of proper station keeping. Another was the chief petty officer, who confirmed the importance of the incident and related how "[o]n the way across we got out of station several times and I don't know the full particulars, and as for his seamanship not what I would call a good seaman." A leading telegrapher provided more detail, reporting that "we were seven miles astern of the convoy one morning and were supposed to be ahead of it, and everyone heard about it, and we figured 'How can we sink submarines in a state like that?'"

In his own appearance before the board, the First Lieutenant explained that:

We were doing an independent zig-zag on the starboard bow of the convoy keeping station on the starboard wing leader. The visibility was poor. We couldn't see the convoy and had to depend on periodic cuts of that leader by Radar, using it as infrequently as possible. Before dusk closed down, the patrol were called up early so that they could see what the situation looked like. During the night, as convoys will, got out of station. The starboard wing leader slipped back. The last contact - the picture changed very rapidly in about 10 minutes. I was on the bridge myself on this port station. It was presented to me - I thought we must be out in front. Suddenly they gave an entirely different picture.

Whether nervous because of circumstances or because he was having difficulty recalling an incident that had occurred several months before, it was not a very coherent defence.

Another example offered by ratings that showed a lack of confidence in their officers had to do with searches for survivors. As one leading seamen related, "[o]n a couple of occasions the Captain stopped the ship at sea to get alongside a raft, and the First Lieutenant jumped aboard it. In 1943 they ran the ship full astern and put on the navigation lights,"

potentially giving away the ship's position to lurking U-boats. A gunner's mate ventured that "they just didn't know their jobs," while a signalman singled out the incidents as the point at which he began to have doubts about the ship's leadership. The issue was one of trust. Members of the crew increasingly became unsure that the senior officers were looking after their best interests. As one able seaman put it, "[w]hen you go to sea, and stop the ship and look to see a Carley float it is not very good for myself or anyone on the ship." The First Lieutenant explained to the board that the captain wanted to check for the sunken vessel's name, which would have been stencilled on the Carley float they were inspecting. As for turning on the navigation lights, that had been a simple matter of avoiding collision while the ship made some rather intricate manoeuvres to get a close look at the floats. Two ratings also brought up the issue of the First Lieutenant using a flashlight during action stations. Although the officer did not address the charge; he may not have known that it had been levelled at him.

The allegations discussed above may seem to be the worst of the seven main complaints the mutineers posted in the mess, but such issues as obscene language, entering the ratings' mess without removing hats, disrespectful treatment, and failure to give attention to reasonable suggestions may have loomed just as large in men's mind. After all, these were for the most part volunteers engaged in dangerous duty at sea who felt they deserved a modicum of respect. It should be remembered that Captain Bligh's "wounding tongue" was far more important in causing the revolt on *Bounty* than the rare flogging he may have inflicted. Thus, when a leading seaman brought up the issue of indecent language before the board of inquiry he was not being frivolous.

In all fairness, none of the witnesses went so far as to suggest that the First Lieutenant was abusive in his choice of words. A leading signalman heard much foul language, "but not directly swearing at the men." One of the officers, however, provided an interesting insight. Asked about the use of obscene language, he responded: "Not often, sir." But when asked if "the First Lieutenant's handling of the crew could be described as 'tactless,'" he replied, "[f]hat would be a good word, sir." Another officer related how one rating had complained of being "treated like a child," while another volunteered "that he did not like the First Lieutenant, but he had no specific reasons other than that he was inclined to treat him and the other men like children." Tone was perhaps more important than vocabulary, a situation similar to that on board the other RCN ship examined in this essay where the First Lieutenant's tendency to sarcasm was noted by the investigating officer.

Whether it was the First Lieutenant's way of dealing with ratings, the errors in station keeping, the alleged risks taken to check Carley floats, or a combination of some or all these factors, there had definitely been such a breakdown in communications that official channels for redressing grievances went unused. Asked if he had put in a complaint, one able seaman replied that "I did not know if they would or not but I did not want to take the chance...I thought that if my request would go through I would have been a marked man." Another able seaman, after describing his fear of having the ship taken to sea by the First Lieutenant, was asked why he did not put in a request to see the divisional officer; he responded that "I didn't think that I was able to see him for that." Another replied in like manner that "I didn't think the complaint would be any good under the circumstances...I did not think my complaint alone would be enough."

On the surface, their testimony makes perfect sense; to approach one officer to complain about another would have struck most ratings as an invitation to retaliation.

Technically, the naval service's procedures allowed for such complaint, but the consensus among the crew, that "I didn't think it applied in a case like this," was perhaps far more logical for those relying on common sense than on King's Orders and Admiralty Instructions. There was also an incident, described by the captain, which could perhaps have served as a warning.

On Christmas morning, after having visited the various messes and extended Christmas greetings and a certain amount of cheer in the form of beer, I was later in the wardroom flats when I was accosted by three ratings... They began to air grievances against the First Lieutenant and were somewhat heated in their remarks. I interrupted their remarks pointing out that this was neither the time, place or form for their grievances. I said that I had every confidence in my First Lieutenant, that he was acting under my orders and that any grievances they had should be brought forward in the proper service manner. One of the men...mentioned that if something wasn't done, there might be trouble or a mutiny. I told them that such thoughts were serious and that I thought they had more sense than to entertain such crazy ideas.²¹

Less than three weeks later, they proved him wrong.

The spark that set off the incident, according to a leading telegrapher, was when "[f]hey found out that they may have to go to sea without the Commanding Officer, due to his hand being bandaged up." A supply assistant agreed; though he was not in the mess at the crucial moment, he heard other ratings discussing the issue as they made their way to join their comrades, and he went along because "I wanted my complaint received with the others." A telegraphist, who had been in the communications mess when the order to leave harbour was piped, had perhaps the most interesting tale to tell. Asked what he did when he heard the pipe, he responded: "I was in a daze" because "I did not want to go to sea in that command." Asked why he made his way up the ladder to the upper mess deck, he could only respond evasively that "I did not know why I walked up top." Obviously, the strike was not as spontaneous as witnesses implied, and it is likely that ratings avoided giving any evidence of collusion to escape serious punishment. Nonetheless, there is little doubt as to their sincerity. One stoker, asked if he understood the consequences of his actions, responded: "Well, I figured my life was safer than going to sea with the First Lieutenant. I am willing to go to sea with any officer as long as he knows what it is." An able seaman, taken to task for passing judgement on his officers after only two years at sea, replied that "I am not any judge, but I value my life, and I did not think it was safe in their hands."

After two days of testimony by sixty-five witnesses, the board briefly considered the evidence and presented its findings. Its first, that forty-seven ratings did in fact barricade themselves and refuse duty, thereby "committing an act of mutiny," was not surprising given that none of the sailors denied their actions. The second was also very much in keeping with the evidence in that the main cause of the protest was a "general lack of discipline on board over a long period. This lack of discipline was caused by injudicious and tactless handling of the ratings by the Executive Officer." The board, however, also found that he had received "little assistance being given to him by either the Petty Officers or Leading Seamen," which

was more an assumption about the proper role of NCOs than a reflection of two days of testimony. In better keeping with what had been presented was the conclusion that:

the unhappy atmosphere in which the ship's company lived was aggravated by certain events at sea on which the crew put an exaggerated and probably false interpretation. A further exaggeration was personal dislike of the First Lieutenant by a considerable proportion of the ship's company, who did not hesitate to discuss this Officer's shortcomings quite freely.

The board also found that "the immediate cause of the mutiny was the sudden realization of the ship's company that the ship was about to be taken to sea by the First Lieutenant." Further, the board believed that they acted "on the spur of the moment and with little previous planning except that it is considered the Petty Officers probably and the Leading Seamen certainly were well aware of what was about to happen and therefore kept well clear." In addition, it noted that the "divisional system on board did not seem to work satisfactorily, ratings did not appear to have any confidence that their requests would be promptly dealt with nor did the general standard of training of the ratings appear to include such matters as method of stating complaints, how to prefer requests, or the duties of officers with regard to their ratings."

In conclusion, though the board found that the faults of the senior officers were due more to inexperience than to negligence, it still recommended "that the Captain and Executive Officer should be relieved of their duties forthwith." As for the ratings, "severe disciplinary action" should be taken, while the petty officers and leading seamen, who failed to notice trouble brewing or kept out of the way when it did, should be drafted to other ships as soon as feasible. None of the forty-seven mutiny cases merited trial by court martial, however, and summary sentences of forty-two to ninety days imprisonment were imposed.²² As the Commodore (Destroyers) reported, after the board of inquiry the FOIC Northern Ireland "took [the] view that this was a foolish escapade by young ratings rather than serious insubordination."²³

Writing in 1849, Captain Francis Liardet suggested that:

The very difficulty which seamen feel in making known their wishes should induce us to give every complaint a patient hearing; for though the thing they wish or want remedied may appear very trifling to the officer, it may be of the greatest consequence to the seamen... In ships where the complaints are not strictly attended to, duly investigated, and endeavoured to be removed, they are only smothered for a time; and if they do not break out in some acts of insubordination, deep-seated discontent is produced.²⁴

The captain of the January 1945 mutineers might have avoided serious trouble had he read and heeded such advice, for discontent need not be discussed in detail for it to lead to group protest. Describing a mutiny in the Royal Fleet Reserve Battalion in 1931, a police inspector noted that there seemed to be no ringleaders but rather "a very bad frame of mind." When the time came, "they stayed where they were instead of falling in because everyone else did the same."²⁵ Such action might in fact have been eased by the knowledge that similar protests had met with minor or no punishment. Writing about the 1931 mutinies at Invergordon,

David Divine proposed that "the existence of a latent tradition of mutiny in the British fleet, a community memory, on the lower deck, of success in the righting of past wrongs and of the methods and rules to be observed in the event of future necessity."²⁶ Though more research would be required to determine whether such was the case in the RCN, it seems clear that as much as the board of inquiry into the mutiny of January 1945 might have harped on the existence of grievance procedures and the responsibilities of officers and NCOs, as far as the men of the lower deck were concerned non-violent mutiny was a tactic worth considering to redress perceived injustices.

NOTES

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1. Under Canada's Privacy Act, material relating to the education or the medical, criminal or employment history of an individual is considered "personal information" and is treated as classified. In a few of the cases discussed in this paper, the executive officer is held liable for some of the blame, which is why the ship's name cannot be mentioned, since that would allow easy identification of the individual concerned.
2. J.H. Owen, *Mutiny in the Royal Navy* (2 vols., London, 1933), I, 148.
3. Joseph Schull, *The Far Distant Ships: An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in the Second World War* (Ottawa, 1952), 189-190; and Tony German, *The Sea Is at Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy* (Toronto, 1990), 157, 186-187 and 207-211.
4. Owen, *Mutiny*, I, 31; and David Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon* (London, 1970), 26.
5. Owen, *Mutiny*, I, 168.
6. Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis, 1992), 144.
7. Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, 62.
8. Owen, *Mutiny*, 1, 31.
9. For further details, see Schull, *Far Distant Ships*; German, *Sea Is At Our Gates*; and Michael J. Whitby, "Matelots, Martinets and Mutineers: The Mutiny in HMCS *Iroquois*, 19 July 1943," *Journal of Military History* (forthcoming).
10. Unless otherwise indicated, the following account is based on National Archives of Canada (NAC), Record Group (RG) 24, Acc. 83-84/167, box 1469, 4250-321/10, Commodore G.W.G. Simpson to Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) Western Approaches (WA), 21 August 1944.
11. NAC, RG 24, Acc. 83-84/167, box 1469, 4250-321/10, Lt. G. Daley for Deputy Judge Advocate General (JAG) of the Fleet, to Chief of Naval Personnel and Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, 14 September 1944.
12. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, R/Adm R.H.L. Bevan, Flag Officer-in-Charge (FOIC) Northern Ireland, to C-in-C WA, 17 January 1945.
13. *Ibid.*
14. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Board of Enquiry, Statement of Complaints of Ship's Company.
15. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Commodore (D) WA to Distribution, 10 January 1945.
16. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-4, Commodore (D) WA to Captain DNF, 15 January 1945.
17. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Board of Enquiry, H.G.D. Acland, Maintenance Captain, 11 January 1945.
18. *Ibid.*
19. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Board

of Enquiry, [First Lieutenant], Report on Refusal of Duty..., 11 January 1945.

20. The next section, unless otherwise noted, is based on NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Minutes and Findings of Board of Enquiry Held on 11th and 12th January 1945.

21. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Board of Enquiry, [Ship's captain] to FOIC Northern Ireland, 13 January 1945.

22. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, FOIC Northern Ireland to C-in-C WA, 14 January 1945.

23. NAC, RG 24, vol. 11,718, CS 31-1-14, Commodore (D) WA to Captain DNF, 15 January 1945.

24. Quoted in Owen, *Mutiny*, I, 148.

25. *Ibid.*, II, 8.

26. Divine, *Mutiny at Invergordon*, 13.