

Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Halifax as an International Strategic Factor, 1749-1949

C. P. Stacey

Volume 28, Number 1, 1949

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300308ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/300308ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (print)

1712-9095 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Stacey, C. P. (1949). Halifax as an International Strategic Factor, 1749-1949.
Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada, 28(1), 46–56.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/300308ar>

HALIFAX AS AN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC FACTOR, 1749-1949

By Colonel C. P. STACEY
Historical Section, Army Headquarters, Ottawa

THE city of Halifax may be said to have played, during its two centuries, two main roles in the history of Canada. One was purely domestic—that of a Maritime metropolis, the focus of the political and commercial life of Nova Scotia, the city of Samuel Cunard and Joseph Howe. The other was imperial and international—that of a military base which has been an important factor in five great maritime wars, and in the strategic calculations of many nations between the wars. The city was founded to serve strategic needs; and it celebrates its two hundredth birthday only four years after the end of a war in which the Halifax base played a greater part than in any previous conflict. It is of this second function that I propose to speak today.

We have to examine three main phases which reflect the steadily changing conditions of international relations in the North Atlantic area and Western Europe, and more particularly the evolution which has led, by not particularly easy stages, to the present happy relationship between the two great sections of the English-speaking world. In the first and shortest, Halifax guarded the flank of the British seaboard colonies and served as an advanced base in the final great British offensive against the French in North America. The second began with the disruption of the Empire in 1775; in it Halifax served, through two wars and a long period of rumours of wars, as a major pivot of British strategy in the New World. The third was inaugurated by the withdrawal of British naval and military forces from Halifax in 1905-7. It has witnessed the two World Wars, in which Halifax served in a new role: as one of the great gateways through which the strength of the New World went forth to the assistance of the Old, and as one of the main bases for the forces protecting the routes over which that strength was exerted.

I. THE FLANK GUARD OF THE FOURTEEN COLONIES, 1749-63

In the year 1745, it will be remembered, the New England colonies, with the help of the Royal Navy and a good deal of luck, surprised the world by capturing from the French the strong fortress of Louisbourg. Three years later British negotiators, liquidating a worldwide war, made the New Englanders very angry by handing Louisbourg back to France in exchange for Madras. The British government, however, was not so oblivious to the interests of the King's American colonies and the conditions of American strategy as the colonists imagined. It well understood that with Louisbourg in French hands again it was essential to provide in that area a British military station of comparable strength as a counterweight and as a protection for New England and her trade. The result was the founding of Halifax.¹

¹J. B. Brebner, *New England's Outpost: Acadia before the Conquest of Canada* (New York, 1927), 131-2.

The character of this enterprise of 1749 as a stroke of policy appears in the fact that Halifax is the only community in America ever established by the direct action of the British government. The choice of the site was doubtless influenced by Admiral d'Anville's utilization of uninhabited Chebucto as a base in his abortive campaign of 1746.² It was, however, a sufficiently obvious idea, and the great attraction of the place was of course its well-protected and extraordinarily commodious harbour. Over a century later, Sir William Jervois pointed out that, including Bedford Basin, there were "nearly 4,000 acres of deep water anchorage" there. "The size of the harbour," he wrote, "will be better understood by a comparison with Plymouth Sound, which contains about 900 acres; or with our Portland Harbour, which contains about 1,300 acres of deep water anchorage."³ This feature, combined with proximity to the greatest trans-Atlantic trade-routes, is still the main reason for Halifax's strategic importance. A subsidiary advantage was the fact that the harbour could be effectively fortified, though not without considerable effort and expense. The process of fortification began, in fact, in the year in which the city was founded.⁴

The special place of Nova Scotia and Halifax in imperial military policy at this period is suggested by the facts that during eight years beginning in 1750 parliamentary grants for the province amounted to nearly £550,000, and that it was allowed a permanent garrison of three regiments. At this time no other colony received more than a small fraction of this expenditure, and the total permanent garrison of the rest of British North America consisted of seven independent companies divided between New York and South Carolina.⁵

Halifax's first war was the Seven Years' War, and in it the town may be said to have justified its creation. It was already a place of some strength, and possessed the naval dockyard which still exists.⁶ It was the main local base for the Royal Navy in the operations in the St. Lawrence area. At Halifax the force intended for the attack on Louisbourg assembled in 1757. That plan was dropped, but it was from Halifax that Amherst and Boscawen sailed the following year with the expedition that actually took Louisbourg. At Halifax Wolfe issued his General Orders for the campaign against Quebec in 1759, although

²*Ibid.*, 131-2, 115-16.

³Public Archives of Canada, W.O. 33, vol. 15, *Report on the Defence of the British Naval Stations in the North Atlantic*, by Lt.-Col. W. F. D. Jervois. Jan. 25, 1865.

⁴Harry Piers, *The Evolution of the Halifax Fortress, 1749-1928* (Halifax, 1947).

⁵G. L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York, 1907), 11-13; S. M. Pargellis, *Lord Loudoun in North America* (New Haven, 1933), 31. For several years from 1749, the Board of Trade "gave more attention to the care and encouragement of Nova Scotia than to any other matter that came before it" (A. H. Basye, *The Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, commonly known as the Board of Trade, 1748-1782*, New Haven, 1925, 41).

⁶Knox recorded under the year 1757, "... they have a royal dock here, with all the conveniences for the largest first-rate ship to heave down and careen" (Capt. John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the years 1757, 1758, 1759, and 1760*, ed. A. G. Doughty, Toronto, Champlain Society, 3 vols., 1914-16, I, 52). A deed dated 1759 for land supposed to be "the nucleus of the present Dockyard" is printed in Charles H. Stubbing, "Dockyard Memoranda, 1894" (*Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, XIII, 1908). A document of 1761 in Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, Appendix I, seems to leave no doubt that the yard was established on its present site in 1759.

Louisbourg was the actual assembly point from which the fleet sailed.⁷

The destruction of Louisbourg in 1760 left Halifax without a rival as the great British military station in the Maritime area; but it was shortly to suffer a severe setback. The settlement of 1763 and the expulsion of France from Canada stripped it of its significance. War had brought prosperity, peace brought stagnation. "The conquests of Ile Royale and New France had neatly destroyed the strategic importance which had won for Nova Scotia the spasmodic but increasing interest and financial support of Great Britain and New England since 1688."⁸

II. BRITISH STRATEGY VIS-A-VIS THE UNITED STATES, 1775-1906

If the older English colonies had remained within the Empire, it might have been long before Halifax regained its military importance. As it was, however, in 1775 their disputes with the Mother Country flared into war, and simultaneously the city again attracted the attention of strategists. It is true that in the spring of that year Gage withdrew almost the whole of the garrison to help him at Boston, and with only thirty-six effective men left, Halifax must have been weaker than at any other time in its history;⁹ but it was soon reinforced, and by December Sir William Howe, finding Boston uncomfortable, was sending instructions for improving the Halifax fortifications.¹⁰ In the following March he evacuated Boston and himself arrived at Halifax with his army. The town now became for a time the main base of operations against the rebellious colonies. In June, Howe sailed again, his object being the reduction of New York.¹¹

New York was duly taken. That city was thenceforward the chief focus of the British military proceedings in America, and the role of Halifax was secondary. More than the possession of New York, however, was needed to win the war, and the required leadership and resources were not forthcoming. In 1783 the King made peace with the colonies which he had been unable to reduce to obedience, and the early winter of that year witnessed the final great act of the Revolution—the evacuation of New York. For months the convoys had been sailing out past Sandy Hook, with their freight of British and German battalions, Loyalist troops, and dejected civilian refugees. Some went to England, but many went to Nova Scotia, where a large military force was now to be maintained.¹² When New York was handed over to General Washington on November 25 and Sir Guy Carleton departed with the last of the red-

⁷Knox, *Journal of the Campaigns in North America*, I, 23, 44, 213, 328, 335. Wolfe went to Halifax because Louisbourg harbour was blocked by ice (A. G. Doughty and G. W. Parmelee, *The Siege of Quebec and the Battle of the Plains of Abraham*, 6 vols., Quebec, 1901, II, 21).

⁸J. B. Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony during the Revolutionary Years* (New York, 1937), 5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (4 vols., London, 1904-9), I, 22-3, Howe to Massey, Dec. 19, 1775.

¹¹A. T. Mahan, *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence* (Boston, 1913), 29-30, 38-9.

¹²"... the six regiments that are to remain in Nova Scotia" (*Report on American Manuscripts*, IV, 349, Carleton to Fox, Sept. 12, 1783).

coats, it symbolized the withdrawal of British power, not from America, but into the pinched and frosty north. Thanks in no small part to the influence of the military and naval establishments at Halifax, one of the fourteen seaboard colonies had remained outside the circle of the Revolution; the inflowing Loyalists now rapidly swamped Nova Scotia's "neutral Yankees"; and while the Stars and Stripes flapped loudly on staffs from Maine to Georgia, the Union Jack still flew on Citadel Hill.

When the British marched out of the works at Yorktown, their bands are said to have played "The World Turned Upside Down." It was certainly upside down for Halifax. The military station which had looked northward now faced to the south. New England's outpost against the French of Canada had become Canada's outpost against New England. As the military relationship of the Second Empire and the young Republic began to take shape, it was very clear that Halifax was to be an important element in it.

As always, the conclusion of peace caused the suspension of work on the Halifax fortifications; but the renewal of war in Europe in 1793, combined with the arrival in Halifax next year, as commander-in-chief, of a royal prince¹³ who loved to build forts, led to a large new programme being undertaken. Continued alarms served to keep the defences in at least moderately good condition until the outbreak of the War of 1812.¹⁴

Let us recall for one moment the basic strategic conditions of this war. The Canadian population was very heavily outnumbered by that of the United States; American industrial resources were small, but those of Canada were still smaller; and the lateral communications over which men and munitions from the eastern seaboard could be moved to the shores of the Great Lakes were very inadequate indeed. A great war in Europe made it impossible for Britain to exert more than a fraction of her strength in America. All the advantages in warfare on the Canadian border seemed to lie with the United States, and if that country had exploited these advantages with even a moderate degree of intelligence it could hardly have failed to overrun the Canadas. As it was, Sir James Yeo's comment may have been a trifle rude, but was certainly accurate: "The experience of two years active service has served to convince me that tho' much has been done by the mutual exertions of *both Services*, we also owe as much if not more to the perverse stupidity of the Enemy. . . ."¹⁵

However weak she was in the interior of North America, Great Britain was tremendously strong at sea, and the United States Navy, however efficient, was tiny. The Royal Navy, moreover, had good bases within striking distance of the American coast. Halifax, the headquarters of the North American station, was only 370 sea miles from Boston; Bermuda was only 700 from New York. Thus, though British operations on the Canadian border had to be basically defensive, on the Atlantic seaboard the British were in a position to attack. This was in fact the pattern which the war followed throughout. Such secondary offensive moves on the border as Brock's capture of Detroit were actually defensive in intention, designed for the protection of Canada. But the

¹³Edward, later Duke of Kent.

¹⁴Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, chap. II.

¹⁵C. P. Stacey, ed., "An American Plan for a Canadian Campaign" (*American Historical Review*, XLVI, Jan., 1941), Yeo to Melville, May 30, 1815.

squadrons based on Halifax and Bermuda not only strangled American seaborne trade but threatened a hundred communities along the Atlantic coast and convoyed and supported the expeditions that captured Washington, took and held a good part of Maine, and assailed Baltimore and New Orleans. Thanks to them, American forces which might have been used against Canada were immobilized along the seaboard, and the merchants whose business was ruined by the blockade were rendered strong advocates of ending the war. There were no such complaints from Nova Scotia. Halifax, secure behind the fleet and her forts, was never threatened; and British military and naval expenditures and the profits of privateering and wartime trade made her so prosperous that her citizens would probably have made shift to bear it if the conflict had gone on for another five years.¹⁶

On January 5, 1815 the city of Ghent gave a banquet for the plenipotentiaries who had just succeeded in patching up a peace between Britain and the United States. The assiduous Belgian musicians played "Hail Columbia" and "God Save the King" steadily and alternately all through dinner, until both the British and the Americans found it a bit wearing; and John Quincy Adams was evidently glad when the time came for him to give the last toast: "Ghent, the city of peace; may the gates of the temple of Janus, here closed, not be opened again for a century!"¹⁷ John Quincy would undoubtedly have admitted under cross-examination that he was being consciously optimistic. There can have been few people in 1815 who really felt confident that there would not be another Anglo-American war for a century—let alone that there would never be one at all. For generations to come, in fact, considerable thought and effort were devoted on both sides of the border to preparing for a third war.

During this period, British strategic thinking inevitably followed the same general lines as in 1812-14. It was recognized that operations on the Canadian border must be defensive; but British planners continued to think in terms of offensive action against the American Atlantic seaboard. Thus in 1825 Sir James Carmichael Smyth's commission suggested that the United States' vulnerable point was their seaborne trade and the government's dependence upon customs revenue. The best manner of exploiting this weakness, the commission considered, was to seize Long Island and Staten Island and blockade New York. They wrote: "We think such a measure, if conducted with secrecy and promptitude could not fail of success, and would be a more effectual blow than any operation which could be undertaken from Canada. . . ."¹⁸

During the very serious emergency arising out of the American Civil War, Colonel Jervois, reporting on the defences of British North America, found the old theory still applicable. British operations in Canada and New Brunswick could only be defensive. "In order to apply our re-

¹⁶The best military study of this war is A. T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812* (2 vols., London, 1905).

¹⁷C. F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (Philadelphia, 1874), III, 139.

¹⁸J. J. Talman, ed., "A Secret Military Document, 1825" (*American Historical Review*, XXXVIII, Jan., 1933, 295-300). The continued prevalence of such views is interestingly reflected in a letter of Lord Elgin to Lord Grey, Dec. 6, 1848. It should be noted that the idea that the Rush-Bagot Agreement produced general disarmament is not founded in fact. To the period after 1817 belong the largest military works ever constructed by the British Government in America.

sources to the best effect against the United States, our Navy,—which will always, it is hoped, be superior to that of America,—must perform the principal part in bringing a war with that country to a successful issue. Our offensive operations should be,—the blockade of their sea-ports; the destruction of their commerce; and combined naval and military expeditions, directed, where practicable, against the naval establishments and other places of importance on their sea-board.”¹⁹

In both the defensive and offensive operations, as projected, Halifax had important shares. Jervois described them succinctly in 1865.

Halifax occupies a position of great importance as a naval station, both for purposes of aggression and defence.

It is admirably situated as a centre of refuge and action for squadrons engaged in the defence of the shores of the maritime provinces of British North America, and in the important service of maintaining the command of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. It is also, as it were, a naval entrenched camp which would be on the flank of any American force issuing from the Ports of the States with a view of disturbing our communication by sea with Canada.

Halifax and Bermuda were bracketed together as bases for offensive action. “The fine harbours at these . . . stations,” Jervois wrote, “the capabilities of defence which they possess, and their positions in relation to the Northern States, point them out as the centres where we should collect our forces for aggression upon the American coast, and as the chief stations for our squadrons and vessels of war cruising in the North Atlantic.”²⁰ With these strategic functions in view, the British government was ready to spend large sums on fortifying Halifax. In 1825 Carmichael Smyth’s commission reported that the place had “six very good Sea Batteries” but was exposed on the land side; a real citadel on Citadel Hill was the main requirement.²¹ The Citadel was duly begun in 1828-9, and was completed nearly thirty years later, having cost well over £200,000.²² In 1865 Jervois reported that, the Citadel being “on the whole, a strong work,” the land side was in fair condition; but the sea defences urgently required attention. They were already being improved, and Jervois recommended further extensions. Between 1862 and 1870, over £170,000 was spent on the Halifax defences.²³

In 1871 the British troops were withdrawn from Central Canada in accordance with a general policy of evacuation of the self-governing colonies. There was no suggestion, however, of abandoning Halifax; it continued to be garrisoned “as an Imperial station,” a naval base

¹⁹*Report on the Defence of the British Naval Stations in the North Atlantic*, 35.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 36, 35.

²¹*Copy of a Report to His Grace the Duke of Wellington . . . relative to His Majesty's North American Provinces . . . 1825*, para. 49 (copy in Toronto Reference Library).

²²Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, 43, indicates that the work was finished in 1856, the final cost being “at least £233,882.” The ordnance estimates for 1831 give the estimated cost as £124,863 (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, vol. VI, no. 177); in 1839-40 this was increased to £175,863, and in 1847-8 to £204,926 (*ibid.*, 1849, vol. IX, no. 499—Second Report from Select Committee on Army and Ordnance Expenditure, Appendix “G”, no. 202).

²³Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, 54, gives a total of £173,298. Jervois’s estimate in 1865 (including work already done) was £180,000. Still larger sums were spent at Bermuda.

analogous to Gibraltar or Malta.²⁴ The Imperial government clearly considered that the Royal Navy still required such a base in this part of the world.

The functions of Halifax in British strategy in the latter part of the nineteenth century are fairly obvious. Although war with the United States would have been even less welcome than in earlier times, and was becoming less and less probable, it was still a contingency that had to be reckoned with; and if war had come Halifax would have been as important as ever both for attack and defence. At the same time, there were other antagonists to think about. In times of tension with Russia, there was always fear of armed merchant cruisers being let loose on the trade routes. France was a more important naval power and also a potential foe; and the possibility of a French cruiser war against British seaborne trade was one of the Admiralty's pet bogeys in this period.²⁵ In such an event, a well-equipped base close to the western termini of the main trans-Atlantic routes would have been a necessity. Halifax was still considered important enough to justify a continuation of large expenditures on fortifications. A new programme undertaken in 1888-9 pushed the sea defences out another stage—to Fort McNab and Sandwich Battery; and improvements continued until the withdrawal of the Imperial troops, when they handed over to their Canadian successors a well-armed modern fortress.²⁶

The considerations that caused the withdrawal are familiar. Britain's isolation was acutely uncomfortable during the nineties, but it seemed to portend no fatal consequences as long as she retained supremacy at sea. In 1898, however, Germany began to build a powerful navy, and this threat rapidly transformed British foreign policy and British strategy. The year 1904 witnessed both the Entente with France and the enunciation of a new naval policy—that of concentration in European seas. This policy was facilitated by the recent improvement in relations with the United States, which, along with the removal of the French naval threat, made it seem practicable to rely on American benevolence for the protection of British interests in western waters.²⁷ The last major Anglo-American territorial issue—the Alaska boundary—had just been liquidated; and in retrospect that liquidation, however dubious the manner of it, appears very good business. The South American and Pacific Squadrons now disappeared and the North America and West Indies Squadron in effect went too, being transformed into a Particular Service Squadron with no definite local habitation.²⁸ As a result, the dockyard establishments at Halifax, Jamaica, and Esquimalt (though not Bermuda) were cut down, and it was shortly arranged to transfer the two yards in Canada to the keeping of the Dominion. With the Navy going, the Army had no need to stay; the British troops sailed for home, and in January, 1906 the fortress was handed over to the

²⁴C. P. Stacey, *Canada and the British Army, 1846-1871* (London, 1936), 226.

²⁵A. J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (New York, 1940), chap. VI.

²⁶Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, 58-62. These extensions were certainly still directed mainly towards the United States.

²⁷Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 449-50.

²⁸Navy. *Distribution and Mobilization of the Fleet. Presented to both Houses of Parliament . . . December 1904*. Cd. 2335. (Memorandum by Lord Selborne). Cf. *Annual Register*, 1904, 227-8.

Canadian Department of Militia and Defence.²⁹ Thus the long second phase in the military history of Halifax drew to a close.

III. THE BRIDGE TO EUROPE IN TWO WORLD WARS, 1914-45

When the British soldiers and sailors departed, many people in Halifax undoubtedly felt that the glory of the city went with them and that history (as in *1066 and All That*) had come to a full stop.³⁰ These people were mistaken, for Halifax's greatest period was just beginning. Had the Admiralty fully foreseen the shape of things to come, it might indeed have been in less of a hurry to withdraw from the port; but nobody did foresee, in 1905 nor yet in 1914, just how far it would be necessary, in two great wars, for the New World to redress the balance of the Old. Britain had long been dependent on imported food and raw materials. She and her European allies were now to owe their survival, in great part, to men and munitions brought in from North America.

It would take too long to tell in detail the story of Halifax in the First World War. The dockyard worked overtime fuelling, provisioning, and repairing British and Allied warships; and the harbour became busier than ever before, with vessels by hundreds clearing for Europe freighted with the human and material means of waging war. For the second time in its history, the Halifax base had changed front. The first change had reflected a revolution in the political organization of North America; the second was the result of a fundamental shift in the military and economic balance between America and Europe.

In 1917 the submarine menace produced the convoy system, and this further enhanced the importance of Halifax. With its position, its defences, and its great extent of protected harbourage, it was a natural convoy assembly point; and in this capacity it served for the rest of the war, sharing the labour with Sydney. The record shows a total of fifty convoys and about 500 ships clearing from Halifax between August, 1917 and November, 1918.³¹ This task brought the city not only distinction but also disaster, in the terrible explosion of December 6, 1917.³²

Between the two World Wars Canadian defence planners tended to look to the Pacific rather than the Atlantic coast. A modest programme of coast-defence improvement was undertaken in British Columbia in 1937, but money for the fixed defences of Halifax and other Atlantic ports began to appear in the estimates only in the spring of 1939, after the severe shock administered by the Munich crisis. The air defences of the Maritimes, however, received attention rather earlier, development being fairly actively pushed from 1937 onward. In 1918, it may be

²⁹*Annual Register*, 1905, 64. Piers, *Halifax Fortress*, 62. For the formal arrangements under which the dockyards were transferred, see *Canadian Papers*, 1938, Series C, no. 3 (Canadian Institute of International Affairs, prepared for British Commonwealth Relations Conference). The whole development is briefly surveyed in C. P. Stacey, *The Military Problems of Canada* (Toronto, 1940), 69-70, 170-71.

³⁰T. H. Raddall, *Halifax, Warden of the North* (Toronto, 1948), 244.

³¹Sir H. Newbolt, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents . . . Naval Operations*, vol. V (London, 1931), Appendix "B". The ship total cannot be given exactly, as Halifax and New York figures for March, 1918 are not separated.

³²Raddall, *Halifax*, 266-72.

recalled, a flying-boat station had been established near Dartmouth, and from it the Royal Canadian Naval Air Service, with large United States assistance, had flown anti-submarine patrols in the last months of the war. Now Dartmouth was made the most important unit of the new Maritime air programme; the seaplane base was extended, and a field for landplanes was developed alongside.³³

Turning to that war which is still so fresh in our memories, one is struck by the number of respects in which, for Halifax, the Second World War was simply the First writ larger, and in which the experience of 1914-18 was applied to advantage in 1939-45. The convoy system, for instance, was a late development in the First War; but in 1939 Convoy HX-1 sailed for the United Kingdom on September 16.³⁴ It was the first of a series that lasted throughout the German war. All told, approximately 17,600 ships, in ocean and coastal convoys, sailed out past Chebucto Head in the course of this war.³⁵ The great harbour worked and served as it had never done before. Many of the ships were troopships, for of nearly half a million Canadian soldiers and airmen who went overseas almost all sailed from Halifax.

The Germans were well aware of the place of the port in the Allied effort, and of the desirability of an effective blow against this great focus of shipping. On February 23, 1940, Admiral Raeder begged Hitler to let him send two submarines to operate off Halifax with mines and torpedoes. They would quite probably have had a field day, but Hitler refused his consent "in view of the psychological effect on the U.S.A."³⁶ No submarines actually operated off the Canadian coast until after Pearl Harbor. The same apprehension of bringing the United States closer to the war doubtless reinforced the fear of the city's own defences to make the German surface raiders keep their distance. None seems to have come within 500 miles.³⁷

Thus, in this as in four earlier wars, the Halifax gunners found nothing at which to shoot. The batteries were again improved during the war, and could certainly have made things hard for any raider; but the enemy, as usual, preferred to go where the guns were *not*. One form of attack which had been feared before 1939, but which did not materialize, was small raids by ship-based aircraft. Such enterprises might have done extensive material and moral damage in the early days, when the port's anti-aircraft defences were painfully weak.³⁸

The city, of course, was no longer dependent merely on guns for its defence. It now had a much longer arm, the R.C.A.F. at Dartmouth, where about five squadrons were normally based. And the Navy was

³³Stacey, *Military Problems of Canada*, chap. IV.

³⁴S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. I: *The Battle of the Atlantic, September 1939-May 1943* (Boston, 1947), 18. Canadian official accounts of naval operations will be published shortly.

³⁵Information from Naval Service Headquarters, Ottawa. The importance of Halifax was somewhat reduced after the main trans-Atlantic terminus was shifted to New York in September, 1942; but subsidiary convoys continued to sail from Halifax to join the main New York ones, and troopships and coastal convoys continued to use the port.

³⁶*Fuehrer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1940* (Admiralty, 1947), 12.

³⁷Commander E. V. St. J. Morgan, "Sea Raiders in the 1939-45 War" (*Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, XCIV, Feb. 1949, 21-36).

³⁸Every effective A.A. gun in Canada was concentrated at Halifax a few days before war broke out, but as there were only four the effect was not imposing.

as active as ever; in this war, building on the foundations laid in the previous one, it was far more R.C.N. and less R.N. than before. When the U-boats appeared in Canadian waters in 1942, a battle began which continued until the German surrender; the evidence of its fierceness was the desperately-damaged ships that limped into Halifax for repairs. As late as April, 1945, H.M.C.S. *Esquimalt* was sunk in the actual approaches to the port. During these years, aircraft of Eastern Air Command made eighty-three attacks and destroyed six submarines; nineteen of the attacks were made by the Dartmouth squadrons, which however did not have the good luck to score a kill.³⁹ The whole battle, in the Canadian sector, was directed from Halifax, where the Navy (Canadian North-West Atlantic), the Army (Atlantic Command), and the Air Force (Eastern Air Command) all had their headquarters.

Volumes could and will be written about the Atlantic bridge that carried the means of victory from America to Europe in the Second World War. It was an almost miraculous structure. One fact is enough to support this statement. During the war we sent to England some 370,000 men and women of the Canadian Army. Of this number, exactly seventy-three were lost at sea.⁴⁰ This is the measure of the valour, skill, and devotion of the Naval and Air forces and of the merchant navy, who kept the seaways open and thereby made victory possible. Ships and aircraft, however, need bases. The Canadian bases were the western abutments of the bridge. There were several of them; Sydney, and St. John's, Newfoundland, were of particular consequence. But the part played by Halifax was proportioned to the port's long and distinguished history. The events of 1939-45, heroic, proud and tragic, provided an eminently fitting climax for the city's second century. If Edward Cornwallis was looking on, from whatever place old soldiers go to when they finally fade away, he must have felt well satisfied with the results of the enterprise which he directed so long ago. The British Crown has made in its time some notably successful investments; but it is doubtful whether any of them has ever returned larger or more consistent dividends than the money that was spent on establishing a military station on the shores of Chebucto Bay in 1749.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Bell said that he had been in charge of aircraft overhaul in Halifax during the war. While he had never feared attack by German troops landing on the Nova Scotia coast, he had feared attack by German submarines mounting guns. He asked why Halifax, lacking the complete blackout of London, was never attacked by gun-mounting submarines.

Colonel Stacey said that Hitler would not hear of operations against North America during the early part of the war. During the later years the enemy became more enterprising; nevertheless, it was never German policy to engage in pin-prick attacks. Colonel Stacey agreed that, although the amount of damage would likely have been small, the moral effect of such attacks would have been great. Attacks of

³⁹Information from Air Historian, R.C.A.F. Both the R.C.N. and the R.C.A.F. made most of their kills outside of Canadian waters. In all theatres, the R.C.N. destroyed or shared in destroying twenty-seven submarines, the R.C.A.F., twenty-three.

⁴⁰All in the S.S. "Nerissa", 30 April, 1941.

the nature suggested by Mr. Bell would have had the effect of tying up in Canada resources much needed in Europe. A perusal of the German documents has not, however, revealed any proposals for such attacks.

Mr. Trotter expressed satisfaction that Colonel Stacey's paper had placed Halifax in its proper position in the broad continental picture rather than in the more local maritime Canadian picture. He agreed that the "undefended frontier" was one of the historical myths of Canada. Not only the Halifax Citadel, but Fort Henry at Kingston and the Rideau Canal were built by the imperial government after the signing of the Rush-Bagot agreement.

Mr. Wright pointed out that the location of Halifax harbour, had significance not only in relation to the Atlantic ocean, but also in relation to the Minas Basin, to Windsor, and to Fort Cumberland (Beauséjour). He said that Sydney formed an adjunct to Halifax as a naval station and that it had been garrisoned by British troops for a period during the nineteenth century.

Mr. MacGregor asked whether the St. Lawrence had been used for convoys during the War of 1939-45.

Colonel Stacey replied that although the St. Lawrence had been used during the War of 1914-18, it had not been used to the same extent during the War of 1939-45. A proportionately greater volume of traffic passed through Halifax during the second war than during the first, even after allowance is made for the use of New York.