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The Royal Canadian Navy in Halifax – December 1917

On 6 December 1917, a motley little navy was in charge of the port of Halifax. Although the British Royal Navy (RN) had inhabited Halifax Harbour for more than a century, it had relinquished direct control of the port to Ottawa in 1905. With the onset of the Great War, the White Ensign had returned as a very visible presence, yet the Royal Navy was no longer in charge. That responsibility fell to an utterly inadequate collection of Canadian vessels, which had only recently been cobbled together.

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) had been born in 1910 in almost farcical circumstances. It had begun the war with only two elderly cruisers. By the last month of 1917, minesweepers, armed tugboats, patrol ships (even a torpedo boat destroyer of doubtful lineage), and two antiquated submarines had been added. These vessels had been gathered at the Halifax naval dockyard to guard against the recent, and potentially serious, threat of enemy attack at sea and to ensure both clear access to the harbour and the safety of ships off Canada's coasts. These responsibilities were beyond the means and

priorities of the overburdened Royal Navy, yet the ragtag flotillas of Canadian ships were hardly adequate for the task. By early December 1917, however, a steady trickle of newly constructed armed trawlers and drifters had begun to arrive from the interior. The RCN had little time to prepare for the distinct possibility that German submarines would be operating off the Canadian coast by the spring.

Halifax had been a garrison town and naval base since its inception in 1749, and had been a site of varying importance in the military security of the British Empire. Its importance was again highlighted as the war in Europe dragged on. Despite the priorities and demands of the overseas forces, the former imperial fortress possessed a substantial garrison, and the sea approaches to the harbour were shielded by a considerable network of coastal artillery and searchlights.¹

The city of Halifax sits on a peninsula that juts into the west side of Halifax Harbour. From its narrow southern tip, Point Pleasant Park, the peninsula widens, and the harbour passage correspondingly narrows – indeed, the passage is called the Narrows – before expanding again into Bedford Basin north of the city. By the time of the Great War, the city's eastern shore, which faces Dartmouth across the harbour, was lined with port facilities. At the northern end were the railway wharves, the dry dock, and HMC Dockyard.

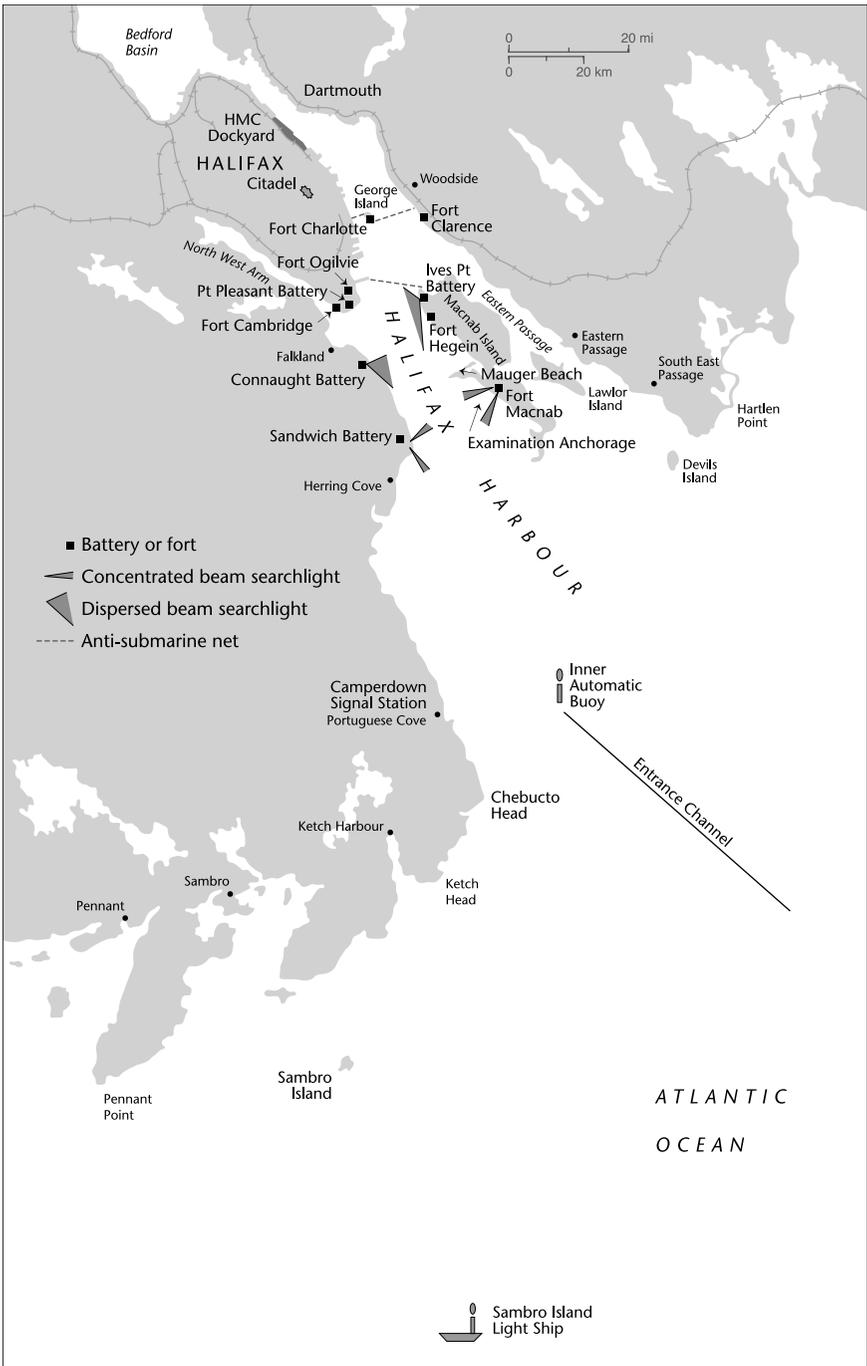
With its population of some 50,000 souls, Halifax had become an increasingly vigorous and vital port, serving the war effort of the British Empire and its allies. Indeed, the strategic position of Halifax on the Great Circle route to Europe and its status as the most important Canadian ice-free port had kept it at the forefront of the North Atlantic war effort. With the recent entry of the United States into the war, that country's northeastern ports were growing in importance, but Halifax continued as a key centre. Wartime shipping from Halifax was limited only by the capacity of the single-track rail line that connected the port with Canada's interior. Nearly two thousand commercial vessels passed through the port in 1917, not including the considerable coastal and fishing traffic. The city also remained the preferred port of embarkation and debarkation for Canadian soldiers.²

Unlike the unseasoned and generally untested RCN, the Canadian Militia had long been a significant presence in Halifax's social and cultural fabric. Although, as a national force, the Canadian Militia was inadequate in numbers, equipment, and training, its local importance was enormous. Its status within Halifax had been reinforced when the British garrison left the

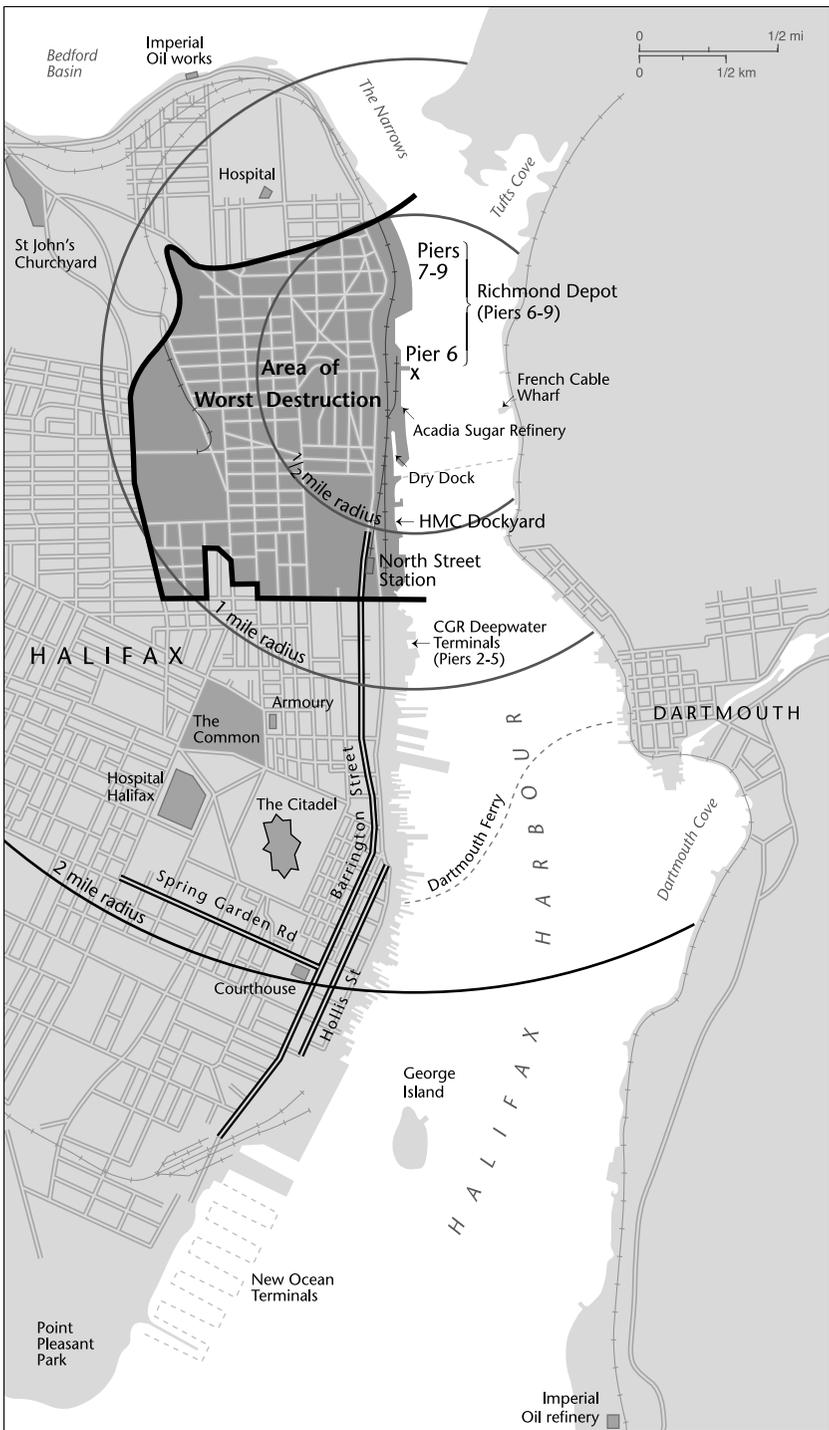
city in 1905 and Canada had assumed full responsibility for the protection of the port. Since that time, Ottawa had been obliged to maintain an operationally ready garrison to guarantee the security of the base as a safe haven for imperial fleets and commerce; indeed, the base had become the Canadian Army's premier peacetime defence commitment. To meet it, a relatively well-trained and balanced all-arms force – including garrison artillery, infantry, engineers, ordnance, service corps, and medical troops – much of it made up of full-time soldiers, was in place even prior to the outbreak of war. Their presence was pervasive, with military facilities scattered throughout the area.

By 1917, the 3,300 soldiers responsible for the defence of Halifax were largely older, married with families, or suffering from minor disabilities, which made them less eligible for service overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). In addition to these men, the city housed many members of the CEF itself – mostly depot units and drafts of recruits awaiting transport overseas. Counting the 323 British Army recruits in the city, nearly 5,000 soldiers found themselves in Halifax at the end of 1917, representing about 10 percent of the population of the city. This number included over 600 medical troops – doctors, nurses, and medical orderlies – some of whom served in local military hospitals such as Cogswell Street, Rockhead General, and Camp Hill. Others were employed with No. 6 Casualty Unit, which received wounded at the Pier 2 Casualty Depot in the Deepwater Terminals. Two hundred more were to be found at the Army Medical Corps Training Depot, which was also in the city. With such a garrison in residence, surely Halifax enjoyed the dubious honour of being better prepared than any city in Canada to deal with a major disaster.³

If the war led to a significant increase in the number of troops in Halifax, the city's role as a naval centre of operations also expanded greatly with the appearance of the first German submarines in the western Atlantic, the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, and America's entry into the war. From the onset of the war, the dockyard facilities, much neglected since the departure of the British, had been repaired and refurbished. Although not entirely modern, by the final months of 1917 they had become a busy, even overcrowded, complex of offices, residences, workshops, slipways, wharves, and storehouses. Among the more recent developments was the establishment of a new wireless school to train "wireless learners" for employment at naval radio stations, on Canadian ships, and in the dockyard wireless office.⁴ Admiralty House, long the residence of senior Royal Navy



Approaches to Halifax Harbour



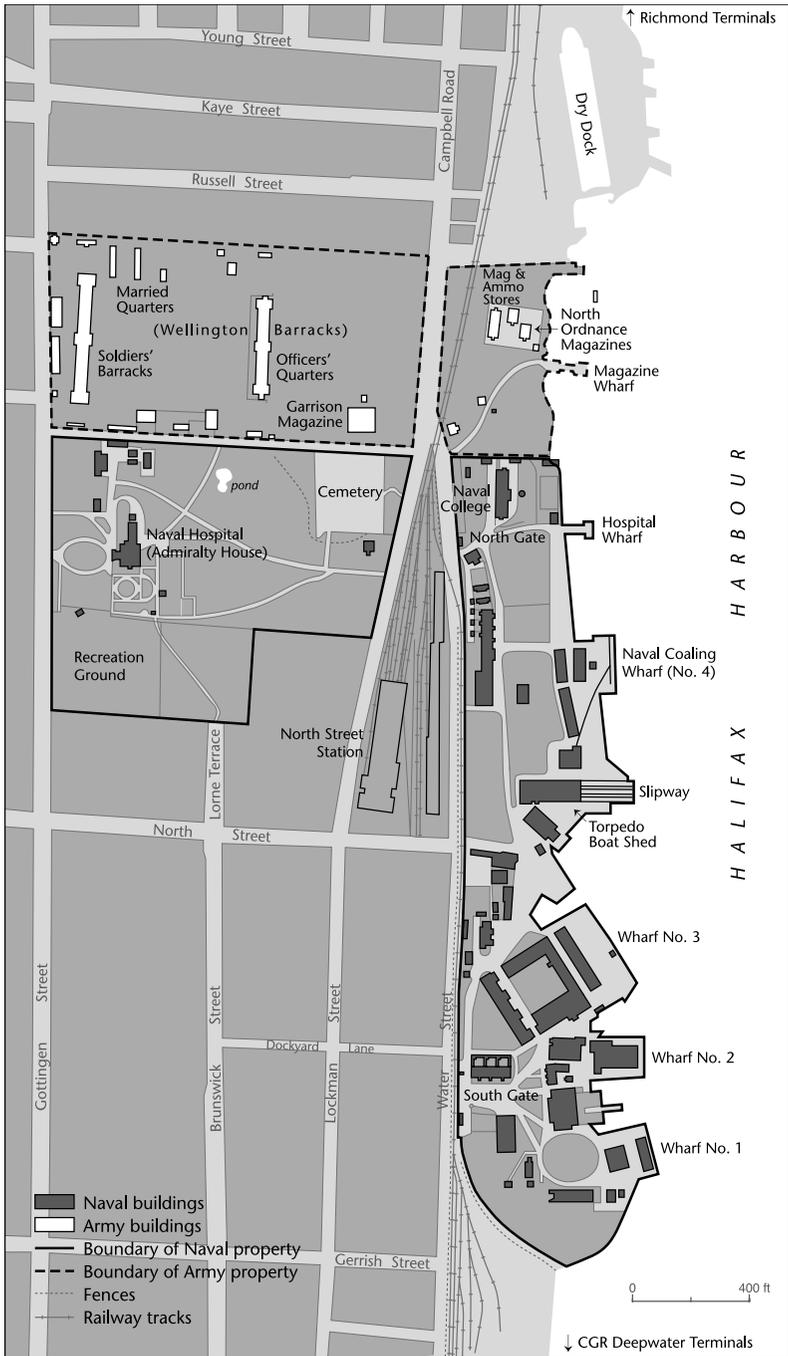
Halifax inner harbour

commanders in the North Atlantic and West Indies, and today the site of the Maritime Command Museum, was in use as the dockyard hospital. With a staff of three surgeons, two nurses, and ten attendants, the facility could accommodate fifty patients – more than sufficient for anticipated needs.⁵

The dockyard's civilian and military staff – and private companies as well – were under constant pressure to meet the mounting demands of repair, refit, and maintenance for both the varied collection of Canadian vessels and passing units of the RN.⁶ On 18 November, the dockyard's efficiency suffered a setback when the office block that housed its headquarters was gutted by a fire that destroyed many records. The offices were transferred temporarily to the Marine and Fisheries Building, which was adjacent to the dockyard property.⁷

At the extreme north end of the dockyard, a building that the Royal Navy had constructed as a hospital housed the Royal Naval College of Canada. With thirty-eight cadets in residence, the college offered instruction comparable to that at Britain's two naval training colleges. The institution's small professional and academic staff was supervised by the much revered Commander E.A.E. Nixon, RN. Four members of the college's first graduating class had been the first RCN casualties of the war, having been appointed to the ill-fated HMS *Good Hope*, sunk off Coronel (Chile) in 1914. The names of Malcolm Cann, John Hathaway, William Palmer, and Arthur Silver are the first of the hundreds that now grace the Sailors' Memorial at Halifax's Point Pleasant Park and attest to Canadian sacrifice at sea.

Command over HMC Dockyard was exercised by a captain superintendent, Captain Edward H. Martin, RCN, who was also charged with responsibility for the naval defence of the port and its immediate approaches. The fifty-eight-year-old Martin had retired from the Royal Navy in 1909 after more than thirty-six years of service and had joined the RCN on its formation the following year. By late 1917, he had overseen the affairs of the dockyard for more than seven years.⁸ At the end of November, however, he was not present in Halifax. Admiral Charles. E. Kingsmill, director of the naval service, had sent him off to the Admiralty as principal delegate in a mission to sort out continuing difficulties between the Admiralty and the Canadian navy. As Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty have noted, Kingsmill had earlier "telegraphed Admiralty over the [Naval Service] minister's signature and asked three pointed questions. What was the precise scale of attack that Canada faced? What defences were required? And what assistance might



HMC Dockyard and Wellington Barracks, 1917

Source: Adapted from *H.M. Naval Yard, Hospital & Admiralty House, Halifax* (1904), NAC, National Map Collection, NMC 0034329.

Canada expect from the Royal Navy? Kingsmill followed the telegram with a lengthy memorandum that documented the difficulties that Admiralty's erratic advice had caused since 1916 ... an already too-familiar pattern of half-baked and misleading advice."⁹

Martin looked a good choice to plead the Canadian cause in London, and Kingsmill allowed he could be spared for a few weeks during the winter months. Only later would he confidentially reveal to the minister responsible for the navy that he had had other reasons for wishing the dockyard superintendent away from Halifax.¹⁰ In Martin's absence, the post would be filled by the gruff but benevolent Captain Fred C.C. Pasco, another former RN officer of long service and experience, who had retired from the RN and joined the Canadian force in 1915. Free from his usual responsibilities as senior officer in the port of Sydney, Pasco took up temporary residence in Martin's house in the dockyard.

The captain superintendent was responsible for the naval defence of the port, although the reality was that the Militia Department's coastal defence guns were the port's premier insurance against warships operating on the surface. They provided small comfort in the face of potential submarine incursions, however. Thus, as early as mid-1915 the first anti-submarine net had been placed across the inner harbour from either side of George's Island. By July 1917 a second net was established farther down the harbour between Ives Point and the breakwater off Point Pleasant.¹¹ Joint orders had also been issued by the local army and navy commanders in late 1916 to douse all lights ashore and afloat that might be viewed from seaward.¹² These orders had been reaffirmed and enforced with new zeal in October 1917. The virtual blackout made Halifax unique among Canadian cities and served as a constant reminder of the growing danger off the coast.¹³

Attacks on shipping were not the only reason to fear submarines. Concern mounted that the U-boats might lay mines in the approaches to Halifax and other harbours. Thus, outside the nets, a flotilla of ten minesweeping craft was moored at two buoys in the North West Arm, just above Chain Rock. A continuously manned telephone hut on the fore shore in Point Pleasant Park provided necessary communications with the dockyard, and the minesweepers normally proceeded into the inner harbour only for repairs.¹⁴ Seven of the craft were converted menhaden (herring) trawlers commissioned (in distinctive Roman numerals) as *PV-I* through *PV-VII*. The other three – *Baleine*, *Musquash*, and *Gopher* – were ocean-going tugboats

operated by civilian crews under charter. Four of the sweepers were radio equipped. A motor boat, *W.H. Lee*, attended the flotilla and conveyed stores back and forth into Halifax Harbour.¹⁵ Early every morning, weather permitting, the vessels would sortie in pairs more than twenty miles to sea to ensure clear channels into and out of the harbour for warships, convoys, and coastal traffic.¹⁶

Tugs such as *Nereid* and the *Wilfrid C.*, armed with six-pounder guns, provided a measure of protection for the boom nets and acted as gate vessels. Beyond these, the captain superintendent had few armed resources to deal with potential threats outside the range of the militia's coastal defence guns. The fast, low-slung HMCS *Grilse* was an exception. A converted yacht permanently assigned to the port, she bore the perhaps optimistic designation "TBD" (torpedo boat destroyer) because she carried a torpedo tube in addition to her two twelve-pounder guns. Almost alone among the tinpot fleet of the Canadian navy, she bore at least some physical resemblance to a modern warship.¹⁷

Although the long-feared but still shocking appearance of German U-boats in North American waters had occurred in 1916, there were no major incursions the following year. The growing fleet of German submarines had at least temporarily found better hunting and easier access closer to home. Indeed, overall shipping losses had grown astronomically, and in July 1917 a reluctant Royal Navy had been forced to adopt a convoy system if shipping routes to Britain were to be kept open at all. Convoys from Sydney escorted by RN warships and armed merchant cruisers had begun in September of that year. With the freeze-up of the St Lawrence River by December, convoys had to be organized from Halifax instead. This move also brought about the relocation to HMC Dockyard, Halifax, of the RCN Patrol Service from its usual base at Sydney. Thus, on the eve of disaster, the importance of the Halifax naval base had been vastly increased and the challenges multiplied.

The arrival of the patrol fleet brought the competent and respected (Acting Captain) Walter Hose to Halifax. The Captain of Patrols was another former RN officer who had found the prospect of transfer to the newly formed RCN attractive, possibly due to his marrying into a family in St John's. Still relatively young, at age forty-two, he had a number of impressive successes to his credit and was one of the few truly able professionals available to the RCN with clear potential for senior command.¹⁸

The eight auxiliary patrol vessels that constituted the core of Hose's

Patrol Service were still a rather sundry assemblage, despite the replacement of some of the least suitable components. They ranged in displacement from 700 to 1,050 tons and had been turned over to the RCN from a variety of sources – mostly other government departments – and fitted with modest armament, usually one or two twelve-pounder guns.¹⁹ Two of the ships, *Hochelaga* and *Stadacona*, were large yachts purchased earlier in the war and adapted to naval service. Another vessel, the former *King Edward* of Canada Steamship Lines, had been purchased by the navy in May 1917 and been given the name *Laurentian*. *Lady Evelyn*, acquired by the Post Office to transfer mail to and from passing transatlantic steamers, had entered naval service in June. *Margaret's* RCN service dated back to February 1915, when she had been commandeered from the Customs Service. *Cartier* and *Acadia* – the latter today preserved on the Halifax waterfront – were hydrographic survey ships. Of the eight, only *Canada*, built in 1904 and nominally intended for fisheries patrol, had been designed “along warship lines” in order to provide a foundation for training sailors for the future RCN.²⁰

Only five of these patrol ships were considered fit for deep-sea work and the sometimes difficult conditions off Saint John in the Bay of Fundy, and all would have to be cycled through refit at some point during the winter season. *Laurentian* and *Lady Evelyn* were regarded as less seaworthy in heavy winter conditions and therefore were restricted to work close off Halifax and escorting warships.²¹ *Acadia* also required repairs and, until these could be completed, she was to be anchored in Bedford Basin for the winter to be used as a guard ship and a base for Royal Navy staff assigned to control the movement of neutral shipping.²²

Other new arrivals at Halifax were intended to beef up the Patrol Service. Although delayed by frustrating debates with the Royal Navy over numbers and allocations, and plagued by technical and manufacturing problems, by late 1917 the long-awaited Canadian-built trawlers and drifters had finally begun to make their way down the St Lawrence and across the gulf into Nova Scotia waters. By the time deteriorating ice conditions closed the route in early December, three of the new battle-class trawlers (*St Julien*, *Messines*, and *Ypres*) and thirty-nine of the drifters had been despatched.²³ All but one arrived safely in Halifax, although some of the voyages were not without mishap.²⁴

The arrival of these new vessels in Halifax immediately improved the navy's ability to patrol the approaches to Halifax, including the routes taken

by convoys from outside the mineswept channel a farther 130 miles to sea.²⁵ As well, the additional resources contributed to a more effective minesweeping program for the port, allowing vessels to be dedicated exclusively to that purpose.²⁶

Not all of the new arrivals in Halifax were surface vessels. On 14 October, HMCS *Shearwater* had sailed into the dockyard accompanied by the RCN's two submarines. This sloop, brought into the RCN at the beginning of the war as the submarines' tender, was a remnant of the Royal Navy squadron that had once cruised from Canada's Pacific coast. The submarines, *CC-1* and *CC-2*, had been purchased early in the war by the premier of British Columbia, Sir Richard McBride, as a counter to a German cruiser squadron in the Pacific.²⁷ If it had ever existed, the need for the subs to remain on the west coast had long since passed. Under the mistaken impression that the already obsolete boats, with their finicky two-cylinder engines, would be of use in European waters, the British Admiralty had asked for them to be made available at Halifax. An epic voyage ensued. The vessels were en route from June, their 8,000-mile passage marred by frequent breakdowns and long stays in a series of ports. Although a dedicated but overworked crew constantly cleaned and overhauled the engines, cylinders and piston heads cracked, and fuel pump crankshafts broke. Without the enthusiastic assistance of the US Navy, including frequent towing, during the subs' passage through the Panama Canal and up the eastern seaboard, it is doubtful that the hapless little flotilla would have found its way to Halifax.²⁸ Once they arrived in that city, it was painfully clear that the boats would never make it across the Atlantic. Consequently, the Admiralty opined that the boats should remain in Halifax, where they might be of use should enemy U-boats threaten the Canadian coast.²⁹ First, however, an extensive refit would be required. Thus, in December 1917 the two hard-used boats were based at Pier 1 in the dockyard, with their own crews carrying out much of the labour from improvised workshops.³⁰ *Shearwater*, temporarily free from her onerous responsibilities, was detached to Bermuda in company with four drifters for delivery to the Royal Navy.³¹

The largest Canadian ship in the port of Halifax was no longer an effective part of the order of battle but was still very much a useful presence. HMCS *Niobe* was the 11,000-ton heavy cruiser that had been obtained from Britain at the RCN's inception. Outdated even then, the cruiser was to serve as a training ship for naval personnel on the East Coast. The fate of the

vessel – damaged in a grounding in 1911, slowly repaired, and then left alongside with a skeleton crew – symbolized the fortunes of the RCN in the years immediately before the First World War. Although *Niobe* had been placed on a war footing in 1914 – and indeed was well used in the early part of the war for RN cruiser patrols in the western Atlantic – by mid-1915 the much-worn ship was no longer economical to maintain on active service. Given its size, the ship was also a severe drain on the RCN's limited manpower for anti-submarine patrol. Smaller, more manoeuvrable vessels better met the requirements of that job.

Yet recommissioned as a depot ship at Halifax, *Niobe* filled a vital need. Naval accommodation and office space were in very short supply, and the 450-foot "Hotel Niobe" could house and victual a thousand sailors while providing space for training, classrooms, and communications. Her various operational and technical departments provided practical training for novice seaman. As one old hand remembered, the same routine, rules and regulations, and discipline were maintained aboard just as if she were on active service at sea. There were even Royal Marines aboard, employed by the RCN to enforce the traditional standards and as armed sentries. *Niobe* was moored at the extreme north end of HMC Dockyard, with her wide gangplank (near the stern) at what was then still known as the Hospital Wharf, directly opposite the Royal Naval College of Canada, and with her bow pointing directly up the harbour and into the frontage of the adjacent militia property, Wellington Barracks.³² Her commanding officer was Acting Commander Percy F. Newcombe, once executive officer of HMS *Shearwater* on the Canadian west coast, a physical training enthusiast who had been lent to the Canadian service some months after having been seriously wounded at Gallipoli.³³ In addition to her other functions, *Niobe* provided a floating headquarters for the RCN in the port of Halifax and provided a home for naval, transport, intelligence, and communications staff.³⁴

Another essential function coordinated from offices aboard *Niobe* was the RCN's Examination Service, which controlled traffic into and out of the port of Halifax. Each arriving ship was met by a number of small boats at the Examination Anchorage off Macnab Island. There, the ship's legitimacy was verified before it was allowed into port. Thus, in wartime, the chief examining officer (CXO) essentially supplanted the role of harbour-master.³⁵

The CXO was Acting Commander Frederick Evan Wyatt, age forty. In addition to his experience as master of mail and passenger steamers, and as

a navigator and pilot, Wyatt had also served in the Royal Naval Reserve until 1906.³⁶ At the outset of the war, his commission had been reactivated and he was accepted for service as a lieutenant aboard *Niobe*. After that ship was decommissioned, Wyatt's commanding officer recommended him for further service with the RCN as "a thorough competent and efficient Officer." Wyatt was appointed CXO for Halifax and was also placed in charge of the port's anti-submarine defence, with the rank of lieutenant-commander.³⁷ In March 1916 Admiral Kingsmill asked the Admiralty to promote Wyatt again, citing the zealous and able manner in which he had carried out his increasingly demanding duties.³⁸

Towards the end of 1917, the dockyard had become so busy and crowded that not even *Niobe's* considerable space was sufficient to accommodate the RCN's mounting needs. With the addition of the Patrol Service personnel and vessels, and with new men to staff the rapidly accumulating new trawlers and drifters, Walter Hose was urgently seeking additional space to establish a depot and base for his vessels and to provide for their laying up and repair. The Captain of Patrols felt the solution to the problem lay just north beyond the dry dock in the substantial adjoining waterfront property and wharfage of the Acadia Sugar Refinery. In addition to its towering building, a landmark on the Halifax waterfront, the refinery had some 900 feet of wharfage. The navy particularly coveted the 412-foot section immediately adjacent to the refinery's massive storage shed. With extensive renovations, the large storage shed would make an ideal barracks, with space left over for refitting, repairing, and stores. Negotiations with the refinery's owners, who had demanded the exorbitant sum of \$36,000 per annum to rent the property, had lagged on into the autumn of 1917. With the situation becoming increasingly more urgent, a frustrated Admiral Kingsmill finally demanded that the government immediately appropriate the property.³⁹

As this action suggests, from his office in Ottawa, Kingsmill was very much involved in the supervision of ship and dockyard affairs. Both Edward Martin, the captain superintendent who controlled the residents of the dockyard and the naval defence of the port, and Walter Hose, head of the Patrol Service, reported independently to Kingsmill. The immediate past had been marked by unseemly disputes regarding how best to manage meagre resources – the retired RN officer who had been Hose's predecessor had launched a vociferous campaign for overall command. By comparison, the chain of command in late 1917 represented a largely workable compromise.⁴⁰

Yet not all of the naval and marine functions carried out at Halifax were in Canadian hands. Organization of the convoys and travel clearance of neutral vessels were the responsibility of the Royal Navy. An efficient and highly visible rear-admiral, Bertram M. Chambers, directed the RN's functions in Halifax. Although most of his staff were British, his second assistant was a Canadian, Lieutenant-Commander T.A. Murray, Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RNCVR).⁴¹

Chambers was an inspired choice for service at Halifax. During his long career he had distinguished himself in hydrographic work and operational theory. He had served as a flag captain with the Home Fleet and on the staff of the Royal Navy's War College. Then, from 1911, he had served under the Australian government to organize a training college for their navy and to act temporarily as a member of their Naval Board. Acting for Australia in a number of other high positions until May 1914, he was thus well grounded in the challenges of organizing and working with new navies in the dominions.⁴²

Despite such experience, his arrival in Halifax had caused considerable consternation among Canadian naval authorities, because he ranked over the Canadians stationed there. Admiral Kingsmill considered it a problem that Canadian officers tended to defer automatically to their British seniors. Such a tendency undermined the autonomy and credibility of the Canadian service and the authority and jurisdiction of the government in Ottawa.⁴³ Thus, Kingsmill reacted with alarm when in November the Admiralty had somewhat blandly suggested that Chambers be described as senior Naval Officer Afloat, Halifax, "in order that his position may not conflict with that of Officers of the Canadian Naval Establishments at Halifax and at the same time to provide necessary authority and continuity of control in regard to convoy work."⁴⁴ Indeed, as he fussed to G.J. Desbarats, deputy minister for the naval service, Kingsmill could not see how such action could lead to anything but "unutterable confusion at Halifax," nor would it serve any advantage. The term held wide significance across the imperial navy: "The Senior Naval Officer Afloat has charge of everything that is afloat in Halifax, including minesweepers and patrol vessels outside the Port, or the title means nothing. It is most undesirable to have an Officer coming from England to take charge over the heads of our Officers who have been in Halifax and on the Coast since the War and are cognizant of all local conditions."⁴⁵

Kingsmill's civil service and political superiors agreed with him, and the British were advised that the Canadians saw "no advantage" in such

nomenclature.⁴⁶ Inexplicably, the correspondence on this picayune point was still going on two days after the tragedy of 6 December. Admiralty officials, acknowledging the possibility of “misconception,” proposed the alternative title of Port Convoy Officer and Senior Officer of Escorts Halifax to describe Chambers’s responsibilities, which included “control of any Imperial vessels visiting port in connection with escort work.”⁴⁷ Kingsmill had won his point, but, under the circumstances, his victory would ring hollow.

Chambers’s charges – the sleek and efficient British cruisers that appeared frequently in the port for replenishment and to escort the vital convoys across the Atlantic – were the most visible manifestations in the harbour of the naval side of the war. Halifax society warmly welcomed the visitors and, even more so, the prosperity they symbolized. The war economy contributed to what the business community characterized as a “banner year” for Halifax. Exports amounted to \$140 million dollars, with 15 million tons of shipping passing through the port.⁴⁸ Haligonians attributed the vibrant economy to the war and the presence of the British and other foreign vessels, not to the RCN, who were still viewed as interlopers in the former imperial port. The aversion of Admiral Kingsmill for traditional political patronage in purchasing and in granting Canadian contracts did little to improve local opinion.⁴⁹

Lack of respect for the RCN’s “tinpot navy” was by no means limited to Halifax. Even the redoubtable Bob Edwards of Calgary’s widely circulated and satiric *Eye Opener* found cause for comment on the RCN:

Our dear old friend H.M.C.S. Niobe is still shedding tears in Halifax harbor. She is weeping over the 47 skippers and 35 mates who are undergoing a course of comic-opera training on her historic decks. Her anguish is especially keen over the pathetic activities of one of these ancient mariners who celebrated his 76th birthday last month and is reputed to be an orphan ... Occasionally they sally forth in a small gunboat to practice naval warfare outside the harbor. But it is well known that all they do on these occasions is fish. We should dearly love to see their booze account, because it is contrary to every known ethic to go fishing without booze.⁵⁰

This barb aroused much indignation at naval service headquarters, where it was felt that, although such a comment might be “suitable in peace time ... it is highly objectionable at the present time.”

Burdened by an unappealing image and negative expectations, the unsung Canadian navy nevertheless carried on with what it had. Although the RCN was being prepared for daunting challenges, it was as yet largely untested. That situation was to change quickly in early December 1917, and in a way that further jeopardized both its morale and credibility and had grave implications for the future of the Royal Canadian Navy.