

"We Have Missed Another Great Opportunity": G.G. McGeer, Alaska, and the Politics of Failed Advocacy

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The year 1942 began very badly for the Allies. Until checked at Midway in early June, Japanese forces ran riot, seizing almost effortlessly one western possession after another. The advent of the Russian spring brought yet another German offensive which would not be stopped until the Red Army's stunning counterattack at Stalingrad in late November. But as the anti-Axis nations reeled before the onslaught, there was one individual who saw in these events not defeat but opportunity. Gerald Gratton McGeer, a Liberal member of Parliament (MP) for Vancouver as well as a determined booster of his province's economic development, bombarded the Canadian government and American officials with a myriad of proposals to transform BC and Alaska into bases from which powerful military strikes could be launched against Japan. Although not an original thinker, McGeer stands out, not only due to his dogged persistence but also because his suggestions were considered at the highest levels of Canadian political and military decision-making, including the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee (COS) and the Cabinet War Committee (CWC). Nonetheless, these efforts ultimately came to naught. Despite the fact that Prime Minister W.L.M. King used McGeer's ideas to compel the military to pay more attention to Canada's west coast, neither King nor his service advisers were eager to have the Dominion play a large role in the struggle with Japan; once the immediate crisis in the Pacific had passed, McGeer found himself increasingly marginalized and ignored, a man whose time seemingly had come and gone. Yet before he faded from the scene, McGeer acted as a relentless advocate for a large segment of west coast opinion that feared its interests mattered little to Ottawa's power brokers.

Prior to 1941 McGeer had shown relatively little interest in military matters. Elected to the federal parliament in 1935 after involvement in provincial and municipal politics (including a stint as Vancouver's mayor), he was best known for his ardent support for Keynesian economics and his noteworthy talent for letter writing. His correspondence with King on the subject of monetary and economic reform in the 1930s was prodigious.¹ McGeer's first public reference as an MP to matters martial came on 14

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February 1936 when he complained that the militia in Vancouver could not parade because there were no funds to purchase shoes. Arguing that keeping the militia in a state of readiness was a federal obligation, McGeer declared that it was "a sorry reflection upon the administration of public affairs when we have to maintain our militia by means of contributions from the officers and other private individuals." If matters had sunk "to such a pitiful level," he suggested that "it is nearly time to close out this particular service."²

McGeer was not serious about annihilating the militia. His purpose — despite his typically bombastic style — was to draw attention to what he considered a very important problem: the country's seeming inability to defend itself. Like so many others at the time, McGeer worried that an international crisis of some magnitude was fast approaching. Yet more uniquely, he worried more about Japan than Germany. Four days after complaining about the militia's condition, he drew attention to Japan's apparent effort to dominate Asia and the Pacific and Canada's possible role to both support the empire and contribute to its own economic development. While Japan and Britain were increasing their military and trade efforts in the Far East, McGeer protested that Canada was reducing an already "niggardly" shipping subsidy, an act that would do nothing to distribute BC and Albertan products to Pacific markets. Moreover, having returned from a recent tour of American west coast ports, McGeer worried that Vancouver's prominence as a harbour might fade as the US improved its anchorages and developed naval and air bases in Alaska.³

But with the exception of the Bren Gun debate of 1939, when he was selected to defend the government's case, McGeer was remarkably silent on defence questions prior to late 1940.⁴ He did evince an interest as early as 1937 in building highways to link BC to the continental US and Alaska to attract tourists. The building of such routes was a popular notion in British Columbia and one of its major advocates was Premier T.D. Pattullo, McGeer's political rival. Pattullo wanted an Alaskan highway for the economic and security benefits it might provide, but the Canadian government, concerned that the American support for the military value of the project masked more sinister designs, refused to countenance its construction.⁵ McGeer does not seem to have complained much about Ottawa's attitude beyond occasional comments, such as he made in 1938, that the federal government had forgotten that Canada was a "two-ocean" nation. Furthermore he could contradict himself. In July 1940 he informed Justice Minister Ernest Lapointe that the 20,000-plus Japanese-Canadians living in BC constituted a serious security risk and should be disarmed. Yet two days later McGeer wrote his wife that "I do not think that we have much to fear from Japan."⁶

McGeer's lethargy seems to have evaporated somewhat by the late autumn of 1940. King's hopes for a limited war vanished when France fell before the German panzers, leaving Canada as Britain's ranking ally. Faced with the grim possibility of defeat, the entire commonwealth settled down to the arduous task of producing a military capable of meeting and defeating the German menace. Canadian industry, including plants and other facilities on the west coast, went into high gear as it tooled up to churn out the vital materials of war. Although pleased to see the increased effort, McGeer was certain that more could be done, especially in his home province. In late November he

commented to the Secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association that Ottawa was pursuing a short-term shipbuilding programme when what was needed was an effort over the longer haul to create an industry sector capable of "meeting a large but indefinite demand for a long but indefinite period of time." Desirous of shipyards that could turn out a variety of naval and merchant vessels, McGeer called for the expansion of existing yards, the creation of new facilities, and the building of a steel mill, smelter, refinery, and more power generators in BC.⁷

By early March 1941 McGeer, with the aid of Ian MacKenzie, a fellow Vancouver MP and the Minister of Pensions and National Health, helped to convince C.D. Howe, the powerful Minister of Supply and Munitions, to send a committee of war production experts to BC to coordinate the industrial effort there. While the federal government had agreed to build a blast furnace in the province, it remained reluctant to expand iron and steel production because it feared, according to McGeer, that to do so would be economically unsound. Convinced that Ottawa was mistaken, and believing that BC could manufacture steel cheaply, he advised Pattullo to employ a prominent American engineering firm to write a brief justifying the establishment of an iron and steel industry on the west coast and also to seek British views on the matter.⁸

McGeer did not wait for Pattullo to act on these suggestions and in early June despatched a multi-page memorandum to Howe and King, outlining his steel production scheme. American President Franklin Roosevelt recently had made a speech about the need to boost steelmaking capacity, and McGeer used those comments to buttress his own view that Canada required a long-term industrial policy that took into account the latent potential of BC. If Ottawa would provide the needed funds to get his various proposals off the ground, steel plants in British Columbia quickly could produce steel both for internal consumption and for export to Britain and the US. Additionally, the province's lumber reserves could be used to churn out hundreds of wooden merchantmen designed to last for five years at a cost of only \$500,000 per ship.⁹

The lack of any response beyond letters of acknowledgement did not discourage McGeer. On 19 July he petitioned King to allow American naval units to parade in their uniforms in Vancouver in late August, a step he hoped would send a message to Germany and Japan that North Americans were ready to defend themselves, particularly as he worried that Germany, having attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June, intended "to break through to Vladivostok." Three days later he reminded King of the 6 June letter.¹⁰

It was not until late November 1941 that McGeer intruded upon the Prime Minister again. Reflecting on a recent proposal to build a highway to Alaska, McGeer remarked that roads and railways were vital adjuncts to the system of airways and seaways required to defend the west coast, a system that stretched "for more than 8,000 miles in a great inverted 'S' from the Bay of Panama along the shore lines of Mexico, California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Alaska, along the Aleutian Islands and across the Bering Sea to the shore line of Siberia." Canada could play its part by developing Prince Rupert into a major base, an act that would bolster the "whole line of Pacific Coast naval power" and strengthen Alaska and the Aleutians. Beyond the need to

defend North America, a major military facility at Prince Rupert would help to maintain communications with Siberia and could support offensive operations against Japan."

McGeer had jumped the gun a bit; the war in the Pacific between Japan and the Allies would not begin for more than two weeks. Still, it was the first expression by McGeer of what was soon to become a refrain: the need to strike Japan via the north Pacific. The idea was hardly original. Alfred Thayer Mahan, the noted American naval theorist, had argued in favour of an offensive against Japan from bases in the Aleutians as early as 1911. Ships based on the island of Kiska would be only 1800 miles from the major Japanese port of Yokohama, and Mahan dismissed concerns about the region's unstable climate, stating that it was "difficult to admit that for white men climatic inconveniences of an over-cold climate can equal in ultimate effect those of one constantly over-warm."¹² Perhaps the most famous advocate of the "northern route" to Japan was Brigadier General William (Billy) Mitchell. An air power proponent as well as an Alaska booster, Mitchell in the inter-war period had urged his nation to prepare for an inevitable conflict with Japan. As geography dictated that the focus would be on the north Pacific, Mitchell warned that whoever controlled the route via the Aleutians could "neither be flanked nor taken in reverse." If the US held the islands, Mitchell planned to send 300 bomber aircraft, 200 from bases in Alaska, as part of a "decisive" air offensive against congested Japanese cities constructed of "paper and wood or other inflammable structures."¹³

McGeer, a voracious reader, had seen some of Mitchell's many articles and speeches about air power and Alaska and many times cited him in his own pieces. What made McGeer unique was his dogged belief that Canada could and should aid the US in the north Pacific. The fires at Pearl Harbor were barely extinguished before McGeer redoubled his efforts to improve BC's defences. Nine days after Japan launched its attack, Howe received another submission from McGeer. Calling attention to "the bold audacity and surprising strength attending the Japanese treachery" — and disturbing shortages in war materials — McGeer entreated Howe to take the steps necessary to meet the threat and remedy the deficiencies. In the event Howe was unsure as to what those might be, McGeer offered some suggestions: an increase in hydroelectric stations and iron and steel complexes in BC; the construction of more roads and railways on the west coast; and the establishment of a major military base at Prince Rupert. A Christmas Day telegram to the Prime Minister repeated these demands and added something new. Pointing to the heroism of the nearly 2000 Canadian troops just lost at Hong Kong, McGeer advised that Canada might respond by increasing its part "in the Battle of the Pacific which will prepare us for the day when we can strike to avenge from our Canadian Pacific shores."¹⁴

McGeer would have his hands full trying to convince the Canadian military of the need to strike back from Canadian shores. There had been considerable discussion in government and military circles in the 1930s about Canada's possible role in a war between the US and Japan; the prevailing opinion was that Canada should remain neutral and resist incursions by either side." That policy was abandoned in August 1940 with Canada's assent to the Ogdensburg Agreement, which pledged Canadian-American

cooperation in the defence of North America. The rejection of neutrality, however, did not mean that Ottawa automatically would play much of a role in the Pacific. Fixated on Germany, the Canadian Chiefs-of-Staff recommended the creation of Pacific Command only in October 1940 and government approved it in the hope it "would help to establish local confidence and stability."¹⁶ Appreciations prepared in 1940-1941 tended to discount Japan's ability to threaten seriously the west coast. Raids against BC were technically feasible but thought unlikely, especially if the United States was a belligerent. According to the COS, the major area of conflict would be the south Pacific, and the Chiefs' September 1941 appreciation of the global situation devoted only three paragraphs (of twenty-eight) to Japan and the Pacific.¹⁷

Japan's dramatic entry into the war in December did little to change the view of the Ottawa-based Chiefs that BC was reasonably secure from attack. One day after Pearl Harbor the air force commander, Air Marshall L.S. Breadner, noted that "[f]he only threat worthy of consideration" was the possibility of raids carried out by carrier-borne aircraft, but as Japan's navy was so vital to the security of the home islands and lines of communication, he doubted that "carriers would be diverted from their normal role of fleet operations to bombing attacks on the Pacific Coast."¹⁸ Once the extent of American losses was revealed to Canadian authorities on 9 December, King fretted that the public reaction "would be consternation, particularly as it is possible that our own coast might be attacked by invaders - which seemed wholly probable."¹⁹ Others agreed. Bruce Hutchison, a journalist with the *Vancouver Sun* who had prominent friends in the Liberal Party, declared on 8 December that the Pacific conflict would compel the government to re-examine home defence needs and would require the stationing of strong forces on the west coast at the expense of service overseas.²⁰

Worried that the Cabinet might waver in the face of possible pressure from the west coast, the Chiefs presented a new appreciation on 10 December. While admitting that the defeats suffered by the American and British navies had modified somewhat the assumption that Japanese power would be more than balanced by US capabilities, the COS believed it remained "vitally important to ensure that attention is not unduly diverted from the Atlantic. It is still true to say that the principal threat to the British Empire is from the Continent of Europe." Furthermore, Japan's main thrust was towards the southwest Pacific, although a diversionary assault against North America could not be ruled out. Given the vast distances involved, however, the Chiefs doubted that Japan could sustain an invasion or lengthy operations against the western hemisphere even if it wanted to. Raids by a small number of cruisers, accompanied perhaps by up to two brigades of troops, were possible, but the air force promised to have 120 aircraft in place in BC within one month. The army, represented by the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Kenneth Stuart, did not want to send any large numbers of soldiers west since it believed that an invasion was unlikely and the forces currently available were reasonably adequate. In his opinion "[f]here was no reason to alter substantially present army dispositions," adding "that if a disproportionate amount of our available defence

forces were moved from east to west, we would be playing into the hands of our enemies."²¹

In the event that the ministers had missed somehow the gist of the military's message, Vice-Admiral Percy Nelles hammered home the point in another memorandum on 11 December. Advising the government to resist pressures to increase forces on the west coast, Nelles proclaimed that Canada was presently in a better position militarily than before 7 December because it now could rely on the considerable American military to ward off the Japanese instead of facing the threat alone. He concluded that:

We must not allow ourselves to be stampeded by public opinion on the West Coast. The decisive theatre in this war is to the East and not the West. If we forget this truth and divert an unnecessary proportion of our strength to the West, then we are merely playing into the hands of our enemies.²²

Pressure did mount on the government to safeguard BC. In Parliament Howard Green, the Conservative MP for Vancouver South, charged in late January 1942 that Japan might target Prince Rupert, the Queen Charlotte Islands, and Alaska for attack; if the Japanese did come, Green alleged that the Canadian military would retreat behind the Rockies "leaving the people on the west coast to their fate." His recommendation was to make the west coast a military front and to build a substantial offensive force. Liberal backbenchers J.G. Turgeon (Cariboo) and Thomas Reid (New Westminster) were less caustic, but their views were much the same. Concerned that Alaska and the Aleutians were imperilled, Turgeon backed a proposal by Green to amend the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) so that home defence conscripts could be employed anywhere in the western hemisphere and even Siberia. Reid favoured bringing back General A.G.L. McNaughton, the Canadian commander in Britain, so that his insight and experience could be utilized to shore up home defence (and public confidence).²³

The press, particularly the *Vancouver Sun*, was even harder on the government. Over two weeks before Reid asked for McNaughton's return, the *Sun* labelled BC as "Canada's No. 1 war front" and demanded that a cabinet-rank official be located in Vancouver or Victoria. By early February, as Japan's victories mounted and Singapore, Britain's major fortress in Asia, came under close siege, the *Sun's* tone became even more strident. On 5 February Bruce Hutchison wrote that "on excellent authority — which I wish I could quote but I can't — I can tell you British Columbia is not defended." Singapore's surrender on 15 February removed any remaining restraints. Contending that this catastrophe changed everything, the *Sun* demanded that Ottawa take immediate steps to protect BC, describing as a military absurdity the continued flow of Canadian troops to Britain "while the war moves towards Canada across the Pacific." King was told to assume his responsibility as the nation's leader and to overrule his service advisers.²⁴

McGeer had not been silent either, but unlike the *Sun* or his parliamentary colleagues, he preferred to do his lobbying in private. On 10 January he sent King yet

another long letter warning that there would be political repercussions stemming from the Hong Kong defeat and allegations that the government was lagging in the prosecution of the war. Critical of what he regarded as "false economy," McGeer declared that even "a minor Japanese force, aided by a comparatively small fifth column organization within our midst, could land at Prince Rupert, Victoria and Vancouver, devastate the areas, and escape before anything could be done about it."²⁵ Yet not until McGeer fell ill with a near-fatal kidney ailment in early March were his efforts recognized by the Prime Minister. King visited the sick backbencher in hospital on 3 March and received for his kindness a lengthy diatribe directed at the COS and the Minister of Defence, J.L. Ralston. Concerned that Canadians were losing confidence in their leaders, McGeer wanted Ralston removed and McNaughton put in his place. This suggestion was recapitulated two days later in a sixteen-page memo to King. Believing that Canada had no plans to counter a Japanese attack against BC or Alaska, McGeer recommended that the government do two more things in addition to his earlier suggestions: form a mobile force in BC able to move quickly to any threatened point; and create training facilities in his home province capable of handling 75,000 to 150,000 Canadian and American soldiers.²⁶

McGeer's views figured prominently when the Cabinet War Committee met on 6 March. Reading from McGeer's lengthy 5 March submission, but without identifying the author, King highlighted the message that a vulnerable British Columbia needed a larger army garrison and an expanded transportation net so that it could sustain large-scale military operations. But King did not take McGeer's proposal to heart, revealing to Stuart afterwards that he had cited the document because he felt it was representative of the feelings "held by Members of parliament generally," rather than for its specific ideas.²⁷

Why had King cited McGeer and then refused to act on his suggestions? In the first case, the two men were long acquainted, having met initially in 1909. By 1922 they were carrying on a regular correspondence in which McGeer's fixation on monetary reform informed King that the western politician was an enthusiast who had to be handled carefully. After another visit to McGeer's bedside on 6 March, the Prime Minister admitted in his diary that "McGeer was hard to talk to as he is so energetic in giving his own views."²⁸ That energy could be useful if properly harnessed (as during the Bren Gun debate of 1939), but when it was not, as in 1936 on the subject of the militia, it could cause damage. McGeer's biographer has claimed that his subject had an "unexplained hold on the prime minister" and that King may have admired the western populist because the two men were so unlike.²⁹ Very different opinions have been offered by others. In his memoirs Bruce Hutchison portrayed McGeer as "a piercing thorn in MacKenzie King's side" and revealed that King blanched when told in 1935 of McGeer's plans to enter federal politics. Paul Martin, a future cabinet minister, admired McGeer's powerful speaking style, noting that he "always had the attention of MacKenzie King, who feared that McGeer, with his great bellowing voice, would single out the prime minister for some caustic remark."³⁰ Perhaps because he dreaded that voice, King thought it best to acknowledge McGeer's contributions so that his restless backbencher would not abandon his private lobbying style in favour of a more public confrontation.

It is far more likely that King declined to take up McGeer's plans because the Prime Minister, having entered the conflict in 1939 with the aim of fighting a limited war (and thus avoiding the need for conscription), only to see that hope dashed after France's collapse, could not fail to see the implications if McGeer's ideas were implemented: the creation of a second front in the Pacific which would require an ever-growing supply of troops and other resources. If that happened, conscription for overseas service, a step that had led to the Liberal party's near demise in 1917 (and cost King his seat), would have been a virtual requirement. Still, King could make good use of the fact that "McGeer's mind continued to make helpful suggestions and observations on existing conditions," and employ those notions, as he had done on 5 March, to rein in a military he believed was paying too much attention to Germany and not enough on the need to maintain national unity and security.³¹ During February and March King and his service advisers, particularly Stuart, fought about the requirements of home defence and command structures. Stuart opposed the assignment of three divisions for coastal defence (two in BC and one in the Maritimes) and the integration of the three services under a unified command. It was a losing battle for the military. King refused to back down and used McGeer's memoranda, among other things (especially his fear of conscription), to convince cabinet to back him. It did; even Ralston, who generally acted as a mouthpiece for the military's point of view, was on King's side this time. By mid-March Stuart, claiming that his job depended on his caving in, drew up plans establishing three home defence divisions and a form of unified command, plans that quickly were endorsed by his civilian masters.³²

King had won and McGeer, although it is doubtful that he knew it, had played a small part in achieving the victory. No doubt heartened by the government's actions, by late March McGeer had settled on the concept that would guide his efforts for much of the remainder of 1942: a belief that Canada should participate in an offensive across the north Pacific against Japan. Twice prior to month's end, encouraged by his chats with King as well as a discussion with Ralston on 22 March, McGeer wrote to the Prime Minister to say that BC and Alaska had value strategically as bases from which Japan could be struck. These hints were supplemented on 8 April when a letter plus a nineteen-page report was composed for King. The thrust of the document was that the north Pacific was not just an area that needed to be defended but that, if properly developed, the region could be utilized to bring about a speedy defeat of Japan. McGeer imagined an ambitious program encompassing the creation of new transportation networks, airfields, industrial plants, and military complexes capable of supporting a massive campaign involving thousands of Canadian and American servicepeople trained in northern BC and Alaska. Judging that Japan was as dangerous a foe as Germany, McGeer predicted that unless action were taken soon the Japanese might grab Siberia, the Aleutians, and other parts of Alaska.³³

The Prime Minister forwarded the submission to the defence ministers for study. Why he did so is unclear. Perhaps King thought there was some value in McGeer's suggestions, but it is more likely that he had tired of the backbencher's letters and hoped

to cool McGeer's ardour by exposing his notions to critical scrutiny while ridding himself of the need to deal with the BC politician. Whatever the motive, the ministers passed the matter to the Chiefs-of-Staff who in turn delivered it to the Canadian Section of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), maintaining that:

As this memorandum contains proposals which, for their efficient implementation, call for an approach to the President of the United States with a view to obtaining his support, the Chiefs of Staff feel that it should be studied by the Canadian Members of the Board, on order to ascertain whether the memorandum, or any part of it, should be brought before the Board as a whole.³⁴

McGeer might have expected a favourable result, for the Secretary of the Canadian Section of the PJBD was H. L. Keenleyside, a native British Columbian and the Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Department of External Affairs. In the first week of March 1942 Keenleyside had attacked the military for its fixation on Europe at the expense of the west coast, asserting that Canadian troops "may be needed *this year* to drive an occupying force out Alaska" [emphasis in original] and could be used in offensive action in 1942 or 1943 in a number of Asian and Pacific locations. If Japan did invade northwest North America, Keenleyside felt that Canadian soldiers would be better suited to fight in that region than most (including the Americans) and he advocated having at least one amphibious *division on the west coast*. But *Keenleyside did not* address McGeer's memorandum, opting instead to have the PJBD's three Canadian military advisers do the job. General Georges Vanier, because he lacked access to vital strategic data, was reluctant to make any comments, adding that it would be wrong to consider McGeer's proposals, "even in a preliminary fashion," without British input. Vanier's colleagues, Air Commodore F. V. Heakes and Major-General Maurice Pope, were not so reticent. Referring to McGeer's submission as a "remarkable document in that it commences with a condemnation of the English speaking races in all that they have done thus far in the war," Heakes dismissed it as too severe and "not in the accordance with the facts." Moreover, if McGeer's suggestions were accepted, original as they were only in scope and scale, Heakes believed they "would lead to a major re-orientation of the United Nation's war effort." Further, because McGeer lacked knowledge about the true nature of the war, he failed to consider the resources required to fight a global conflict and had overrated "the Canadian potential in respect to its true proportion to the war effort." And while claiming that he did not wish to be seen as implying an ulterior motive, Heakes concluded that McGeer's ambitious scheme for the development of BC had "other than strategic significance."³⁵

Pope was a bit more kind. In his opinion McGeer had presented a most plausible paper, replete with skilful pleading. Still, he could not accept McGeer's central premise that a major offensive should be launched against Japan because Pope felt that Germany remained the most menacing enemy. Like Heakes, Pope did not think that McGeer really

comprehended just how much effort and resources would have to be marshalled to transform the north Pacific region into a major theatre of war. And while the expansion of communications in British Columbia was desirable "from certain points of view," Pope doubted that building additional highways and railroads would make any real contribution to the defeat of Japan. He was forced to conclude therefore "that Mr. McGeer's paper has been written from a subjective and not an objective point of view."³⁶

Pope did not send these comments to Keenleyside as he had intended originally, preferring instead to forward them to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa with a request that the military's Joint Planning Sub-Committee consider what McGeer had put forward. Pope offered no reason for his slight change of heart, but perhaps the astute Pope, described by one prominent Canadian official as the best-educated and informed Canadian general and the possessor of an inquiring mind, wanted to see if others saw more merit in McGeer's ideas.³⁷ The Sub-Committee complied and its report, completed on 11 May, admitted that McGeer's notions were not only reasonable but helpful. But the Sub-Committee, chaired by Heakes, agreed with Pope that the war would not be decided in the Pacific and therefore it was not "possible to accept Mr. McGeer's premise."³⁸

Whether or not McGeer was informed of this rebuff, on 13 May he told Ian MacKenzie that Canada was "missing the bus" by failing to join with China and the USSR to liberate Japanese-occupied Asia. A trip to Seattle in late May only strengthened McGeer's conviction that his nation was not taking the Japanese threat seriously. After touring the extensive and formidable defence-related facilities around Seattle, McGeer could not help but feel that what he had seen made "our Pacific Coast Canadian war programme, defensive and otherwise, appear to be very amateurish and insignificant."³⁹

McGeer's attempt to alter this insignificant programme received a boost in early June when Japanese soldiers occupied the western Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska. This action, intended to secure the northern flank of a massive offensive in the central Pacific directed at Midway Island, spurred McGeer into further action.⁴⁰ On 22 June he sent King an eleven-page letter outlining the urgent need to transform Alaska into a bastion from which strong Allied forces would strike Japan. Referring to America's northernmost territory as "the Gibraltar of the sky" (and thus paying homage to the views of Billy Mitchell), McGeer declared that fleets of aircraft based in Alaska and the Aleutians could sever the enemy's supply lines and bomb targets in the Japanese home islands.⁴¹ But if Japan maintained its presence in the Aleutians, which he described as the "Northern Bridge to Asia," McGeer feared that:

the Japanese can then invade Canada, dominate the North Pacific Ocean and block the air power of the United States, with the exception of long-range bombers, from moving in sufficient force to wrest from Japan air supremacy in Asiatic areas already conquered or those whose conquest is in contemplation.⁴²

Once more McGeer's ideas ended up on the agenda of the Joint Planning Sub-Committee for consideration. Its findings, promulgated on 15 July, sounded very much like its earlier commentary. McGeer's claim that Canada should provide the bulk of the labour needed to turn northwest North America into a vast military staging area was judged to be "beyond the capacity of Canada to undertake." Germany continued to be the major foe and any "diversion of men, material and energy to this other theatre beyond the requirements of defence could not be justified." And even if Japan were to become the focus of the Allied effort, McGeer's belief that airpower alone would force a Japanese surrender "has not thus far been demonstrated in any theatre of war in the present struggle, and appears to be beyond the bounds of practical application." This judgement proved so damning that when the Chiefs-of-Staff met to consider McGeer's proposition, they simply put their signatures on the Sub-Committee's brief after making only the most minor of editorial changes.⁴³

Despite the poor reception accorded it by the military, McGeer's dispatch was placed on the agenda for the CWC meeting scheduled for 19 August. While McGeer hoped no doubt for a more hospitable response, he did not sit idly by as the merits of his proposals were weighed. He wrote King twice in July, reiterating his claim that Alaska was the key to defeating Japan and warning again that Japan might yet invade. He also contacted T.A. Crerar, the Minister of Mines and Resources, to ask him to allow some of his departmental officials to produce a special detailed map of the north Pacific:

on which could be outlined existing seaways, railways, highways and airways together with the location of their possible projection for the movement of part of the war power of the continent to battle areas in Russia, China, India etc., and potential battle areas in Siberia, Manchuria, and Japan.⁴⁴

The request for the map was not caprice but rather part of a plan by McGeer to bring his ideas to a wider and hopefully more receptive audience. Frustrated by his inability to make progress with the Ottawa bureaucracy, McGeer looked to the US for succour. In late June he had written Norman Littell, the Assistant Attorney General (and a friend of his wife's family), enclosing an altered map on which he had tried to indicate how Alaska could be used to penetrate German and Japanese defences. Citing Billy Mitchell's assertions about its strategic importance, McGeer told Littell that Alaska offered "a splendid opportunity for the United States and Canada to cooperate in paving the way to utilize the air supremacy that is rapidly developing in the United States to effective advantage."⁴⁵

But McGeer's primary ally in the United States was far less well connected, at least politically. Rex Beach, a Florida-based writer who had spent several years in Alaska as a young man and subsequently churned out a number of novels employing Alaskan settings, did his best to champion McGeer because he shared many of his beliefs.⁴⁶ Writing to McGeer in April 1942, Beach said that the shortest and fastest way to save

India was to grab the Japanese islands off Siberia's coast. Convinced that the Aleutians were vital stepping stones to Asia, Beach asserted that the loss of even one of the islands "might prove a calamity." Given a copy of McGeer's 22 June memorandum, Beach asked the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers* if they would be interested in publishing the document. Both declined, the editor of the former replying that the piece did little more "than re-emphasize a point of view we have already expressed."⁴⁷

Disappointed with the lack of progress, McGeer decided to take matters into his own hands. He informed the Prime Minister on 30 July that he intended to make his case in person in Washington. Asking permission to undertake the trip, McGeer promised King "that any conversation that I may have in Washington will be purely exploratory and unofficial."⁴⁸ King had no objections and one day later Ralston telephoned Pope in the American capital to announce McGeer's imminent arrival and to make clear that Pope understood that the mission was private. Understanding the implication of that statement, Pope promised to show McGeer "every courtesy." Pope did so, meeting McGeer at the train station, escorting him to his hotel, and briefing him on the subtleties of the American political scene. The Canadian Legation also set up appointments for McGeer with officials in the Soviet Embassy and with T. V. Soong, China's Ambassador to the US.⁴⁹

We know very little about what was said during those meetings beyond the fact that Soong and McGeer discussed the possibility of taking back Japanese-held Manchuria. Somewhat more is known about McGeer's *tete-a-tete* with Frederic Delano at the latter's upstate New York estate on 5 August. McGeer had sought out Delano, the Chief of the National Resources Planning Board and an uncle of the American President, because Delano had backed a February 1942 recommendation by an American engineer to build a railway to Alaska through western Canada.⁵⁰ McGeer briefed Delano about his plan to turn Alaska into a Gibraltar of the sky and in return, at least according to McGeer, Delano praised his guest's comprehension of the general strategic situation and railroad construction and asked that McGeer leave behind a special map that he had brought with him.⁵¹

McGeer returned to Canada, as he told Pope, "very well satisfied with the results of his trip to Washington." Others too were pleased. The 10 August edition of the *Vancouver Sun* identified McGeer as "a military authority pertaining to Alaska," praised him for making "a great creative contribution to the Allied cause" and quoting Ian MacKenzie as saying that McGeer had done "magnificent work." MacKenzie apparently was so impressed that he suggested to the Prime Minister that McGeer was suited ideally to become the Canadian Minister to the Soviet Union while retaining his seat in the House of Commons.⁵²

Energized by his recent accomplishments, McGeer visited King at his Gatineau Hills estate on 9 August. He recounted later that the Prime Minister had recognized the strategic value of an Alaskan railway but that King doubted if the requisite money and labour could be found to bring the project to fruition.⁵³ Unwilling to quit when it seemed that he was on the brink of success, McGeer sent two more despatches to King, one on 10 August and the other five days later. The first was uncharacteristically short (only three

pages), but replete with biblical references. Quoting from the Book of Jeremiah, McGeer wrote "Behold the noise of the Bruit has come and a great commotion out of the north country to make the cities of Judah desolate and a den of dragons." For McGeer the US was the Bruit while the commotion from the north would "be the air armadas of this continent moving to and from Alaska." The desolate cities of Judah would correspond to the urban areas of Japan once Allied bombing had started.⁵⁴

The second memorandum was much longer, totalling nearly twenty-two pages. Dropping references to Billy Mitchell, Franklin Roosevelt, and Frederic Delano, McGeer made his case again for transforming Alaska into an impregnable fortress from which aircraft would soar west carrying supplies to China and the Soviet Union and bombs for the industries and cities of Japan. There was no time to hesitate for Japan had recognized already "that the Aleutian Islands were a potential trans-oceanic bridge of military, naval, and air bases which threaten her very existence." But almost half of the submission dealt with the Alaskan railway. Paying particular attention to Delano's role, McGeer described the history of the project and insisted that it was going to be approved by the Americans. Believing that its construction would lead to additional spurs on Canadian soil, McGeer warned that if Canada refused to help the US, the government would be "setting a standard of subservience that will undoubtedly prove harmful to Canada's prestige during the war, and endanger our good-neighbour relations with the United States over an indefinite period of time."⁵⁵

Convinced that the Alaska railway was the right idea at the right time, McGeer was not in Ottawa on 19 August when the CWC discussed his concepts. Instead, at Delano's suggestion, he had travelled to Edmonton the day before to meet with some of the US Army's top engineers about the railroad. Much of the ensuing dialogue centred on the respective merits of four varying routes passing through BC and Alberta as well as the availability of workers and steel rails should the enterprise come on stream. According to the minutes of the meeting, only McGeer brought up the strategic and tactical aspects of the project, and that occurred before the conference formally began.⁵⁶

McGeer's small chain of achievements snapped on 19 August. Having ascertained that the US intended to do nothing on the Alaska railway until a preliminary survey had been completed, the CWC expressed scant interest in the project. McGeer's ideas regarding an Alaskan-based offensive were also examined and found wanting. Ralston supported his service advisers' claim that Canada's west coast security needs had not been neglected, and he agreed with their assertion that the United Nations did not have the resources to launch simultaneous attacks against Germany and Japan. None of those present, including the Prime Minister who had seemed so interested in McGeer's notions in March when it had suited his purposes, said anything in McGeer's defence.⁵⁷

McGeer's sole source of support had come from an individual who had not even been present at the gathering of the CWC. J.G. Turgeon had written to King on 28 July about the need to employ the northern route to Japan. If the US, Canada, and the USSR could coordinate an attack against Japan while it was preoccupied elsewhere, Turgeon was sure that "the political effect would be very gratifying, while the value of the military

result might be greater than we would hope for." The MP from Cariboo did not shy away from publicity either, having said publicly in June 1942 that Japan's occupation of the western Aleutians constituted a serious threat to Canada and the Soviet Union and that this concern should be eliminated by taking "offensive action against Japan." There is no evidence, at least on paper, that McGeer and Turgeon tried to coordinate their activities, but it would stretch the bounds of credulity to think that the two politicians from BC had never spoken to each other about defence issues. Whether cooperation existed or not, Turgeon fared no better than had McGeer before higher authorities. Colonel J.H. Jenkins, Director of Military Operations and Planning, dismissed Turgeon's submission as offering nothing new and for omitting any discussion as to how an attack could be mounted against a fairly secure Japan. Furthermore, Germany remained the primary foe and carrying out two simultaneous offensives would be very difficult. Jenkin's conclusion was that Turgeon's vague proposals were not feasible at present, a verdict shared by the COS. Turgeon fared no better with the CWC. The contents of his letter to King were also considered and rejected by that body on 19 August.⁵⁸

There were more disappointments in store for McGeer. Six days after his defeat before the CWC, he received a letter from Delano in which the American qualified his support for McGeer's efforts. Declaring that he was a layman on strategic matters, Delano asked McGeer to refrain from quoting him on military topics. And whereas Delano thought it conceivable that the war might be brought to a swifter end if offensive power were concentrated in BC and Alaska, there was a moral obligation to do everything possible to aid Australia and New Zealand. Insofar as the railway was concerned, Delano warned McGeer that while the army and President Roosevelt had expressed interest, "that does not guarantee approval." Delano could not say whether the railroad would be built.⁵⁹

Having invested so much time and energy, McGeer was not yet willing to admit defeat. Back in Vancouver in late August, he wrote Ian MacKenzie to complain that many people still mistakenly regarded Alaska as "Seward's Ice Box" and alleged that the Canadian Pacific Railway might be conspiring to block the Alaska railroad's construction. Stating that he would be willing to return to Ottawa to press his case, McGeer asked MacKenzie in the interim to have a very frank conversation with the Prime Minister on the issue. MacKenzie was supportive but non-committal. There was apathy in certain quarters, he had to admit, and MacKenzie promised to do all that he could to help. But as the initiative on the railway likely would come from Washington, MacKenzie doubted that McGeer would be able to accomplish much in Ottawa.⁶⁰

McGeer apparently took MacKenzie's admonition as a guide for future action. He went to Washington in early November 1942 to see Delano. Upon his return to Canada he told King that everyone he had spoken to in the American capital was convinced that the Alaska rail line would be built; "the only question standing in the way seemed to be the approval of the [American] General Staff." Summoning his energy for one last try, McGeer produced on 21 November thirty-three pages on the subject of railways to Alaska and despatched the weighty document to the entire Cabinet. Restating all his old arguments about the need to convert Alaska into a military stronghold, McGeer professed

that the line would cost only \$100 million (less than two battleships) and would employ 13,000 workers, half of them Canadian. Important in the current conflict, the railway, McGeer asserted, would have a lasting strategic significance in the postwar era and would help to open Canada's northwest to economic development and settlement.⁶¹

It was already too late. The US Army had recommended on 9 November that the Alaska railroad not be constructed. Building the line made sense if Japan was expected to control the seas in 1944, but the American military doubted this:

[the [project's] construction requires so much in materials, equipment, and transportation, its completion is so long delayed, its need so dependent upon the assumption of control of the sea by Japan, that the resultant diversion from the war effort during the critical period, 1943 and 1944, is not justified.⁶²

The War Department decided subsequently in December to file away the railway survey "for possible future wartime use."⁶³

McGeer was informed curtly of the American decision to abandon the railway by C D . Howe in late November. Bitterly disappointed, he complained to MacKenzie that the US had declined to go ahead "due solely to the attitude of our Canadian Government in refusing to extend any real measure of co-operation in the building of the railway through Canadian Territory." Reciting a list of the requests he had made over the past year, all unfulfilled, McGeer wearily concluded that he did "not know whether anything can be done, but it does seem that we have missed another great opportunity."⁶⁴ After being told by Delano in mid-December that the US army decision was "not final," McGeer petitioned Ralston to help to reverse it, maintaining that the chief cause had been "Canada's refusal to contribute rails, materials, equipment, labour and finance to the part of the enterprise in Canadian territory." In McGeer's opinion this failure to expand the continental railway system to Alaska "at the earliest possible moment" was "again playing into the hands of the Japanese war leaders."⁶⁵ Ralston apparently did not respond or act upon the request.

This last appeal marked the cessation of McGeer's attempts to draw attention to the strategic importance of Alaska and northern British Columbia. Undoubtedly wearied by the effort, as well as hurt by the constant rejection, McGeer ended the parade of letters and memoranda. There was also the re-emergence of a drinking problem, albeit short-lived, in 1943.⁶⁶ Ironically, McGeer abandoned his goal only months before the Canadian government opted to assign a brigade to help recapture the island of Kiska in August 1943. The choice to participate in this offensive was taken only reluctantly by the CWC after its hand was forced by an army leadership now eager to help the Americans and thus put an end to an extended and embarrassing period of relative inactivity. Once the soldiers were committed to the Kiska operation, there were a number of prominent Canadian civilian and military officials, including General Stuart, who wanted to move beyond the Aleutians to an assault on the Japanese-held Kuriles just north of Japan itself.⁶⁷ If McGeer can be accused of anything, it might be that he was slightly ahead of his time.

McGeer might also be reproached for failing to understand the system within which he had to manoeuvre. To employ a tired cliché, as a mayor and a provincial politician McGeer had been a big fish in a couple of small ponds. But once he had left the familiar environs of Vancouver, he found himself swimming in a large pool that even his expansive character could not fill, especially when the water was dominated by other powerful and entrenched personalities. Ottawa in the 1930s and 1940s has been described as a place ruled by a meritocratic civil service mandarin, tightly knit politically and socially, who valued expertise, intellect, and sophistication.⁶⁸ But McGeer was a consummate populist who has been described variously as witty, caustic, blunt, tactless, and impulsive, as well as a ruthless demagogue who "epitomized personality over policy."⁶⁹ These qualities were no doubt valuable in getting votes in BC, but they were not likely to impress the cautious Ottawa denizens with whom he had to deal, nor were they apt to win many friends. It does not seem, however, that McGeer put much of an effort into acquiring allies, at least in Canada. I can find no evidence that he corresponded with his fellow British Columbia MPs or that he tried to cultivate support within the bureaucracy. As a native British Columbian and a critic of the military's obsession with Europe, Keenleyside would seem to have been a natural ally. Yet there is no evidence that he and McGeer spoke or otherwise discussed the security situation on the west coast. One must wonder though if Keenleyside would have been much help, for he "had blotted his copybook in the Prime Minister's view by supporting the Japanese Canadians too enthusiastically" when they were evacuated from the west coast in early 1942.TM

King had not been the only obstacle to the achievement of McGeer's hopes. On the two instances that McGeer's propositions had come before service representatives for appraisal, the military had judged them as impractical, not feasible, and certainly undesirable in a global conflict in which Germany had been identified as the more dangerous adversary. The military could not accept McGeer's central premise that Japan was just as menacing. One reason was that the bulk of the senior officers had cut their teeth professionally combatting Germany in the First World War and had difficulty accepting that the Japanese, an Asiatic people, could equal the threat posed by the Germans.⁷¹ The services consistently played down the peril posed by Japan. For example, only five days after the presence of Japanese troops was confirmed on Kiska in June 1942, and before it could be determined just what the enemy's intentions were either in the short- or long-term, the COS had ruled that the landings were probably "more concerned with removing threats to Japan than with raiding or other operations against this continent."⁷² As it happens that assessment proved to be correct, but had it been wrong, and had the Japanese carried out additional operations in the region, Canada might have paid a high price because its military was fixated on the conflict in Europe and dismissive of Japan's capabilities.

There was another motive behind the military's categorical denunciation of McGeer's ideas. Stephen Harris has argued forcefully that during the interwar era, bereft of resources and with few operational tasks, the army concentrated on establishing itself as a professional corporate body with an integral role in guiding the organization of the

nation's defence.⁷³ Yet when war came in 1939, the army's ambitions for an important voice in strategic formulations were dashed. As C P. Stacey noted in his seminal work on Canadian political-military policy during World War II, because Canada was a junior and largely voiceless partner in a grand coalition, the government did not require much advice from its military. From 17 June 1942 until the Cabinet War Committee was dissolved in 1945, the Chiefs-of-Staff attended just forty-five of 167 CWC meetings — and then only by invitation.⁷⁴ Unable often to present its own view or to be accorded the professional advisory status it so badly craved, it is hardly surprising that the army, and the military as a whole, resisted the efforts of an amateur strategist like McGeer do its job.

Despite the fact none of McGeer's recommendations were adopted by the Canadian and American governments, in a curious way he could be considered a success. At a time of grave crisis, when the successful outcome of the war lay in the balance, McGeer managed to bring his ideas to the attention of prominent and sometimes powerful officials on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel. Copies of some of his writings even managed to land on the desks of American Vice-President Henry Wallace and Major-General George Strong, the War Department's Chief of Staff.⁷⁵ Anthony J. Dimond, Alaska's delegate to the House of Representatives, probably envied McGeer's accomplishments, meagre though they were. Dimond had campaigned for years to draw attention to Alaska's security needs but his "earliest requests for improving territorial and national defense received so little attention that he had few active opponents to argue against."⁷⁶ Many in Canada who had to deal with McGeer probably saw him as a self-interested crackpot, but it is important that a number of prominent Americans would have acknowledged McGeer's views as both reasonable and workable. Hanson W. Baldwin, the military columnist for the *New York Times*, had advocated an offensive against Japan via the Aleutians as early as February 1942, reversing his prewar opinion that operations in the north Pacific were impractical.⁷⁷ Two days before Baldwin's claim appeared in print, William Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services, warned Roosevelt that Japan would try to grab the Aleutians to safeguard a future invasion of Siberia and to prevent the archipelago from housing bases from which American long-range bombers could strike the Japanese home islands. If the US developed the Aleutians and built air fields there, Donovan believed the island chain was "a place from which we could really get the initiative and have a chance of upsetting Japan's plans."⁷⁸

American commanders on the west coast and in Alaska would have sided with McGeer as well. In January 1942 the heads of the army and navy forces in Alaska requested that a northern route of attack against Japan be cultivated and that negotiations with the Soviets be initiated as soon as possible with the aim of obtaining access to Siberian bases.⁷⁹ Once the Japanese seized the western Aleutians the pressure to do more in the north Pacific intensified, with Lieutenant-General John L. Dewitt leading the charge. As commander of the US Western Defense Command, a jurisdiction that ran from California north to Alaska, Dewitt was an enthusiastic advocate of a northern approach to Japan; it was his initiative that led to the inclusion of a Canadian brigade in the operation that reoccupied Kiska in August 1943. He fought hard, if unsuccessfully, to

convince his superiors that an offensive launched from the Aleutians was feasible if the proper level of resources was assigned.⁸⁰ But the most highly-placed individual with an interest in Alaska's strategic value was President Roosevelt. Long interested in his nation's northernmost territory, once Japan opened hostilities, Roosevelt sought to convince Joseph Stalin to bring his country into the Pacific war or at least to allow American forces access to Siberian facilities.⁸¹ If Stalin had agreed, the Aleutians would have become the vital bridge to Asia that McGeer had been advocating. Stalin, however, was most reluctant to embroil his battered nation in a conflict with Japan while engaged already in a life-and-death struggle with Germany, and negotiations with the Americans about the Siberian bases continued until the war was almost over. More than anything else (including the region's dismal weather), it was Stalin's refusal to give the Americans bases in the USSR that limited the strategic value of Alaska and the Aleutians.

Perhaps McGeer's most significant contribution was that through sheer persistence and relentlessness he acted as a spokesperson for his province and compelled King and the military to address at least the security needs of the west coast. To those in Ottawa the possibility of a few raids by small Japanese forces seemed remote and insignificant. But to British Columbians the danger appeared very real and the federal government's apparent indifference to their plight additional proof of the widely-held belief that they and their province mattered little to eastern power brokers except as a place that could be exploited for votes or its natural wealth. British Columbia has been described as seeing itself as an outpost of empire - first the British and then the Canadian - and suffering all the insecurities which that status can sometimes bring, especially when confronted by an external danger.⁸² The level of anxiety was very high in 1942-1943, as reflected in the newspapers (noted above) and in books such as *A Million Miles From Ottawa*, a sharp condemnation by a BC-based journalist of the federal government's actions (and inaction) after the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁸³ Ian MacKenzie was BC's representative in the federal Cabinet but his effectiveness was limited by his relatively minor portfolio (Pensions and National Health), his mixed record as an administrator, and geography, which he complained restricted his ability to visit the province more than three or four times a year and then only for periods "of a very short duration." This made it impossible for him "to keep entirely in touch with local conditions and opinions."⁸⁴

MacKenzie also owed his Cabinet position to King, a fact that limited his ability to act independently on BC's behalf. As a backbencher with ambitions to move to the front rows, McGeer too had an incentive to stay on side, but this seemed a much harder proposition. One analyst of the Liberal Party labelled him as "an ambitious, hot-tempered Irish politician encumbered by some strange and unorthodox policy ideas" as well as "a monetary crank."⁸⁵ A kinder interpretation might view him as a British Columbian who, like T.D. Pattullo, placed a heavy emphasis "on the need for strong government intervention in the economic life of the country."⁸⁶ With the onset of war in the Pacific, McGeer combined his obsessions — Keynesian pump-priming and a fear of Japan — and sought, in time-honoured Canadian fashion, to link his fortune with his province. He failed, a

victim of his own flaws and a fluid decision-making system that made it harder for old-style political outsiders to have much impact on policy formulation. But at least he tried.

NOTES

- * Galen Roger Perras recently defended his doctoral thesis, "Stepping Stones on a Road to Nowhere? The United States, Canada, and the Aleutian Island Campaign, 1942-1943," at the University of Waterloo. He is currently a strategic analyst for the Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Department of National Defence, Ottawa.
1. The many letters about economic reform penned by McGeer and sent to King can be found in the National Archives of Canada (NAC), W.L.M. King Papers, Correspondence, MG26 J1, scattered throughout King's 1930s correspondence.
 2. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates (Debates)*, I (1936), speech by G.G. McGeer, 14 February 1936.
 3. *Ibid.*, speech by McGeer, 18 February 1936.
 4. McGeer's defence of King's government concerning the Bren Gun scandal can be found in, *Debates*, I (1939), 886-892.
 5. David Ricardo Williams, *The Remarkable Gerald Grattan McGeer* (Vancouver, 1986), 226; Kenneth Coates (ed.), *The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium* (Vancouver, 1985), especially David Remley, "The Latent Fear: Canadian-American Relations and Early Proposals for a Highway to Alaska," 1-8; and Robin Fisher, "T.D. Pattullo and the British Columbia to Alaska Highway," 9-24.
 6. Williams, *McGeer*, 227 and 237.
 7. British Columbia Archives and Records Service (BCARS), G.G. McGeer Papers, MSS 9, box 2, file 9, McGeer to Hugh Dalton, 23 November 1940.
 8. *Ibid.*, McGeer to Pattullo, 9 March 1941.
 9. NAC, MG 26 J1, vol. 309, file MacE-McGee, McGeer to King and Howe, 6 June 1941.
 10. *Ibid.*, McGeer to King, 19 and 22 July 1941.
 11. *Ibid.*, McGeer to King, 20 November 1941.
 12. Robert Seager II, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (Annapolis, 1977), 485; and Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (Annapolis, 1991), 93.
 13. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, William Mitchell Papers, box 46, file Pacific Problem Strategical Aspect, memorandum by Mitchell, "Strategical Aspect of the Pacific," 1924; and Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, 1987), 31.
 14. NAC, MG 26 J1, vol. 309, file MacE-McGee, McGeer to Howe, 16 December 1941; and BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 2, file 9, McGeer to King, 25 December 1941.
 15. See A.R.M. Lower, "The Defence of the West Coast," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, XVI (October 1938), for an outline of possible strategies Canada might have employed to meet such a contingency. Maurice Pope, a Canadian army officer who participated in military planning in the 1930s, held a poor opinion of the neutrality schemes. In his memoirs he wrote that to "my mind and, I am sure, to that of the General Staff, this idea that it might some day become incumbent on Canada to defend her neutrality was the height of absurdity. For it was clear that should the United States become involved in a war in the East our West Coast, being pretty well on the great circle route leading from the United States to Japan, would immediately become of vital importance to the former in the prosecution of the war. Consequently, it was equally clear that if in such

- circumstances Canada should attempt to remain neutral and aloof, our American neighbours would ride roughshod over us and make use of our territories and facilities as it pleased them. And, as far as I could see, they would be entirely justified in doing so." Maurice A. Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt.-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto, 1962), 91. The best account of Canadian defence planning for the west coast prior to 1939 is Roger Sarty's "'Entirely in the Hands of the Friendly Neighbour': The Canadian Armed Forces and the Defence of the Pacific Coast 1909-1939" (Unpublished paper presented at the conference on "Redirection: Defending Canada — The Pacific Perspective," University of Victoria, March 1994).
16. NAC, RG2 7c, Cabinet War Committee (CWC), Minutes and Documents, Minutes, 8 October 1940.
 17. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, CWC, Minutes, 26 July 1940; vol. 3, "Brief Appreciation of the Situation as of 24th February 1941," submitted by the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee (COS), 25 February 1941; COS, "Appreciation. The Nature of the Canadian War Effort Midsummer 1941 to Spring 1942," 28 May 1941; and NAC, CD. Howe Papers, MG27 III B20, vol. 51, file 5-14 (1), COS, "Appreciation. The Nature of the Canadian Military Effort As of 5th September 1941."
 18. Queen's University Archives (QUA), C.G. Power Papers, box 59, file D 1030, Breadner to Power, 8 December 1941.
 19. NAC, MG26 J13, King Diaries, entry for 9 December 1941.
 20. *Vancouver Sun*, 8 December 1941.
 21. NAC, RG2 7c, "Appreciation presented by the Chiefs-of-Staff to the CWC," CWC Document no. 40, 10 December 1941; and CWC, Minutes, 10 December 1941.
 22. *Ibid.*, Nelles to the Ministers of National Defence, CWC document no. 42, 11 December 1941.
 23. *Debates* (1942), vol. 1, speeches by Green, 29 January 1942; Turgeon, 3 February 1942; and Reid, 2 February 1942.
 24. *Vancouver Sun*, 12 January; and 5, 17, 18 and 25 February 1942.
 25. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 328, file 1942. McGeer to King, 10 January 1942.
 26. NAC, MG26 J13, King Diaries, entry for 3 March 1942; and NAC, Ian MacKenzie Papers, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 24-53, McGeer to King, 5 March 1942.
 27. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC, Minutes, 6 March 1942; NAC, MG26 J13, King Diaries, entry for 6 March 1942; NAC, RG2, vol. 32, file D-19-1 1942, Privy Council Records, copy of excerpted memorandum by McGeer read by King at the meeting of the CWC, 6 March 1942; and NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 335, file "Smuts to Syrett," King to Stuart, 6 March 1942.
 28. NAC, MG26 J13, King Diaries, entry for 6 March 1942.
 29. Williams, *McGeer*, 97.
 30. Bruce Hutchison, *The Far Side of the Street* (Toronto, 1976), 95; Paul Martin, *A Very Public Life. Volume I: Far From Home* (Ottawa, 1983), 170.
 31. NAC, MG26 J13, King Diaries, entry for 19 March 1942.
 32. Stuart apparently told other officers that he feared for his position as CGS if he did not approve a second division for the west coast; CP. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa, 1970), 47n; NAC, RG2 7c, memorandum, COS to the Ministers, CWC document no. 117, 10 March 1942; Stuart to the CWC, "Proposal to Mobilize Units Required to Complete Order of Battle of 6th Canadian Division" and "Proposal for Mobilization of Three Brigade Groups of the 7th Division,"

CWC documents nos. 122 and 123, 17 March 1942; and CWC, Minutes, 18 March 1942.

33. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 328, file 1942, McGeer to King, 19 and 23 March and 8 April 1942.

34. NAC, Department of External Affairs Records, RG25, vol. 3049, file 242, Captain Houghton, Secretary of the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, to H. L. Keenleyside, Secretary of the Canadian Section of the Permanent Joint Board of Defence, 28 April 1942.

35. NAC, RG2, Keenleyside to N.A. Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 4 March 1942; NAC, RG25, vol. 820, file 686, Keenleyside to Robertson and Lester B. Pearson, 9 March 1942; Vanier to Keenleyside, 6 May 1942; and Heakes to Keenleyside, 30 April 1942.

36. Canada, Department of National Defence (DND), Director General History (DHist), file 314.009 (D81), Pope to Keenleyside, 5 May 1942.

37. J.W. Pickersgill quoted in J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto, 1993), 207.

38. DND, DHist, file 112.21009 (D204), Brigadier R.B. Gibson to DMO&I (Director of Military Operations and Intelligence), "Memorandum of Mr. McGeer, K.C., on Pacific Strategy," 6 May 1942; and DHist, file 314.009 (D81), "Memorandum of Mr. McGeer, K.C. on Pacific Strategy," submitted by the Joint Planning Staff, 11 May 1942.

39. NAC, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 23-1, McGeer to MacKenzie, 13 May 1942; and BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 2, file 9, McGeer to King, 29 May 1942.

40. Japanese plans for the Aleutian portion of the attack are discussed in Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945)* (Annapolis, 1978); and Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya, *Midway: The Battle That Doomed Japan* (Annapolis, 1955).

41. In 1935, during testimony on Capitol Hill, Mitchell had identified Japan as a potentially dangerous enemy which would attack Alaska immediately in a conflict. He described Alaska as "the most central place in the world for aircraft, and that is true either of Europe, Asia, or North America. I believe in the future he who holds Alaska will hold the world, and I think it is the most important strategic place in the world;" United States, Congress, House of Representatives, "Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs," 74 Cong., 1 Sess. testimony by General William Mitchell, 13 February 1935.

42. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 328, file 1942, McGeer to King, 22 June 1942.

43. DND, DHist, file 193.009 (D9), report by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee, 15 July 1942; NAC, Department of National Defence Records, RG24, vol. 8081, file NSS 1272-2, vol. 6, COS Committee, Minutes, 21 July 1942; and NAC, J.L. Ralston Papers, MG27 III B11, vol. 37, file Aleutian Islands, Chiefs-of-Staff to the Ministers of National Defence, 22 July 1942.

44. NAC, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 23-1, McGeer to Crerar, 22 July 1942.

45. BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, McGeer to Littell, 30 June 1942.

46. Born in Michigan in 1877, Beach abandoned a law career in 1897 to participate in the Klondike gold rush and spent five years as a prospector in Alaska before turning to literary pursuits. At least four of his novels were set in Alaska. An account of his life is found in Edward T. James (ed.), *Dictionary of American Biography: Supplement Three 1941-1945* (New York, 1973), 59-61.

47. BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, Beach to McGeer, 27 April 1942; Beach to Ben Hibbs, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, 1 July 1942; Beach to McGeer, 3 July and 20 July 1942; and Hibbs to Beach, 8 July 1942.

48. *Ibid.*, McGeer to King, 30 July 1942.

49. NAC, Maurice Pope Papers, MG27 III F4, vol. 1, diary entries for 31 July and 1 and 4 August 1942.
50. A copy of the recommendation is in BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, J.R. Wemlinger to Ernest Gruening, Governor of Alaska, 18 February 1942.
51. *Ibid.*, Delano to McGeer, 5 August 1942; and McGeer to King, 6 August 1942.
52. NAC, MG27 III F4, diary entry for 4 August 1942; *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 1942; NAC, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 23-1, MacKenzie to King, 10 August and 19 September 1942.
53. Williams, *McGeer*, 252.
54. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 328, file 1942, McGeer to King, 10 August 1942.
55. *Ibid.*, McGeer to King, 15 August 1942.
56. BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, letter, McGeer to Delano, 15 August 1942; and NAC, MG27 III B1 1, vol. 37, file Alaska (Secret) 1942-43, "Memorandum on conference held by Lieut-Gen. Sommerville [sic], U.S.A. Army on the evening of the 18th of August, on the question of a railway into the Yukon and Alaska," 18 August 1942.
57. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC, Minutes, 19 August 1942.
58. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 336, file "Trestail to Tyrelle," Turgeon to King, 28 July 1942; *Hamilton Spectator*, 19 August 1942; DND, DHist, file 193.009 (D10), Jenkins to the Chief of the General Staff, 8 August 1942; NAC, RG24, vol. 8081, file NSS 1272-2, vol. 6, COS, Minutes, 11 August 1942; NAC, RG2, 7c, COS to the Ministers of National Defence, CWC document no. 252, 13 August 1942; and CWC, Minutes, 19 August 1942.
59. BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, Delano to McGeer, 25 August 1942.
60. NAC, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 23-1, McGeer to MacKenzie, 29 August 1942; and MacKenzie to McGeer, 31 August 1942.
61. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 328, file 1942, McGeer to King, 24 November 1942; McGeer, memorandum, "The Railway to Alaska," 21 November 1942.
62. United States National Archives (USNA), RG 165, War Department Records, Office of the Director of Plans and Operations, General Records-Correspondence, box 1638, file OPD 617 Alaska (Section 1), Major-General C.P. Gross to General Somervell, "Trans-Canadian Alaska Railway (Prince George, British Columbia, to Kobe, Alaska)," 9 November 1942.
63. Stanley W. Dzuiban, *United States Army in World War II: Military Relations Between the United States and Canada 1939-1945* (Washington, 1959), 228.
64. NAC, MG27 III B5, vol. 19, file 23-1 (2), Howe to McGeer, 27 November 1942; and McGeer to MacKenzie, 3 December 1942.
65. BCARS, McGeer Papers, box 9, file 2, Delano to McGeer, 16 December 1942; and McGeer to Ralston, January 1943.
66. Williams, *McGeer*, 256.
67. I have explored the decision to send Canadian soldiers to Kiska and the failed attempt to go to the Kuriles in "Canada as a Military Partner: Alliance Politics and the Campaign to Recapture the Aleutian Island of Kiska," *Journal of Military History*, LVI (July 1992), 423-454; and "Eyes on the Northern Route to Japan: Plans for Canadian Participation in an Invasion of the Kurile Islands — A Study in Coalition Warfare and Civil-Military Relationships," *War & Society*, VIII (May 1990), 100-117.
68. See J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935-1957* (Toronto, 1982); and Doug Owram, *The Government Gener-*

- ation: *Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1986).
69. Williams, *McGeer*, 15; and Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto, 1991), 175.
70. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, 95.
71. The racial aspect of the war in the Pacific and the complex ways in which ethnocentrism and racism influenced Allied perceptions and war-fighting strategies are explored in John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986); and John Ferris, "'Worthy of Some Better Enemy?': The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army 1919-41, and the Fall of Singapore," *Canadian Journal of History*, XXVIII (August 1993), 224-256.
72. NAC, RG2 7c, Chiefs-of-Staff Monthly Appreciation, CWC document no. 199, 15 June 1942.
73. Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto, 1988), 5.
74. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 115 and 128.
75. Norman Littell sent McGeer's 22 June 1942 piece to Wallace, who in turn forwarded it to Strong; USNA, RG165, Office of the Director of Plans and Operations, General Records-Correspondence, box 1001, file OPD 350.5 Alaska Defense Command, Wallace to Strong, 29 October 1942, plus attached memorandum by McGeer, 22 June 1942.
76. Mary Childers Mangusso, "Anthony J. Diamond: A Political Biography" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Texas Tech University, 1978), 324.
77. *New York Times*, 20 February 1942; and Hanson W. Baldwin, *Defense of the Western World* (London, 1941), 64-65 and 84-85.
78. Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library (FDRL), Franklin Roosevelt Papers, President's Secretary File, Subject Files, box 148, file Office of Strategic Services, Reports: 2/12-20 1942, #244-273, Donovan to Roosevelt, 18 February 1942.
79. USNA, RGI65, War Plans Division, General Correspondence 1920-1942, box 249, file WPD 4503-14, Brigadier-General Simon B. Buckner and Captain Ralph C. Parker, "Joint Army-Navy Plans for Alaska," 31 January 1942.
80. Dewitt's role, and indeed the entire story of Canadian-American cooperation in the Aleutians during World War II, are addressed in my doctoral dissertation, "Stepping Stones on a Road to Nowhere? The United States, Canada, and the Aleutian Island Campaign, 1942-1942" (University of Waterloo, 1995).
81. FDRL, Roosevelt Papers, Map Room Files, box 168, folder #3 Naval Aide's Files, Pacific War Council Apr. 1942-Apr. 1944, memorandum containing minutes of Pacific War Council meeting held on 1 April 1942, 3 April 1942. Roosevelt's interest in the Siberian bases is discussed in Grace Person Hayes, *The History of the Joint Chiefs Of Staff in World War Two: The War Against Japan* (Annapolis, 1982), 131-135.
82. R.M. Burns, "British Columbia and the Canadian Federation," in Burns (ed.), *One Country or Two?* (Montreal, 1971), 254-255.
83. Gwen Cash, *A Million Miles From Ottawa* (Toronto, 1942).
84. Ian Mackenzie cited in Reginald Whitaker, *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930-58* (Toronto, 1977), 369-370.
85. *Ibid.*, 371.
86. Burns, "British Columbia," 259.