

Betrayed

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Betrayed: Scandal, Politics, and Canadian Naval Leadership

Richard O. Mayne



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To my Mom and Dad, for their love and support

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Introduction: The Game and Its Players

On 14 January 1944, after almost ten years at the helm of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), Vice Admiral Percy Walker Nelles was replaced as the chief of the naval staff (CNS). With the public anxiously anticipating the invasion of Europe, Canadians had little reason to disbelieve the government's claim that the navy's top chief had given up his position in order to go to the United Kingdom to help plan and then supervise the RCN's participation in that historic event. It was all a pretence. Hidden in the overblown prose concocted by public relations professionals rested a cold hard truth: Nelles had, in fact, just been fired by the minister of national defence for naval services, Angus L. Macdonald. The victim of hidden agendas, Nelles was put out to pasture with a meaningless appointment, having lost a political game not knowing all the rules or, more importantly, most of the players.

History has not been kind to the admiral. With the notable exception of the official operational history of the RCN, *No Higher Purpose*, and the upcoming second volume, *A Blue Water Navy*, the consensus among naval historians is that Nelles was an unspectacular chief of the naval staff who "fell far too short in his failure to achieve the unachievable."¹ The task of managing the RCN's rapid expansion would have tested the mettle of the most skilled admiral from Canada's larger and more experienced Allies. Nevertheless, for most academics the Herculean tasks that faced Nelles did not excuse his poor performance as chief of the naval staff. In fact, one scholar even went as far as to claim that "Admiral Nelles removed or destroyed papers" in an attempt to hide his incompetence.² Such interpretations of Nelles are much too harsh and the charges of incompetence unjust.

Born into a middle-class Brantford, Ontario, family in 1892, Percy Nelles never seemed to have any doubt that his future was at sea. He joined the Fisheries Protection Service in 1908 at the age of sixteen, and when Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government created the Canadian navy two years later it was a foregone conclusion that the young Nelles would be one of the first men to join. His career in that service was impressive, and his star rose quickly as a successful mixture of shore appointments, training courses, and postings on British warships put him on the fast track. Personally groomed by his predecessor, Commodore Walter Hose, RCN, Nelles was finally confirmed as CNS in July 1934.³

For the next half decade Nelles did well managing his tiny service while at the same time fighting for resources from a tight-fisted and Depression-riddled

federal government. But nothing could have readied the CNS for the incredible rate at which the navy was going to expand during the Second World War. The RCN grew phenomenally and by war's end it would be some fifty times larger than in September 1939.⁴ It was a chaotic time, but for many of those serving with Nelles during the earlier years there was little doubt that he was the right man for the job. As one flag officer later recalled,

I would really like to enlarge on the importance of Admiral Nelles at the beginning of the war. He was a most excellent person to work for and we were all digging out for daylight about anything new that turned up, or anything new that had to be dealt with. If we needed his authority or his approval he could hoist in what it was one was saying at once – “Yes, carry on – sure, sure – make it so” was the way he used to put it, and off we went. This connected with all sorts of things from building ships to piers and jettys [sic], but I feel certain that any lesser man doubtful and unable to make up his mind, could have held up the works for months and months and we would not have got anywhere.⁵

Nelles was not an authoritarian leader. He avoided micromanaging the service and instead preferred to trust his officers, simply instructing them to “go to it chappie.”⁶ Such expressions capture his style quite nicely. A relatively small man with distinctive rounded glasses, Nelles' appearance never really matched his position as head of the navy. While capable of being curt with his subordinates when necessary, he seemed to depend on a relaxed leadership style, and for the most part it worked. The admiral's real problem was that he was – as one of his contemporaries so aptly put it – “a very fine, very straight fellow,” and it was this lack of shrewdness and governmental acumen that left Nelles vulnerable to the politics of naval expansion.⁷

Historians have portrayed Nelles' removal as the dramatic conclusion to a fraught year in which many of the RCN's deficiencies were laid bare to the Canadian government. That the combination of rapid expansion and overtaxing operational commitments on the North Atlantic had created a situation where Canadian escorts were going to sea underequipped, and without the necessary training to effectively fight an antisubmarine war, is a well-established fact.⁸ Rather, what needs to be re-examined is the widely held view that Macdonald fired Nelles because of these deficiencies. The true story is much more dramatic. A group of well-connected “hostilities only” reserve officers launched a concerted campaign against Nelles that gained momentum because it took place precisely at the moment when senior officers in the Royal Navy had particular reason to be concerned about the efficiency of the Canadian fleet.

The role of secondary figures – the so-called behind-the-scenes players – in shaping the history of the RCN has not received the attention in the literature that it

deserves.⁹ Nor has much work been done on the remarkable impact that the huge influx of reservists had on the wartime Canadian navy. This is not due to a lack of interest. Ever since this subfield of military history was resuscitated from obscurity in the mid-1980s, Canadian naval historians have busied themselves writing the much-needed, yet more generalized, accounts that have become its building blocks.¹⁰ But exposing the individuals who were actually responsible for Nelles' removal requires a unique approach, one that looks beyond the ministers and admirals who normally stand as the most visible levels of the decision-making process. An investigation that digs much lower in the officer corps hierarchy is key to understanding the admiral's fate, as well as the politics of the navy's wartime expansion.

Senior officials often rely on subordinates to provide the data that allow them to make informed decisions. With that in mind, new methodological techniques propose that the only way to unravel the rationale behind certain decisions is to study the individuals who provide admirals and ministers with advice.¹¹ When it comes to analyzing Macdonald's decision to replace Nelles, therefore, this bottom-up approach suggests that the solution rests with an investigation not into the minister's motives but into the actions of the men who influenced him. Moreover, once this decision is traced to its lowest level in either the military hierarchy or governmental bureaucracy, this methodology can yield further results. But it does so only if one then follows the decision-making process upward to the minister.

The Nelles case clearly demonstrates the merit of this approach. In fact, only through this type of bottom-up examination does it become apparent how the chief of the naval staff fell victim to cells of complainers within the service who were willing to bypass normal channels so that their voices could be heard at the navy's highest political level. Beginning with a grassroots revolt in the spring of 1942, small networks of reserve lieutenants and lieutenant commanders grew into what one officer called "the underground movement" against Nelles.¹² Aside from being relatively junior, these officers were also members of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). According to their own accounts, this put them at the disadvantage of occupying the bottom strata of the navy's hierarchy, and there was some truth to that view. Unlike the army or the air force, the RCN was divided into three categories of service: the RCNVR, whose members lacked professional marine experience; the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve (RCNR), which consisted of men with previous merchant marine experience; and the full-time permanent force, whose members had chosen the navy as a career. The true professionals came from the permanent force RCN, and the fact that the reserves were often treated as rank amateurs was something that many within these networks greatly resented. This rested at the heart of a larger battle of recognition, in which certain reserve networks demanded the same professional respect as was afforded to the regulars. The relations between the professional permanent force on the

one hand and the civilians who volunteered to join the reserves for “hostilities only” on the other provide a unique look at questions of professionalism and social identity within the Canadian navy during one of the country’s greatest emergencies. This story is particularly important because the conflicting assumptions and ambitions of these two groups had a tremendous impact on both naval and governmental policy.

The system of dividing the RCN into three branches was borrowed from the British model, yet the navy did have justification to distinguish its personnel in this fashion. Since wartime conditions would lead to a dramatic expansion in the force, the RCN needed a way to separate men who would be spending their lives in service from those who would not. In theory, this system would make the demobilization process easier and ensure that the career requirements of the regulars were not inhibited by the huge influx of reservists. There was much rationality to this thinking. The permanent force represented the core of the service, and the navy had no reason to unfairly lump the needs of those members’ career development in with men who would return to the civilian professions once hostilities ended. Even the reservists remaining in the navy after 1945 would not be serving on a full-time basis. Instead, they readjusted to life as part-time sailors, which meant that they were only required to report for training to their local home unit on specified weeknights. Peacetime conditions make it obvious why it would be unfair to measure reservists on an equal footing with those serving each and every day in the regular force. During the war, reservists also served on a full-time basis, and that had the effect of blurring the distinction between them and the regulars. The need to get ships to sea forced the RCNRs and RCNVRs to perform the same tasks as the regulars, despite the difference in training. This is how one permanent force officer described the situation:

Although courageous and colourful, [the Naval Reserve] was under-trained, poorly disciplined and, until late in the war not competent at its job. To my mind, the astonishing thing about it was that it functioned as well as it did, by trial and error and teamwork, inspired by the challenge of war ... The Canadian Army was more fortunate. It enjoyed a period of about three years in which to train and develop the form of discipline that it had inherited from the British. The result was a highly efficient force in which there was no significant difference between the permanent force professionals and the hostilities only volunteers. Had the navy had this good fortune, it would have done a much better job and much bad feeling and grief would have been avoided.¹³

Others in the permanent force expressed similar views, and it was this type of attitude that helped create the reserve networks that eventually toppled Nelles.

The men within these networks were bothered by their lack of standing within the navy. Having gone from being lawyers, journalists, and managers of industry, they suddenly found themselves in a “segregated” environment. Much of this segregation was based on the fact that RCNVR officers could be immediately identified by the wavy stripes on their sleeves, which distinguished them from their straight-stripe counterparts in the regular force. Moreover, the smaller escort ships – such as the corvettes, minesweepers, and fairmiles – were manned almost exclusively by the RCNVRs and RCNRs, which further isolated reservists from the regulars serving on the larger destroyers and fleet units. Putting “hostilities only” reservists on small escort ships that would be scrapped after the war made sense from a long-term operational point of view, but it had the effect of dividing the officer corps into two distinct communities. As former civilian professionals, some RCNVR officers found that the regulars would not listen to their advice (no matter what experience they had acquired at sea) simply because they were reservists. This treatment by the regulars led small groups of reserve officers with powerful social and political connections to develop networks that allowed them to circumvent normal military channels. Given that they were performing duties that were similar to the regulars, these men wanted the respect afforded to the professional navy, and they were ready to go directly to the minister’s office to get it. In time, the desire for the reserves to be accepted as professionals developed into the political battle that pitted the minister’s office against the navy’s top brass.

It was not these reservists’ willingness to buck the chain of command, but rather a crucial contact within the minister’s office, that was the true source of their power. This contact was Macdonald’s executive assistant, John Joseph Connolly, who, having become the linchpin between the minister and these networks, was the key player behind the admiral’s downfall. At first glance, it might be difficult to accept that Macdonald’s personal aide could have played such an important role. Connolly has often been treated as an errand runner, whose October 1943 investigation into the RCN’s operational shortcomings managed to provide “the evidence Angus L. Macdonald was looking for” to relieve Nelles.¹⁴ In reality, he was much more than just an assistant. He was also a watchdog responsible for protecting the minister’s reputation, and to help with that task Connolly relied on these reserve networks to be his eyes and ears. Their purpose was to relay any problems within the fleet that could threaten the minister politically. It is in the study of Connolly’s relationship with these networks where this book differs from other accounts, particularly since the availability of new sources makes it possible to finally identify how these reserve officers informed and influenced Connolly and how he, in turn, swayed the minister’s decisions on their behalf.¹⁵

Over the past sixty years, the achievements and influence of this group of reserve officers in shaping the history of the RCN has remained largely undiscovered.

One of the few scholars to uncover them was the navy's first official historian, Gilbert Norman Tucker. As his research notes make clear, Tucker did not consider a government-backed official history the proper forum to explore these reserve networks. Certainly, the fact that they came from influential Canadian families who enjoyed power in the public sphere gave good cause for concern, explaining why Tucker's team agreed that the "material is so contentious."¹⁶ But that is precisely why a study of these networks is required. While enjoying social standing in their civilian life, these men were still relatively junior naval officers; yet by establishing links to the minister through the executive assistant, and exploiting their civilian status, they created power at a level in the military hierarchy where none was supposed to exist. Their activities were directly responsible for what was probably one of the worst breakdowns in the civil-military dialectic in the RCN's entire history.

In order to maintain discipline, military leaders rely on a strict chain of command that regulates the flow of information to their political masters. During the Second World War, the RCN was no different. Those serving either at sea or on shore reported to superiors who worked for the operational commanders on the coasts. In turn, these commanders would communicate with a group of senior officers at Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) in Ottawa who, by virtue of being members of the Naval Staff, were responsible for drafting policy. These policies were then sent to the Naval Board, where the RCN's highest-ranking officers would advise the minister on whether they should be accepted, rejected, or amended. However, by becoming a conduit for these networks, Connolly had endorsed an alternative chain of command, and that chain, it can be argued, caused Macdonald not only to lose faith in his top military advisor, but also to so shift his attitude toward the navy that it ultimately led to significant changes in Canadian naval policy.

Despite undermining Nelles' authority, a number of these networks truly believed that they were circumventing normal channels for the good of the service. The officers who believed that Naval Service Headquarters was not doing enough to modernize the RCN escort fleet had tried the chain of command, and in their opinion these efforts had proved fruitless. Totally convinced that their cause was just, these Canadian reservists had little compunction about going directly to the minister, a course of action they saw as the only option left. Nor did they stop there – a senior British flag officer and his staff were also persuaded to circumvent their own channels of communication. Playing a pivotal role in Nelles' firing, these foreign officers – who were members of Western Approaches Command (the British operational authority responsible for fighting the U-boat war in the Eastern Atlantic) – ignored the Admiralty (the British equivalent to Naval Service Headquarters) and instead turned to this particular network for results.¹⁷ But while the modernization network was certainly one of the strongest cells within the RCN, it

was by no means the only one. Other networks included a group that focused on the belief that the permanent force discriminated against reservists for their lack of experience, while another was convinced that morale was suffering because of prejudicial attitudes by the Royal Navy toward Canadians. There was, of course, overlap among these networks, with some members of one either supporting or rejecting the claims of others. And to top things off, a final set – consisting mostly of regular force officers – was able to take advantage of the chaos created by all the reserve cells to help their leader take over from Nelles as chief of the naval staff. This group was something of an anomaly: the product of a competitive permanent force community that encouraged officers to do whatever it took to advance their own careers. That mentality led to factionalism among the regulars, and as a result these particular officers, unlike the reservists, did not have a specific “cause” other than seeing Nelles replaced by their benefactor.

While the goals of the reserve networks varied considerably, there were commonalities among the groups themselves. Certainly the most pervasive characteristic was that they consisted of influential and educated professionals with strong links to Canada’s social elite. Consequently, they were accustomed to a civilian environment in which problems were often discussed informally and in a more open and businesslike atmosphere. Placed in an unfamiliar organization structured on strict discipline, rules, and regulations, a few had trouble adjusting to the navy and chose to rely on personal connections to capture Connolly’s attention. In some cases, these officers were Connolly’s longstanding friends or had been fellow lawyers with him prior to his becoming an executive assistant, while in other cases his interest was peaked by prominent individuals currently serving in the reserves who knew exactly how to sway both politicians as well as their keepers. Despite having wildly divergent causes – with varying degrees of legitimacy – it is significant that all these networks employed the same methodology. With these groups bypassing normal channels by going directly to Macdonald, the Naval Staff began to lose credibility, particularly since the reserve networks exaggerated their specific complaints in the hopes that doing so would make it more likely that the minister would take notice. There was no way the professional head of the navy was going to survive after these groups consecutively hit Macdonald with issues that all had the same potential for public criticism and bad press. Using hyperbole may have helped capture the minister’s attention, but this questionable tactic effectively politicized various operational deficiencies.

Thanks to these small yet vocal factions, Connolly and Macdonald took unsubstantiated claims seriously, such as the wild notion that the vast majority of naval reserve officers were on the verge of rebelling against the RCN’s senior leadership. As ridiculous as the suggestion of mass mutiny might sound, both Connolly and Macdonald came to believe that the reserve navy was a powder keg of discontent.

Debatable rallying cries to the effect that the reserves deserved equal privileges with the regulars “for greater sacrifices” eventually received more than a sympathetic nod from Connolly and Macdonald.¹⁸ In time, these words would translate into policy. That Macdonald accepted the advice of these networks over the senior staff clearly indicates that the minister and chief of the naval staff did not enjoy the type of healthy working relationship essential for the service to function effectively. Certainly there was little doubt that a communication gap existed between the two men when in November 1943 Macdonald accused Nelles of incompetence. Although Macdonald never revealed his sources of information, the minister charged that it was unacceptable that the chief of the naval staff had failed to tell him about issues affecting the navy’s morale. Nelles flatly rejected this claim and countercharged that he had consistently tried to include Macdonald in the Naval Staff’s proposed solutions. The chief of the naval staff was right, and explaining how the reserve networks managed to put the minister into a position in which the navy’s top brass was falsely accused of withholding information is an essential part of this book.

The ability of the networks to manipulate the political process obviously spelled trouble for the unsuspecting chief of the naval staff. Under normal circumstances, the veracity of these grievances should have been filtered through the chain of command, but without that balancing influence both Connolly and Macdonald were flooded by unsubstantiated claims and allegations. While some were obviously accurate, others were not, and that gave Connolly a distorted interpretation of the navy and its problems. Trying to influence naval policy subsequently became a political game of survival, where unconfirmed criticisms were suddenly transformed into an artificial political crisis because of fears that they could cost the minister his Cabinet post if discovered by the public. These networks created a dysfunctional environment whereby Connolly engineered Nelles’ removal as a political solution to protect the minister from potential scandal and embarrassment. The main purpose of this book, therefore, is to explore the role that these individuals and networks played in Nelles’ downfall, and to clarify the impact they had on Canadian naval policy during the Second World War.

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Confused Seas

When Vice Admiral Nelles stepped down as chief of the naval staff in early 1944, he had little reason to suspect that a quixotic reserve officer by the name of Andrew Dyas MacLean had played a large role in his downfall. The troublesome MacLean had been forced out of the navy himself in October 1942 and was now nothing more than a distant memory. Yet the network MacLean had established while in uniform had marked the beginning of Nelles' woes with the minister of national defence for naval services, Angus L. Macdonald. MacLean was frustrated that the permanent force never listened to his ideas because of their "discriminatory" attitude toward reserve officers, and was thus probably the first individual to establish channels of influence that effectively bypassed Nelles. Powerful political and public connections afforded MacLean the opportunity to open a direct dialogue with the minister, in which it was argued that reserve officers were tired of the regulars treating them as civilians in uniform and third-class citizens rather than equals. The fact that Connolly was asked to investigate not only their grievances but also charges that the senior chiefs were hiding a severe morale problem from Macdonald made MacLean and his followers a significant force in the navy's political landscape.

This embryonic campaign affected Connolly, who created another network with his friends in the naval reserves, whom he used as personal informants. This second network of reservists was not associated with MacLean, even though they were somewhat sympathetic to his cause. Their central complaint centred on the need to modernize the escort fleet. Morale among the reservists who manned the RCN's corvettes and minesweepers had plummeted, they argued, because their ships were not properly equipped to protect convoys and destroy U-boats.

The opinions of both these groups would eventually have tremendous consequences for Nelles. The reasons for their formation and their influence on Connolly and, ultimately, on Macdonald are crucial to our understanding of the Nelles case. No less important is whether the leaders of these networks were objective, disinterested men with legitimate grievances against the navy, or simply troublemakers whose motivation was based on hidden agendas and personal ambitions.

The leader of the first group of reservists was not an average officer. The nephew of John Bayne Maclean, the founder of *Maclean's* magazine, and the son of publishing magnate Hugh C. MacLean (the brothers could not agree on the proper spelling of their family's name), Andrew MacLean was a member of Canada's elite.¹



Angus L. Macdonald, a former premier of Nova Scotia, was an experienced politician when he joined William Lyon Mackenzie King's Cabinet as the minister of national defence for naval services. Macdonald lost faith in his top advisor, Vice Admiral Percy W. Nelles, largely due to the efforts of small cliques of disgruntled reserve officers. *DHH 81/520/1000, BOX 148, FILE 29*

Being born to such a respected Toronto family afforded many opportunities. Certainly his education – Appleby College, Upper Canada College, and the University of Toronto – reflected his privileged roots. As a senior executive at Hugh C. MacLean Publishing, the young editor enjoyed status and influence within Toronto's business community. He also benefited from working as Prime Minister Richard Bennett's private secretary during the early 1930s, which naturally resulted in strong political ties to the Conservative Party of Canada.² Quite clearly, "Andy" MacLean was a powerful man whose opinions were both respected and followed, at least outside the Liberal Party of Canada.

MacLean also enjoyed power at the local naval reserve level during the interwar period. Having served with the Royal Navy during the First World War, MacLean advanced quickly after joining the RCNVR in 1927 and was given command of the



Perhaps one of the most recognized images of Percy W. Nelles, taken by renowned photographer Yousuf Karsh. For some he never looked the part of a chief of the naval staff, a conclusion that the naval minister also reached when he observed that Nelles did not have “the power, the personality [or] the respect of his officers.” *LAC PA-206626*

local naval reserve division in Toronto, HMCS *York*, only three months later. MacLean had considerable independence at *York*, and that allowed him to run the unit more or less as he saw fit. Left largely on his own by his permanent force superiors, MacLean turned *York*'s wardroom into an elite gentleman's club where the sons of Toronto's rich and powerful would go for their military service. As one

former officer recalled, *York* was seen “as an extension of the little big four private schools,” which made it both “a very strange place, [and] very social.”³ Other references to the little big four – Trinity, Ridley, St. Andrews, and Upper Canada College – or to the idea that *York* was a “University of Toronto/Rosedale/Royal [Canadian] Yacht Club, old boy net” reveal that education and status were used to exclude “unwanted elements” in a distinctive subcommunity that was operating outside the confines of regular naval life. For many it was a surreal and self-perpetuating environment: “The old Boy Net, particularly around Toronto, is an extraordinary thing. It’s extraordinary anywhere, and it works because you wouldn’t have been in it except for it.”⁴

York was certainly not the only reserve division in which the wardroom served as an annex to the local yacht club or country club for the socially powerful and cosmopolitan elite. But it was probably the most exclusive reserve division within Canada. As the commanding officer of *York*, MacLean occupied the top slot in the unit’s hierarchy. It was images of that status that were etched in his memory when he left the reserves in 1931 to devote all his time to serving Prime Minister Bennett. Things were much different when he was reactivated during the Second World War. Now MacLean faced an environment where neither his business, political, reserve, nor social status meant much to men who had spent their lives in the “real navy” – the regular RCN. They too had their own elitist attitudes, and it was the disparity between these two separate mentalities – one reserve, and the other permanent force – that would eventually collide with such force that it would cost Nelles his job.

The RCN had been neglected throughout the interwar years, and life in the tiny service had been tough.⁵ Despite low pay and limited opportunities for advancement, a cadre of loyal officers had nevertheless devoted themselves to a naval career. Beginning with their enrolment in the Royal Naval College of Canada, these men embarked on a long and arduous training process that eventually turned them into professional sailors. Having done so during such lean years only added to their sense of pride. In this community, officers earned advancement through a blend of sea time, staff positions, and years of service. Since the navy was small, competition among officers was often so fierce that they guarded both seniority and appointments with the utmost jealousy.

The onset of war in 1939 greatly disrupted this community, and it was hard for some regulars to take the reservists seriously. Most were fresh off civvy street, while others had been exposed to a maximum of two weeks’ sea time during yearly pre-war training. Worse, volunteer reserve officers were easily identified by the intertwined gold braid ranks on their sleeves that differed from the straight stripes of their permanent force colleagues. Such distinctions apparently contributed to the sense of elitism among the regulars that, one former officer recalled, was based on a perception:

The majority [of reservists] knew nothing. There was great keenness and high-heartedness and so on, but absolute abysmal knowledge, lack of it, which bothered us like hell. [That] is one of the reasons why [we] straight stripers were so disliked, I expect, by the VRs. [From our perspective] we resented you, because you arrived there looking like naval officers with stripes on your sleeve, and it was patently obvious that you knew nothing about it ... This was bothersome to us who regarded ourselves as professionals; of course, we *were* professionals.⁶

Despite insufficient training and experience, reserve officers were often given ranks and positions of authority that it had taken the regulars years to achieve throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Undoubtedly, that was a difficult pill for some to swallow. Cutting corners for reserve officer training – while a necessary evil due to the emergency at sea – demeaned the profession.⁷ The permanent force was glad to have the reserves but could not accept them as full members of the profession. Placing reservists like MacLean into this environment was bound to cause problems, since their first experience with regulars often led to bruised egos and injured pride.

What some described as their “favourite hobby” had suddenly become a full-time job; MacLean was not the only one who had difficulty bowing to the whims of men whose formal education had been obtained merely at the Royal Naval College of Canada.⁸ One member of the group that complained about the state of the fleet’s equipment, Lieutenant Commander Louis Audette, RCNVR, shed light on the problem: “As for many others, for me the transition from peaceable lawyer to belligerent sailor was not entirely smooth ... One of the contributory factors for these difficulties was the vast difference between my new leaders and my former leaders ... In civilian life, my leaders were basically men of education and of distinction. In the armed forces ... the leaders were men of almost no education.”⁹

Unlike the permanent force’s practice of using seniority as a measure of success, members of the particular reserve networks valued status as defined by educational standards and social standing. Mostly former lawyers, journalists, and businessmen, the individuals who followed MacLean (or, like Audette, who were concerned about the fleet’s efficiency) possessed doubts about their permanent force superiors’ ability to lead. As civilian professionals, they worried that the lack of university degrees among the regulars had, in Audette’s words, left the navy “in the hands of a scantily educated and largely unimaginative group of officers who, nevertheless, clearly deemed themselves to be a very lofty elite.”¹⁰ That the regulars would not listen to reserve officers simply because they were reservists amounted to discrimination. This provided MacLean and his followers with all the justification they needed to take such matters directly to the minister. Ironically, their emphasis on education and status reveals that the motivation for bypassing Nelles and his officers was itself elitist. In its way, it was perhaps more insidious, for the

disciples of this so-called crusade against the regulars consisted of a small yet socially and politically connected clique. Such networking had provided them with power and influence in their civilian lives, and they hoped to play some role in the military. That created a class of RCNVR officer aptly characterized by one reservist as the “undisciplined, free thinkers.”¹¹

There is little doubt that MacLean was cast from this mould. Certainly, his reactivation into the naval reserves during the summer of 1940 was a harbinger of things to come. MacLean, anxious to serve his country, and still on the list of retired officers liable for call-out in the event of hostilities, was bitterly disappointed when the navy did not contact him immediately on the outbreak of war in 1939. He broke regulations and applied to join the Royal Canadian Air Force, and when the navy ordered him to report for duty, he tried to use the Royal Canadian Air Force position as leverage. In what would become a common pattern in his dealings with the permanent force, MacLean overestimated his own importance to the service. Not surprisingly, snooty comments such as “the rank of Lieutenant Commander is not sufficiently attractive to induce me to resign my commission in the R.C.A.F.” solicited stiff responses at headquarters, which included the possibility of charges, as well as the suggestion of “telling him to ‘Go to Hell.’”¹² His impertinent demand to be made a commander prior to reactivation offended many staff officers. But Nelles believed that the simplest solution was to cancel the naval appointment and leave MacLean in the air force. There was no vindictiveness in the decision – the reality was that the navy could do without MacLean’s services, and the chief of the naval staff was certainly not going to ignore regulations by negotiating with him. MacLean had been absent from active reserve duty for far too long. Making him a commander would have set a dangerous precedent and been grossly unfair to those who had served throughout the 1930s.

Nelles was in the right. But that was not how MacLean or his influential father, Hugh MacLean, interpreted events. Complaining to the postmaster general and MP for North York, W.P. Mulock, Hugh MacLean singled Nelles out and argued that the chief of the naval staff “bore a grudge” against his son because of a highly critical article that he had previously published on the navy. As Hugh MacLean wrote to Mulock, “It is a disgrace that the personal feelings of that Nelles (known on the Bermuda Station a few years ago as Lieut. ‘Squirt’ Nelles), should prevent him [Andrew MacLean] serving where he can be most effective.”¹³ Charges that his son was facing “persecution” from the RCN’s highest-ranking officer were baseless and uninformed. No less a person than Nelles himself had originally insisted that MacLean be given a position in the navy at a time when others thought he was too old.¹⁴ In fact, suggestions to Mulock that only a “mighty attractive offer” could entice MacLean from the Royal Canadian Air Force indicate that his father’s influence peddling represented nothing more than an attempt to get his son what he wanted through political means.¹⁵ The navy had little time for such tactics and

made it clear that if MacLean were to serve in the RCN, it would be on their conditions, not his. As always, when pushing his luck too far, Andrew MacLean backed down and claimed that the entire affair was an unfortunate misunderstanding.

While this paved the way for his admission into the navy, MacLean's father was not finished with politicking. Placing his son's plight into a larger yet somewhat ambiguous context, Hugh MacLean wrote directly to naval minister Macdonald: "I'll be darned if I shall continue to stand idly by while the vicious treatment of volunteer officers continues on the present scale. I have faith in your ability to reform the Navy, and hope to see some evidence of apparent abuses rectified."¹⁶ Exactly what this meant he did not explain, but the implications were all too clear. Unless his son was handled with care while serving in the navy, Hugh MacLean hinted that the family's media outlet and political connections would be used to make life extremely uncomfortable for Macdonald. That the minister understood the message was apparent from his conciliatory response. Acquiescing to such pressure was a grave mistake, as was his decision not to tell Nelles about this correspondence. This type of political intimidation gave Andrew MacLean a sense of power and fostered the belief that it was possible to operate above the chain of command. Like his father, he would rely on the ill-defined spectre of "abuses" toward the reserves as a means to gain access to the minister. MacLean's experience throughout his two years in the navy reveal that he was neither the victim of permanent force persecution nor the champion of repressed reservists. MacLean's campaign did not stem from a desire to right perceived injustices between the regulars and reserves but rather was a ploy to further his own naval ambitions.

The RCN gave MacLean every opportunity to prove his abilities. The evidence is overwhelming. After spending an unsuccessful year as a Canadian officer on loan to the Royal Navy, MacLean reported to Rear Admiral G.C. Jones, commanding officer Atlantic coast, for duty with the class of small and lightly armed submarine chasers known as fairmiles.¹⁷ Despite word from the United Kingdom that MacLean was a renegade with a penchant for snubbing superiors, the RCN re-assigned him to the Atlantic Command because of a desperate shortage of experienced officers. Accepting MacLean's claim that his First World War service on the motor launches had made him an expert, Jones gave him the title of senior officer fairmiles and a free hand in the training and administration of men and vessels. Despite the auspicious start, it was not long before the new senior officer started disobeying orders, proving that there was more truth than fiction in the tales that had dogged him from overseas.¹⁸

That MacLean's reputation had followed him back to Canada can be determined from instructions Captain E.R. Mainguy had provided prior to a commissioning ceremony for a number of fairmiles in Muskoka, Ontario. The orders were blunt. MacLean was merely accepting these vessels on Mainguy's authority as Captain (Destroyers) in Halifax; he was specifically told to speak neither with the public



The focus of Lieutenant Commander Andrew Dyas MacLean's passion, the 112-foot fairmiles were used for antisubmarine patrols in Canadian littoral waters. They contained a typical armament of 20 mm guns and depth charges with a crew of three officers and fourteen ratings. Pictured here is Q 052, which MacLean commanded for a short period in late 1941. *DND O-1601*

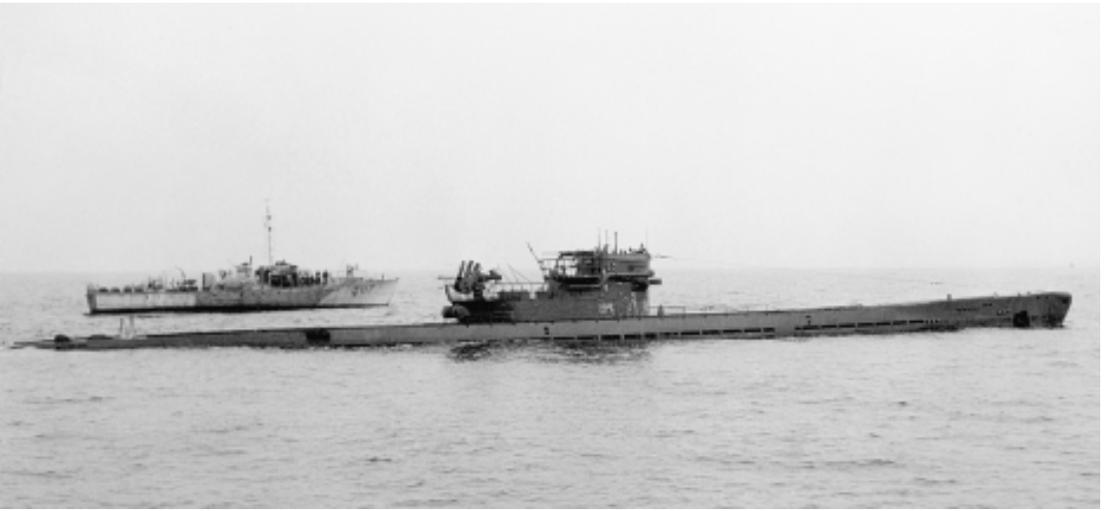
nor to the press at the ceremonies. Stressing that “some tact is desirable,” Mainguy was obviously concerned whether MacLean could follow this mandate. Another officer was equally suspicious, scribbling a note on a draft of the order that MacLean's tact was “improbable.”¹⁹ The justification for this suspicion came two days later. MacLean could not keep his mouth shut, as a *Toronto Star* article reported: “The story of how these naval officers viewed their return to Canada as something to complain about comes from Lieut.-Com. Andrew MacLean.”²⁰ Of course, MacLean claimed he had been misquoted. But he had obviously said something to make the journalist think that naval officers preferred to serve in the United Kingdom rather than under ineffective Canadian authorities.

Outraged by this innuendo, the director of technical division, Captain G.M. Hibbard, RCN, sent a terse memo to both Captain H.T.W. Grant, director of naval personnel (DNP), and the director of naval intelligence, Captain E. Brand. “Lt-Commander MacLean did not have any authority to act for the Department at this ceremony,” Hibbard charged, in fact no duty other than “to stand by his vessel and take command.” After a brief investigation, Brand discovered that too much information had been given to the press on the fairmiles and that these

stories had generally been filed without the official censor's consultation. The source was almost always "due to LCdr MacLean."²¹ That articles were appearing in the press without clearance was troubling, but the possibility that a Canadian naval officer was using the media for his own purposes was worse. Naval authorities feared that MacLean's attempt to drum up public support as a means to expedite the development of the fairmiles could cause problems for more important construction programs, such as the corvettes and minesweepers. And there was more. Having sailed to Toronto, MacLean was growing impatient with the time it was taking to complete the final additions to the fairmiles. He sent unauthorized signals to various manning depots at Halifax and Montreal requesting personnel for his ships, and the crews arrived too early, leaving the Toronto naval authorities scrambling to find accommodations. Nor was that all. MacLean disregarded sailing instructions throughout the journey down the St. Lawrence. Naval Service Headquarters finally caught up to MacLean in Halifax, at which point he was told that he had "incurred the displeasure of the Department."²²

Barely three weeks had passed since MacLean had become senior officer fairmiles, and already many shared Grant's earlier assessment: "The Admiralty considered him unsuitable for a Naval Appointment. I am of the same opinion but there is as yet no conclusive proof."²³ While MacLean had made plenty of mistakes, Nelles gave him the benefit of the doubt. Belying the accusations, the chief of the naval staff chose not to release MacLean, trying instead to bring this troublesome officer into the fold through disciplinary procedures. While such leniency was typical of Nelles' leadership style, he had given MacLean too much credit. The reprimands had fallen on deaf ears. In fact, Naval Headquarters could do little to change MacLean's perception that he alone knew what was best for the fairmiles.

MacLean was infuriated that only four of the RCN's original fairmiles were operational by 1 February 1942.²⁴ Chalking this up as another example of the permanent force's inefficiency was all the justification needed to run the tiny flotilla his way. As the larger strategic picture clearly showed, his perceptions were misguided. The RCN was having trouble manning the last twenty corvettes from the 1940 shipbuilding program, which were desperately required in the North Atlantic. These transatlantic vessels were more valuable than ones built for coastal operations, and Naval Service Headquarters therefore instructed Jones to decommission all but four of the fairmiles temporarily so that their crews could be reassigned to corvettes and minesweepers.²⁵ The decision to man the corvettes was undoubtedly the right one, particularly since the RCN had incurred setbacks during the mid-ocean convoys SC 42 and SC 48 in September and October 1941. Moreover, the fairmiles would not be required until the spring because their assigned area, the St. Lawrence River, was still frozen over.²⁶ While Naval Service Headquarters had no obligation to explain this to MacLean, it nonetheless did so. But MacLean remained steadfast in his conviction that the regulars were a bunch of bunglers.



This close up of a Type IXC U-boat was the product of the U 889's surrender to Canadian forces at the end of the war. The Q 117 was one of several fairmiles that escorted the U 889 into St. John's. While providing invaluable work escorting inshore convoys, the RCN's fairmiles did not score any kills during the war. *DHH, RU (U-889)*

Lacking the ability to think strategically, MacLean cared only about his own small corner of the war and therefore greatly resented the attempt by higher authorities to strip it of its furnishings.²⁷

At first MacLean's superiors were willing to ignore his myopic outlook, believing that his recalcitrance was based on a sense of duty to the fairmiles. Few doubted that MacLean was a fighter. In question over the winter of 1942 was whether he was directing his energy toward making the flotilla an effective fighting force or toward turning the fairmiles into his own personal empire. Although Jones had originally given him considerable leeway, MacLean never liked that most of his major initiatives had to pass through three levels of command (captain [D], commanding officer Atlantic coast, and finally Naval Service Headquarters) before a final decision was reached. Dealing with bureaucracies was nothing new to MacLean but he found the navy's administration particularly cumbersome. As frustrations grew, MacLean hatched a plot to use both his political connections and his media ties to gain more authority over the fairmiles.²⁸

This came to a head when Macdonald faced questions in the House of Commons regarding the disposition of the fairmiles – precisely at the time when MacLean was complaining about the very same thing. The fact that these parliamentary inquiries had originated from the member for MacLean's home riding of Parkdale, Ontario, further suggests that the opening salvo had come from his political arsenal.²⁹ An anonymous editorial entitled "Fairmile Fuddle" published in

Boating Magazine (of which MacLean had been the editor), represented the second prong of MacLean's offensive. The piece disparaged the navy and contained details that only he would know. Comments that the top brass had attempted "to 'whitewash' the disgraceful handling of the Fairmile flotilla" were typical of a man who once admitted in his civilian life that he "was critical of those in public life [and] enjoyed writing editorials condemning those in high places."³⁰ The inclusion of secret details on the fairmiles constituted a serious breach of the Defence of Canada Regulations, and MacLean was fortunate that neither Macdonald nor his naval advisors were aware of the article. This was as far as his luck would carry him.

Changes on the East Coast throughout the spring of 1942 were occurring too quickly for MacLean to keep pace. With the opening of the Gulf to oceanic traffic fast approaching, Nelles informed the minister that the East Coast fairmiles would be divided into five flotillas of six ships each and based at Halifax, St. John's, Sydney, Botwood, and Gaspé.³¹ MacLean was flabbergasted by this news, because this plan bore absolutely no resemblance to one he had submitted in September 1941. While arguing that Nelles' proposal was totally "impractical," he was dealt a second blow when Captain G.R. Miles, RCN, replaced Mainguy as the captain (D) in Halifax.³² Unlike the genial and flexible Mainguy, Miles was the type of regular MacLean especially despised. A no-nonsense and temperamental man, Miles was a stickler for regulations and MacLean knew it. With the fate of his fairmile plans lying in the balance, the panic-stricken MacLean had no time to work around his new commander.

In early May 1942, MacLean approached Miles and suggested that the terms of reference as senior officer fairmiles were not sufficient. This was the first time that the two men had met, and Miles was struck by the duplicity of a request that seemed aggressive yet purposely unclear. Uncertain what he was being asked to do, the captain (D) told MacLean to put his proposals on paper – a move typical of Miles' caution. He was wise to be cautious, for MacLean's written response chronicled his ambition to turn Sydney, Nova Scotia, into an independent fairmile command that not only reported directly to Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa but also had control over the St. Lawrence River. This plan was placing MacLean on a fast track to captain's rank, since these new responsibilities would have been comparable to the two rear admirals in charge of Halifax and St. John's. Having determined MacLean's true motivation, Miles was determined to stifle such arrogance. After telling Admiral Jones that he was going to take direct control of the flotilla, Miles then explained that such a course was necessary because "Lieutenant-Commander Maclean's efforts ... have produced almost no efficiency in the fairmiles under his charge." Remarkably, Miles displayed much restraint, since his final recommendation was not to get rid of MacLean, as expected, but to have him assume command of the depot ship, HMCS *Lynx*, along with one of the fairmile groups.³³



Andrew MacLean (left) dining onboard the Q 052 with one of his ship's officers. It was MacLean's goal to turn the fairmiles into an independent command based out of Sydney, Nova Scotia, where they would be responsible for protecting the St. Lawrence River and gulf areas. *LAC PA-105646*

Following Miles' advice, Jones intended to abolish the position of senior officer fairmiles and replace it with a staff officer's appointment.³⁴ Effectively stripped of all duties, MacLean saw his world crashing down around him. Although he had picked a fight with the wrong officer, he was unwilling to concede defeat. In a last ditch effort, MacLean flooded captain (D)'s office with submissions on the fairmiles. Exactly what MacLean hoped to achieve with this letter-writing campaign is uncertain, but given the abrasive tone of these letters it was obvious that Miles' harsh words had not had the desired effect.³⁵ MacLean chose to rebel, and throughout May and June 1942 he tried to get other reservists to do the same. Claiming that his battle with Miles was yet another example of how regulars regarded reservists as the dregs of the navy, MacLean told his fairmile officers that they too would eventually bear the scars of permanent force discrimination. The only way to effect change, he preached to the small group of reservists who represented his core disciples, was to spread this gospel throughout the entire fleet. The results were disappointing. Typical of those who were not part of MacLean's campaign was the response of Lieutenant Commander A.G.S. Griffin, RCNVR: "MacLean had tried to enlist my support for his vendetta against the 'straight strippers' [but] ... all he ever got from me was boredom. Besides, I had a high regard for the RCN and the job they were doing in the face of such an enormous challenge."³⁶

It is unlikely that MacLean ever had a substantial following, but such efforts were enough for his superiors to notice. Miles was fed up with this troublesome officer and submitted a performance report in mid-July that laid the basis for his dismissal:

While holding the appointment of Senior Officer Fairmiles ... it became apparent that all was not well and steps were taken to correct matters[;] he failed to act on advice and neglected to carry out instructions given him. When called to account for his shortcomings, he deeply resented the criticism of his superiors, blamed this lack of co-operation for all his troubles, and attempted to spread this doctrine amongst the Fairmile officers ... It is difficult to suggest an appointment commensurate with his seniority in which he would be of real value to the service at the present time.

Providing a suitable epitaph for MacLean's naval ambitions, Jones endorsed Miles' appreciation by telling Naval Service Headquarters that "this officer is largely of nuisance value only."³⁷

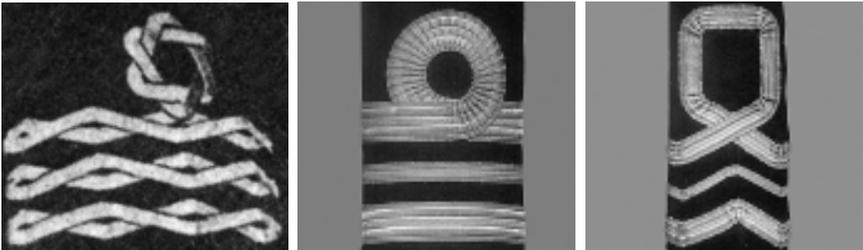
Sensing that his days were numbered, MacLean turned to an "old friend," who was also an Ontario Supreme Court justice, to arrange a private interview with Macdonald.³⁸ During this meeting, MacLean focused on his own feud with the permanent force, which, he argued, was "persecuting" him solely on the grounds that he was a reservist. Macdonald listened patiently. The minister was unprepared for what came next. MacLean had something to offer in exchange for a promise to block his removal from the navy. He was willing to expose a dangerous morale problem within the naval reserves, which the permanent force had purposely hidden from the minister. Macdonald was sceptical, believing that MacLean's offer to become an informant on reserve issues amounted to a bribe, but the allegations could not be ignored altogether.³⁹

After returning to the East Coast, MacLean provided Macdonald with evidence: anonymous letters from reserve officers, who all complained about the way they had been treated by the regulars. The most compelling charge was that this "scandalous situation" was the product of "three distinct navies with different uniforms, regulations and pay, which is a source of confusion, friction and inefficiency which in time of war is inexcusable on any grounds. Among the volunteers, both RCNR and RCNVR there is much resentment that all the hard, dirty and dangerous jobs appear to be avoided by the officers of the Royal Canadian Navy, who are able to find themselves soft jobs in Ottawa or behind desks in the dockyards."⁴⁰

For these particular reservists, the distinction between reserve and regular officers was not only "discriminatory," it also triggered the perception that the regulars could only be found in "safe shore postings" where "drinking ... pink gins" was reason enough to earn promotions and medals.⁴¹ According to this view, the permanent force was unwilling to reward RCNVR officers although it was the

reserves who were risking their lives against Germany's U-boats. "The sooner a move is made to bring the three branches together (RCN, RCNR, and RCNVR) with identical pay, rank markings (as now underway in the RN) and equity of service opportunity," one reservist claimed, "the better the Navy will be."⁴² Simply put, the cornerstone of "segregation" rested in an officer's uniform, which, they argued, branded the RCNVR and RCNR with either wavy or intertwined braid on their sleeves. This allowed permanent force "straight strippers" to recognize reserve officers on sight and, the allegation went, to automatically assume the latter's lack of naval knowledge and incompetence. Worse yet, the regulars seemed to have more tolerance for the members of the merchant navy who, by virtue of this experience, were allowed to join the RCNR. They too were unfamiliar with military life, but unlike the RCNVR they at least had considerable sea time or even a master mariner's ticket. While the inequity that the distinctions caused were undoubtedly the main grievance of the officers who followed MacLean, it was by no means the only one.

One anonymous memo in particular listed the nine most common grouses offered by reserve officers. It clearly outlined how the navy could be reformed to alleviate the current friction. After repeating that the navy needed to abolish the distinctions between the three branches, the next four points dealt with officers being awarded various badges, pins, and clasps for achievements at sea. The sixth argued that all promotions should be based on merit without consideration for pre-war service, and that the promotion board should consist of an equal number of officers from the RCN, RCNR, and RCNVR. The remaining objections involved questions about which officers were entitled to serve ashore, commissioning from the lower deck, and the necessity for all officers to see their evaluation reports.⁴³ This list of demands was pivotal. At a broader level, it suggested that the RCN's caste system and feudal structure was foreign to the social norms of Canadian society and to the requirements and good health of a wartime "people's navy." Put



The root of much anxiety for Andrew MacLean and those who followed him: the distinctive intertwined, straight, and wavy stripes of the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. *DHH 81/520/ PHOTOGRAPHIC FILE AND CANADIAN MILITARY POLICE VIRTUAL MUSEUM*

another way, having been overcome by culture shock, these particular reservists wanted the permanent force to adapt to the needs of the “citizen sailor.”⁴⁴ In their view, the permanent force wielded too much power and their gripes signified an attempt to carve out some type of status within this hierarchy.

Whether these representations accurately depicted the permanent force and its established culture can be seriously questioned. Such suggestions nevertheless served MacLean well, as he tried to convince Macdonald that Connolly should investigate the charges. In fact, MacLean had already prepared the executive assistant, explaining that the “dissatisfaction is much more widespread and outspoken than I estimated and drastic action is essential at an early date if your Chief [Macdonald] is to maintain the respect which he now enjoys. The volunteers – the civilian sailors – look only to him for advice.”⁴⁵ This reveals another reason why Macdonald was unwilling to disregard these complaints. Believing that MacLean was prone to overstatement, Connolly had already sought confirmation from reserve officers at Naval Service Headquarters. One officer wrote to Connolly, “you will remember that only a few days ago I stated that personnel were [sic] being overlooked almost entirely and in a way that was creating a very unhappy and perhaps dangerous situation. The abuses must be corrected and the sooner the better.”⁴⁶ Another reservist provided a similar message:

The feeling that is developing between the permanent force officers and the volunteers is extremely serious and may before long assume really alarming proportions. There is of course a constant irritation by reason of the fact that RCN officers generally regard the volunteer as an interloper and a rank amateur (no matter what his proven abilities may be) – this is reflected in the unreasonable attitude exhibited by the RCN in refusing to permit any volunteer officers to hold important posts ... [which] is so grossly unfair as to seriously effect [sic] the morale of the whole volunteer organisation.⁴⁷

Although these assertions corroborated MacLean’s claims, they received a lukewarm response from Connolly, and the matter might have been left there had not MacLean and his supporters been willing to use political pressure to further their cause.⁴⁸ Mere days after Macdonald had received a warning from MacLean that “the rising discontent will soon be evident in the Press or in Parliament,” six questions related to distinctions between the RCN, RCNR, and RCNVR were asked in the House of Commons. Neither Connolly nor Macdonald could afford to treat this as mere coincidence. A message had been sent and acted on – if Macdonald chose to ignore these complaints, he did so at his own peril.⁴⁹

It was probably MacLean’s personal connections that had the greatest impact on Macdonald. MacLean’s former position as an editor was enough to make any politician anxious, but his strong ties to the official opposition and its current

leader, R.B. Hanson, who was a personal friend, added most to Macdonald's apprehension.⁵⁰ Such links to the media and the Conservatives meant little to MacLean's naval bosses, however. To them he was simply a bad officer who repeatedly tried to bully superiors and consistently disregarded orders. Most of MacLean's seniors had tolerated his complaints and incessant bickering because the RCN had been desperately short of officers throughout the first half of the war. Almost two years later, the higher authorities had had enough, and from their perspective it would be easy to get rid of him.⁵¹ This was a luxury that Macdonald did not share. MacLean's contacts and resources in the public sphere made him a political threat. Even if his evidence did not justify reforms, it was to be feared.

Connolly was not totally convinced of the accuracy of the reservists' claims. Nonetheless, it was troubling that all the memos had not only sent the same message but were also more balanced than MacLean's venom-filled submissions. Moreover, Connolly suspected that one of these anonymous informants was a Victoria Cross recipient from the First World War, Lieutenant Commander Roland Bourke, RCNVR.⁵² This provided instant credibility to at least that officer's memo. Bourke was currently serving on the West Coast, and it worried the executive assistant that the gripes had spread right across the country. Connolly had now seen enough, and suggested to Macdonald that "some effort should be made to find a partial solution at least." In turn, Connolly told MacLean that Macdonald was sympathetic to the plight of the reservists and would address their concerns in the near future.⁵³ The executive assistant did not admit to MacLean that he had caught Macdonald's attention with the suggestion that the navy's top brass was hiding a problem from the minister. Yet while MacLean's allegations had led to a moment of pause, Macdonald also questioned his motives for attacking the senior staff.

MacLean's offer to act as the minister's personal informant on the East Coast was probably sincere. For example, in his political memoirs, MacLean had stated that any minister whose advisors were not providing information should have the power to "phone direct to [any] man that was able to give it accurately and quickly."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Connolly and Macdonald were suspicious. Far too often MacLean seemed more interested in his own status and position. This they considered odd for someone who was portraying himself as the leader and martyr of this disaffected group. MacLean finally betrayed his own agenda when asking the minister to organize the fairmiles under a separate command:

It is essential that the administration of Fairmiles be removed from Captain (D) Halifax (who has no use for the boats themselves or for the RCNVR) and set-up under a suitable and senior RCNVR officer. At present available in Canada there is no better officer than Lt. Cdr. MacLean who has served in such a capacity in England and in the Near East in both wars. Commander Hibbard of Captain D's staff here is entirely unsuitable and is largely responsible for the present confusion ... Sorry for the length

of this letter and for introducing my name in connection with the Fairmiles but let's start putting round pegs in round holes for a change. I did a good job on Fairmiles this winter and would be doing a better job if I had the right kind of gold rings on my sleeves. Why could not you suggest that I be sent for by NSHQ to discuss the whole Fairmile set-up?⁵⁵

While such suggestions indicated that MacLean was preying on the insecurities of a relatively small number of reservists in what was possibly nothing more than a cover campaign to get what he wanted, Macdonald and Connolly were afraid to confront him. Using terms that would capture any politician's attention, MacLean also noted in the letter that "politically [the fairmiles] are dynamite and already it is common gossip in many yacht clubs that they are not being used to the best advantage by the Canadian navy." MacLean was essentially warning the minister that the campaign to fight permanent force discrimination would be made public unless his removal was blocked. Worse, as the summer progressed, MacLean's correspondence revealed that he was becoming more impulsive.⁵⁶

Official assessments of MacLean's personality attest that Connolly and Macdonald had good reason to fear him. Their concern that he was both paranoid and narcissistic was well founded, especially since even those who knew him best thought he was a "very nice guy but very erratic."⁵⁷ Accordingly, Connolly had tremendous difficulty responding to MacLean's endless tirades that "the persecution of an officer by the most senior of the RCN [Nelles] demands drastic action by the Minister to ensure that it cannot effect [sic] other officers and the service as a whole."⁵⁸ Perhaps MacLean truly believed that his own situation and that of those who followed him were one and the same. Claims that Nelles was engaged in a juvenile vendetta were difficult to accept, and instead were chalked up to MacLean's egotism. The fact that a number of other reserve lieutenant commanders received excellent performance reports from their permanent force superiors further diminished his credibility. MacLean's own illustrations best show how his perception of events was skewed. In one instance, for example, MacLean told Connolly, "My leadership and technical knowledge is not desired here and I may have to return to England to find an outlet for my enthusiasm – and half the Fairmile officers and men will apply to come with me." In reality, the British would not have wanted him back, for as two Royal Navy admirals had previously reported, MacLean did not respond well to criticism and was prone to manipulate his surroundings for personal gain. In words reminiscent of Miles' assessment, one even argued that MacLean had "got into a comfortable habit of living and lost the art of sterling hard work." Yet another was so bothered by MacLean's disrespect that he rejoiced at having "helped to kick A.D. Maclean out of [the] RN."⁵⁹

Ironically, had it not been for MacLean's erratic behaviour and political connections, navy minister Macdonald would probably have been willing to let him go

without hesitation. But the minister simply could not ignore the anonymous memos that suggested there was some truth to MacLean's allegations. Macdonald's safest approach was to pacify MacLean. In the short term, this strategy worked, and MacLean found the minister's appeasing tone "most encouraging."⁶⁰ By this juncture, the question of MacLean's future in the naval reserves was being decided in the halls of the Naval Service Headquarters. That future was not expected to last much longer. Already the chief of naval personnel had recommended to both Macdonald and Nelles that, "if he is not willing to tender his resignation ... he should be discharged from the service."⁶¹

The minister was in a bind. While the navy would clearly be better off without MacLean, the very fact that he was in the service gave Macdonald ultimate leverage and control: MacLean could be charged under naval law if he went too far, privately or publicly, in his criticisms. Once freed from the bonds of military regulations, MacLean could wield his power in the public sphere in any manner he saw fit. On the other hand, if Macdonald overruled the Naval Staff's verdict, he would be risking his reputation with his chief naval advisors because it would show that any officers with public connections could intimidate him. In the end, the minister did the best he could in a difficult situation. First, it was decided that Connolly would travel to the East Coast and investigate the allegations. Second, the minister chose not to interfere when MacLean was asked to retire his commission in October 1942, and opted instead to deal with any possible political repercussions. And finally, Macdonald distanced himself from the Naval Staff's position, though never stating that his military advisors were wrong. As it turned out, this diplomatic solution worked, as MacLean agreed to retire his commission. Better yet, there was no reason at this time to punish the minister by taking the story either to the press or to Parliament. MacLean simply interpreted Macdonald's inability to help as an illustration of Nelles' and the Naval Staff's determination to get rid of him.⁶² Unfortunately for Macdonald, these tactics worked only in the short term. A few weeks later, MacLean would return to haunt the minister with renewed threats to make public the complaints about the regular force's discrimination against the reserves.

Given MacLean's eccentric character, few were surprised that his association with the permanent force ended with such acrimony. Certainly, the fact that the navy promoted him to commander the day after his release left a bittersweet taste. They had approved the rank he demanded in 1940, knowing he would not be around to enjoy it. Although the Naval Staff was extending an olive branch for "long service," MacLean was unimpressed. He referred to the official press release on his retirement as his "obituary."⁶³ Perhaps the greatest irony was that Connolly left for the East Coast investigation on 20 October, which, as fate would have it, was the same day that MacLean's name was added to the navy's retired list.⁶⁴ One can question whether this was more than a mere coincidence, for MacLean's removal

conveniently guaranteed that the quest to uncover the true situation between the regulars and reserves would no longer be marred by any personal ambitions.

Why Macdonald did not tell the chief of the naval staff about MacLean's complaints against the permanent force is a mystery. Nelles had never given the minister any reason not to trust him. Since the allegations had tarnished all the regulars with the same brush, perhaps Macdonald worried that it would be naïve to expect an honest appraisal from the highest-ranking permanent force officer of them all. It is also possible that Macdonald was simply unwilling to place too much faith in military men who, it could be assumed, either hid their own plans for the RCN or whitewashed problems to avoid any complications with their political masters. The task of investigating whether the reserves were on the verge of rebelling thus fell to Connolly.

This was a new role for the executive assistant. MacLean's interference had not only sparked the minister's curiosity but was also changing Connolly's responsibilities. Throughout the summer, the executive assistant's primary duty had been to protect the minister's reputation from the potential trouble MacLean's allegations could cause; that the minister emerged from the ordeal unscathed was a testament to Connolly's abilities as a protector. But with Connolly's investigation in the offing, he was now assuming the part of the minister's watchdog. It was the executive assistant's responsibility to observe the navy and discover whether Nelles and his staff were providing Macdonald with the information he needed. In a larger sense, this marked the beginning of a pattern whereby the minister would continually use Connolly rather than normal channels to unravel the truth behind these types of rumblings from the fleet. Macdonald's actions had bestowed power and influence on Connolly that went well beyond the norm for an executive assistant.

In many ways Connolly was well suited to this task. A compassionate and honest man, he was deeply concerned about the quality of life for the average sailor. With four diplomas hanging on his office wall – including a University of Notre Dame doctorate and a law degree from the University of Montreal – few could doubt his determination and intelligence. He also had a reputation for being naturally inquisitive, a quality that had earned the thirty-six-year-old lawyer a partnership at the firm of Clark, Macdonald, Connolly, Brocklesby, and Gorman – a particularly young age for such a position.⁶⁵ As far as Connolly was concerned, the only potential weakness in his investigation was that he might miss the nuances of naval life. After all, he had had no experience with the military prior to becoming the minister's assistant in the summer of 1941.

His solution was to have a naval officer accompany him to the Maritimes. However, choosing a suitable travelling companion presented a problem. He could not select a permanent force officer for fear that word of the trip would get back to Nelles. Likewise, it would be equally disastrous to take a reservist who was actually

a MacLean sympathizer. Connolly's decision to ask Captain Eric Brand was undoubtedly the correct one. Information gathering was Brand's job. In his capacity as the director of naval intelligence and British naval attaché at Naval Service Headquarters, Brand regularly wrote classified reports to the Admiralty on Canadian officers, and that, Connolly assumed, ensured his impartiality.⁶⁶ Brand's working rapport with Connolly was excellent, and having become good friends since February 1942, the executive assistant knew he could count on the Naval Intelligence officer's discretion.⁶⁷

Quipping that he wanted to show Connolly "how the poor lived," Brand met his obligation with much enthusiasm.⁶⁸ Despite having spent almost all of his time in Ottawa, it is likely that Connolly had at least some understanding of what was meant by "the poor." Certainly MacLean's account had painted a dreary picture of life in the fleet, and his campaign was not the only indication that there were morale problems at the RCN's Maritime bases. In fact, Macdonald had received information from "two very responsible citizens of Canada" in early June, suggesting that the "attitude of certain Naval Officers in the city, and their conduct" had turned Halifax into a hotbed of discontent. As the former premier of Nova Scotia – and hoping to return to that position after federal politics – Macdonald was troubled by reports that the citizenry were fed up with naval personnel drinking to "excess."⁶⁹ Likewise, similar accounts from the mayor of Shelbourne, Nova Scotia, indicated that Halifax was not the only place suffering problems.⁷⁰

Macdonald found it difficult to accept the explanations from the commanding officer Atlantic coast, Rear Admiral Jones, who hinted that there was a small faction of reservists behaving in an unruly fashion.⁷¹ Nor was Jones the only RCN officer to believe that the RCNVRs were causing problems, as another later charged that he "had never seen a Naval Officer drunk in a ship until 'those god-damn reserves' came into the service during the war."⁷² It is extremely doubtful that they were the only ones drinking to excess, but it was clear that some naval personnel were unhappy. So was the minister, as he found himself answering opposition questions about the rowdiness in Halifax at the same time that MacLean first approached him.⁷³ Naturally, Connolly expected to see some evidence of this discontent, but instead was treated to another interpretation.

Responsible for the circumstances that led to the executive assistant's investigation, MacLean also indirectly had a hand in the formation of another group of reserve informants in the wartime naval port of St. John's, Newfoundland. Unlike MacLean and his followers, this new group was not actively attempting to bypass the chain of command but rather came to help Connolly because they were his friends and former legal colleagues. There was no clear leader among them, although the commanding officer of the corvette, HMCS *Amherst*, Louis Audette, undoubtedly held the most sway with the executive assistant. Not only had Audette

and Connolly been friends since childhood but they had also shared the same adolescent dream of becoming lawyers. Audette was the best man when Connolly married Ida Jones, and Audette's older brother, J. deG. "Gap" Audette, immediately found room in the family law firm for the newlywed after he passed the Quebec bar in the early 1930s. Other men in this network also had well-established pre-war links to Connolly. The father of Lieutenant Barry O'Brien (serving on another corvette, *Trillium*), gold mine magnate John Ambrose O'Brien, had in 1933 given Connolly a big first break by making him the family's lawyer.⁷⁴ As trusted friends, Audette, O'Brien, and others in seagoing billets were well situated to provide the executive assistant with front-line observations on conditions in the fleet. It also helped that they were respected. Comments that Audette was an "excellent commanding officer," or that O'Brien "was a prince" were typical of those who served with them.⁷⁵ Nor were they the only ones Connolly would use as he cast a net over a wide range of positions that covered shore appointments as well.

Perhaps one of Connolly's greatest shore assets was Sub-Lieutenant J.S. Hodgson, RCNVR, who had followed Rear Admiral H.E. Reid from Ottawa to his new position as the flag officer Newfoundland force. A Rhodes scholar with a PhD from Oxford University, Hodgson had not only attended the vast majority of Naval Staff and Board meetings while Reid was the vice chief of the naval staff but had also drafted numerous "policy and plans" papers for the navy. Accordingly, he was one of the few reservists who could compare what was in the minds of the top brass in Ottawa with the realities that he was now witnessing in St. John's. There also was Hodgson's pre-war experience as an executive assistant with the Department of Labour, and that made him particularly valuable.⁷⁶ He too understood the importance of "insider information," a fact reflected in a letter to Connolly after the investigation:

Glad you considered your trip a success. Being so much nearer to the ships makes it possible for one to feel "useful" without need of farsighted analysis. "Bubs" [Lieutenant J.C. Britton] has been asking about you, and asked to be remembered as did his colleague [Lieutenant J.H.] Kyle; also [Lieutenant Commander] Bob Keith, [Lieutenant] Charlie Donaldson – and all points west. Haven't seen Louis [Audette] since you left, but hope to ere long. If at any time, John, you may want some (non-secret but personal) information which is hard to get through official sources, let me help pls.⁷⁷

This second network started with a small group of Connolly's friends, but as Hodgson's comments indicated, it already had the potential for growth after originating with an innocent visit to a single corvette.

With Brand in tow, one of Connolly's first stops in St. John's was to the *Amherst*. After getting a complete tour of the ship, Audette recorded their reaction as follows: "Eric Brand turned up one day with John Connolly, the Executive Assistant



A tour of Lieutenant Commander Louis Audette's ship, HMCS *Amherst*, gave J.J. Connolly his first taste of the equipment issues on Canadian corvettes in October 1942. Had it not been for a refit, this ship would have transported Connolly to Londonderry on a second equipment investigation one year later. *DHH 81/520/8000, BOX 179, FILE 11*

to the Navy Minister ... He had never seen a corvette, which is why he came down. I took them all around the ship. Back in the wardroom Eric sat down with a drink and said with a sparkle, 'It's been interesting, but I can't imagine how you get the bloody thing from A to B, or how you fight it.'⁷⁸

Their conversation in the wardroom did not stop there, and Connolly was interested in what Audette had to say. The message was blunt: MacLean's charge was flawed because the real issue for those serving at sea had nothing to do with permanent force discrimination against reserves; it was the inadequate equipment on their warships. Having just returned from escorting convoy ON 137 from Londonderry, Northern Ireland, Audette was unimpressed with Canadian equipment such as the SW2C radar, which in his words, "could not compare with the [British-built] 271 radar." This explained why Audette had taken such care to show Connolly his ship's equipment and argued that this matter needed investigation more urgently than did complaints about discrimination against reserves.⁷⁹ In time Connolly would do just that, and the issue of modernization of the RCN eventually contributed to Nelles' dismissal.



J.J. Connolly (far right) and Captain Eric Brand, RN (third from the right, front row), on the last leg of their October 1942 trip to the Maritimes. In this instance, they are pictured with officers and officials in Sydney, Nova Scotia, while HMCS *Lethbridge* rests impressively on the marine haul-out. *H.H. BLACK PHOTOGRAPHER, LAC PA-105967*

Despite Audette's efforts, an hour and a half on the *Amherst* was simply not enough time to explain a complicated issue like the RCN's modernization dilemma. As seagoing officers, Audette and O'Brien – as well as Connolly's other friends and colleagues – knew that inferior equipment on their ships made it more difficult to protect merchant ships and destroy U-boats. Unlike MacLean, these men were motivated by a desire to help a friend in his quest to see the welfare of the fleet improved. Connolly did not immediately recognize that they were telling him about a problem with the fleet unrelated to MacLean's complaints. And so, when it became obvious that Connolly was not following up on the equipment issue once back in Ottawa, they let the matter rest. They would help Connolly only when he asked for assistance. As far as the modernization question was concerned, that assistance was not required because Connolly did not yet understand its importance.

The desperate need for escorts had initiated the largest naval shipbuilding program in Canadian history. While the corvette and minesweeper hulls were coming off the slips in droves, these ships lacked the most up-to-date radar and sonar, as

well as advanced weapon systems. At the time there was little the Naval Staff could do. During the first three years of the war, the Allies faced a situation in which a poorly equipped and trained escort was better than no escort at all. By October 1942, the effects of three years of expansion had finally caught up with the Canadian navy, which was starting to witness some of its worst setbacks of the war. Poor equipment was not the only factor contributing to these disasters – inadequate training, too few destroyers, and ineffective manning policies also played a part – but it was a significant concern. At the time Audette spoke with Connolly, however, the worst convoys had yet to materialize.⁸⁰ As a commanding officer, Audette certainly realized that the successes of the summer – Canadian escorts had participated in the destruction of four of the five U-boats sunk in the mid-Atlantic – would be short-lived. Convoy ON 127 may have acted as a harbinger of things to come, but convoy SC 107 left little doubt that the RCN was in trouble. Occurring as Connolly was returning to Ottawa, this convoy was the RCN's worst experience in over a year – 15 merchant ships were lost before it reached the United Kingdom.⁸¹

MacLean's complaints seem to have blinded the executive assistant to the significance of what Audette was trying to tell him. Worse, this was not Connolly's first warning about the problem. One of MacLean's own disciples had tried to do the same. Arguing that the corvettes were the workhorse of the escort fleet, this individual had charged that "officers and ratings of these vessels have been sent to sea frequently with defective engines, guns and with bad leaks and inadequate equipment."⁸² When asked to comment on this report, another reserve officer was equally candid, telling both Connolly and Macdonald in mid-July, "Here again is a case of neglect on the part of RCN officers of one of the greatest opportunities of the service. There have been far too many cases of these ships being sent to sea improperly equipped." Since both these reservists were MacLean supporters, neither believed that the modernization issue should take precedence over the grievances about discrimination.⁸³ But that they had raised the equipment issue at all indicates that there was at least some crossover between the two reserve networks. Those other officers interested foremost in seeing the fleet modernized were not totally unsympathetic to MacLean's criticisms. They, too, had complaints about discrimination. Their concerns, however, were not with the permanent force but rather with the attitudes of some shore personnel, and in this they would be joined by some seagoing regulars.

Gruelling weather, the threat of U-boats, sleep deprivation, and even bad food all conspired to make life at sea a miserable experience. For the men who withstood the pressure, the sight of land should have represented a reprieve, complete with welcoming comrades, hot nourishment, and some "wets" to wash it all down before either retiring to a soft bed or a night on the town. Instead, what they saw and endured while ashore only added to their frustration; complaints circulated

throughout the fleet that shore personnel displayed an annoying air of superiority over those serving at sea. With a tone reminiscent of MacLean's grievances, Lieutenant Commander James Lamb explained this "them and us" mindset in greater detail: "Pride kept us at sea, month after month, year after year; to leave and get a berth ashore was to yield, to surrender, to let the side down. Pride was one factor; resentment was the other. Resentment of the shore-orientated organization of the Canadian navy, which cast everyone in the little ships of the escort fleet, officers and men, in the role of poor relations of their counterparts in the big institutions ashore."⁸⁴ Although these complaints were similar to MacLean's, the network in St. John's argued that the reserve-discrimination interpretation was somewhat misleading, and they were right to say so.

Unlike those serving on the fairmiles, reservists on the corvettes operated closely with the destroyers and their permanent force crews. There was a sense of kinship between the vessels in Canadian mid-Atlantic groups, and this suggests that the discontent within the navy was not reserve against regular, but rather sea versus shore. While most members of Connolly's network agreed with this assessment, there was at least one dissenting opinion, as Audette let it be known after the war: "There was a bit of resentment from the seagoing towards the chairborne. However, not nearly as much as James B. Lamb suggests ... When you can't undress, you naturally envy the man who climbs nightly into the crisp sheets, and perhaps not alone. When you can't even take a shower, you equally envy the chap who can soak comfortably each day in his tub. However, I don't think that this mattered as much as many seem to think."⁸⁵

Arguing that the equipment shortage was the most pressing problem in the navy, Audette may not have shared the same sensitivities as some of his colleagues. Nevertheless, the sea versus shore interpretation had some powerful supporters, including the new commanding officer Atlantic coast, Rear Admiral L.W. Murray, who wrote, "[I feel] bound to inform the Department that a feeling has been apparent for some time amongst the seagoing officers that ... it is easier to gain distinction and promotion in the RCN onshore, under the eye of higher authority, than at sea ... It is respectfully submitted that my remarks ... should not be considered as a criticism of the Promotion Board, but that they should be accepted as the earnest endeavour to bring these facts to the notice of the Department which was my sole intention in making them."⁸⁶

Strangely, Naval Service Headquarters reprimanded Murray for having "definitely stuck his neck out" on what they considered a baseless issue, and instructed him "that such unfounded criticisms are not acceptable to the Department."⁸⁷ That Murray was censured for offering an opinion suggests that there was at least a kernel of truth to MacLean's claim that Naval Service Headquarters was uninterested in outside advice. On the other hand, the fact that Murray was a regular did little to support MacLean's assertion that the top brass in Ottawa only snubbed



This ice-coated corvette not only shows the uncomfortable conditions at sea but also identifies the danger of sailing in winter conditions. The added top-weight of the ice affected the ship's stability and had to be removed to prevent capsizing. *DHH 81/520/1000, BOX 142 FILE 4*

ideas from reservists. It did, however, reinforce the shore versus sea perception, particularly since Murray was angered that the Naval Staff, which was hundreds of miles away, was ignoring warnings from the man on the spot.⁸⁸

Murray was not the only one who thought this way. Throughout the summer of 1942, rumours had circulated within the seagoing reserves that another respected permanent force officer, Commander J.D. "Chummy" Prentice, had been rebuffed for sending recommendations to the Naval Staff regarding the need to modernize the corvettes. Yet another version held that his reports had "been conveniently mislaid by NSHQ," suggesting that most of the reservists' anger was not directed at all shore officers but instead fixated on the ones in Ottawa.⁸⁹ In fact, those who had a chance to visit headquarters often found that the navy consisted of two separate worlds. Capturing this perception, one veteran remembered that "I only

visited NSHQ twice during the whole war, and each time felt a wholly unreal atmosphere – disconnected from the sea, not just geographically but in spirit.”⁹⁰

Those on the coast had their own way of dealing with their frustration toward headquarters. Some tried to use humour, such as the officer who posted a fictional port order in St. John’s that listed the RCN’s enemies in the following order of priority: “(1) The German Reich (2) Naval Service Headquarters (3) Imperial Japan.”⁹¹ Others passed their observations directly on to the minister’s executive assistant. Certainly, O’Brien had summed up the nuance of this problem in a poem he had written to Connolly about his experiences with convoy SC 100:

Bless them all, Bless them all,
 The long and the short and the tall.
 Bless all the Brass hats,
 And the chairs where they sit.
 Planning our Westomp and the rest of that shit ...
 Bless them all, Bless them all,
 The long and the short and the tall.
 Bless old CinCWA and COMINCH too.
 Bless old COAC and N-S-H-Q.
 As we’ve waited all trip for this day,
 To stalk these U-boats as prey.
 It’s then they combine, to spoil our good time,
 By taking three escorts away.⁹²

While O’Brien managed to blame almost every operational authority (including the British and Americans) in this acronymic outburst for mysteriously reassigning three corvettes from the convoy, Connolly knew better. O’Brien had wrongly assumed that the extra escorts were joining his group on a permanent basis, when in fact the top brass were reserving them for the planned invasion of North Africa. The executive assistant could not tell O’Brien that the minister had personally approved the decision for the RCN to commit seventeen ships to this operation. Nevertheless, such observations were not entirely lost on Connolly, who realized that his friends represented a valuable source of information for both himself and the minister.

Even before forming his own network of personal informants, Connolly had recognized the importance of consulting reserve officers who could provide pertinent details about sensitive matters. During the initial contact with MacLean, for example, Connolly had turned to Commander W.G. Shedden, RCNVR, for advice. Shedden was a good choice. Not only had he served at sea during the war, giving him insight about the complaints themselves, but because he had been

HMCS *York*'s executive officer in the late 1920s he was also able to assess MacLean's personality.⁹³ Similarly, only days before leaving for St. John's, Connolly had made arrangements for another one of his friends to join the navy so that he could provide the minister with information on the RCN's overseas recreation facilities. The sudden announcement that Walter Gilhooly was getting commissioned as a lieutenant commander and was to serve as the senior naval auxiliary service officer in the United Kingdom caught the Naval Staff off guard. A lawyer turned journalist in civilian life, Gilhooly was considered ideal for his current position as the head of the Directorate of Naval Information. Suspicion that the new special service appointment was politically motivated was correct. Covering his bases, Connolly had sent Gilhooly – as a trusted friend – to keep an eye on the situation overseas while checking the situation on the East Coast for himself.⁹⁴

Connolly's predisposition for "insider" information and the network of informants he had created in the Maritimes assisted tremendously in the investigation. He believed that the men had "helped me a great deal in connection with my work here for the Minister."⁹⁵ In fact, Connolly's trip would otherwise have yielded disappointing results, especially because the vast majority of sailors in St. John's were unwilling to discuss sensitive matters with someone they considered an "outsider."⁹⁶ But the executive assistant was able to gain an appreciation of the state of morale from his friends, who naturally had few reservations about sharing their experiences. They had done so out of friendship and, unlike MacLean, had no motivation other than improving conditions for all sailors who were at sea. As highly educated civilian professionals, they too had experienced culture shock when first confronted by permanent force officers who treated them as rank amateurs. In their view, this was not the product of discrimination but was akin to hazing. Often a quick wit was all that was required to defuse such situations, as one unsuspecting permanent force officer discovered when he asked Audette, "'Why is it, just because you've taken a degree, or whatever you call it, in law, you go about referring to each other as my learned friend and my learned counsel, and my learned opponent.' The VR lawyer [Audette] replied, 'Oh, it's nothing, quite meaningless. It's like referring to you as a gallant officer.'"⁹⁷ By indicating that some reservists could dish out the insults as well as they received them, this network cast grave doubts on MacLean's interpretation.

While these officers had provided Connolly with an alternative explanation of the discontent on the East Coast, they did share some of MacLean's elitist attitudes. Rather than blaming the top brass, they found fault in the training system that produced those officers. As Audette later explained, the inability of the permanent force to understand problems in the fleet was the product of an education that stressed "the constant repetition of an act and on the observation of its performance by others." Audette then clarified his claim:

It is too much an effort of memory and too little an effort of reasoning. The mental deficiencies engendered by this faulty system and by the inadequacy of the sum of his education are usually most apparent among those Officers holding very high rank or filling appointments which require them to consider subjects beyond the confines of strictly naval life ... I do not think that this absence of a more liberal education gives him a proper sense of broad social responsibility, nor does it prepare him to deal with problems beyond the scope of his technical Naval duties ... I do suggest that if the reserve officer was capable of doing what he did in so short a time, then the career officer could well afford to lengthen his period of training in order to receive a more liberal education; he would acquire thereby the intellectual development necessary to absorb all that he is receiving at present in the way of professional training and more.⁹⁸

Apart from a fixation on education, there were few similarities between this network and MacLean's. Perhaps the message about the fleet's equipment would have had a greater impact on Connolly had the network employed some of MacLean's tactics, but that was not their style. Instead, Audette and those like him merely passed observations on to the executive assistant. By doing so they had raised the possibility that the apparent discontent was the product of a morale problem – not just with the reserves but with all those who were serving at sea. It was up to Connolly to determine whether these networks had legitimate grievances against either the permanent force or shore establishments like Naval Service Headquarters.

While their motivation for contacting both the minister and the executive assistant may have differed, the formation of these reserve networks marked the beginning of a process that would alter the balance of power at Naval Service Headquarters. That Macdonald was willing to consider the opinions of those who fell outside of the normal chain of command meant that the Naval Board no longer monopolized the flow of information. It did not matter that MacLean was driven by personal ambition; what was troubling was the implication that the minister's permanent force advisors were hiding things. Despite their altruistic intentions, Connolly's own network inadvertently sent the same message, because they too provided information that caught the executive assistant off guard. Whether intentional or not, both networks preyed on the minister's political insecurities, and by doing so they created a level of mistrust that made Macdonald suspicious of Nelles. The problem was that this information had come from men who, while enjoying rank and power in the public sphere, were relatively junior naval officers.

The minister did not understand that the birth of these networks also represented a clash of two separate communities in which a well-established permanent force hierarchy was being challenged by elitist elements within the naval reserves. The scholarly reservists had difficulty adapting to a world in which the so-called

“ill-educated” regulars were the privileged ones and in which the reserves saw themselves as the dregs and second tier of the navy. Under the banner of creating a more equitable “people’s navy” they cried out for justice. As MacLean’s motivations reveal, what they truly wanted was to create power where none had existed before. As Macdonald was about to learn, these men were willing to use that power. Despite his best efforts, the minister’s political manoeuvring had brought only a temporary reprieve from MacLean. Having returned to his editorial duties at Hugh C. MacLean Publishing, this former naval officer would try throughout November and December 1942 to persuade the minister of the need to reform the service. And one month later, he would show Macdonald exactly why reservists with media and political connections were a force to be feared.