

# **Bypassing the Chain of Command**

## **The political origins of the RCN's equipment crisis of 1943**

**Richard Oliver Mayne**

**A**t the behest of Angus L. Macdonald, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, John Joseph Connolly conducted a secret investigation in October 1943 into the state of equipment on Canadian warships. Connolly, who was Macdonald's executive assistant, traveled to St. John's, Londonderry and London where he discovered that the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was far behind its allies in the modernization of its escort fleet. Canadian ships lacked gyroscopic compasses, hedgehog, effective radar and asdic, as well as other technical gear that was essential in the Battle of the Atlantic. These deficiencies should not have come as a surprise. Inadequate equipment on RCN ships had already become obvious during the intense convoy battles of 1941, and had been confirmed yet again by those of 1942.<sup>1</sup> Insufficient training and manning policies also played their part in Canadian problems at sea. However, it was to be the technical aspects that Macdonald focused upon once Connolly returned from overseas, leading not only to a disruptive feud with the naval staff, but also, in their way, to the eventual replacement of Vice Admiral Percy W. Nelles as the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) in January 1944.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past 30 years various historians have successfully described the RCN's technical difficulties from an operational perspective, but due to the unavailability of some key sources the origins and importance of Connolly's investigation have not been fully analyzed. Most accounts explain how a group of permanent force officers, including Captain J.M. Rowland (a

British officer on loan to the RCN), Lieutenant Commander Desmond Piers, and Captain R.E.S. Bidwell, wrote independent memos to Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) between 1 May and 22 June 1943, voicing their concern that poor equipment on RCN escorts was affecting efficiency.<sup>3</sup> While these criticisms were not ignored, NSHQ was slow to respond to them, and for the most part Macdonald was largely unaware of the problem. This situation might have persisted had it not been for Lieutenant Commander William Strange, Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). After a trip to the United Kingdom, Strange, the Assistant Director of Naval Information, submitted a report directly to Connolly in August 1943 in which he recorded that certain British officers and their Canadian subordinates overseas were extremely concerned about the RCN's technical problems. The standard historical interpretation is that Macdonald, wary of the political implications, then ordered Connolly to investigate these charges. While there is much validity to this interpretation, new evidence makes it necessary not only to re-evaluate Strange's role, but also the impact that a group of influential reserve officers (often under the direction of RN authorities) had in bringing the state of equipment on RCN escorts to Macdonald's attention. It is there, among the British and RCNVR officer overseas, that the political origins of the equipment crisis can be traced.

Lieutenant Commander D. Piers's report in June 1943 had actually stated that his



*John Joseph Connolly crossing the Atlantic in the corvette HMCS Orillia, October 1943. Connolly, executive assistant to Angus Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, played a key role in exposing the deficiencies in the Canadian escort fleet.*

observations spoke not only for permanent force officers, "but also those experienced Reserve Officers who now command the vast majority of HMC ships and who are diffident about forwarding their opinions to NSHQ."<sup>4</sup> Piers was correct in observing that many RCNVR officers<sup>5</sup> did not raise their concerns with equipment to NSHQ. Instead, it appears that some were willing to bypass the chain of command and voice their opinions directly to Connolly and Macdonald. There were members of the naval staff who were aware that various seagoing officers were taking their concerns directly to Macdonald. For example, after the war one former staff member reported that,

...most of the trouble appeared to me that our [reserve] officers would come back, somewhat naturally, complaining about their lack of modern equipment and that they were very open about this. They use to go see the Minister behind Nelles' back, and that sort of thing, and say that we hadn't got certain equipment.<sup>6</sup>

Although the time period to which this officer refers is uncertain, there is little doubt that there were reserve officers who had direct access to the minister, as Macdonald himself admitted that, "[a]llot of the RCNVR officers who come back from sea call in to see me and they talk quite frankly. I always encourage them to do that...."<sup>7</sup> Exactly who these mysterious informants were and when they saw Macdonald is uncertain, but it is possible to identify a group of officers who were communicating various problems with the fleet directly to Connolly, during the trying days of 1942-43.

The most influential individual within this group was the commanding officer of HMCS

*Amherst*, Lieutenant Commander Louis Audette, RCNVR. Two other individuals whom Connolly would also use for information were the commanding officer of HMCS *Snowberry*, Lieutenant Barry O'Brien, RCNVR, and Lieutenant Jim Mitchell, RCNVR, who commanded HMCS *Orillia*. Considering that senior permanent force officers such as Rowland, Piers and Bidwell were unable to effect change with NSHQ's equipment policy, it may be difficult to understand how these relatively junior reserve officers had direct access to Macdonald's executive assistant. This situation can be explained by looking at Connolly's life before the war.

Prior to becoming a civil servant, Connolly once worked for the law firm of Audette and O'Brien Barrister's and Solicitors in Montreal, a practice that was co-owned by Louis Audette's brother. It was through this firm that Connolly first met Jim Mitchell who was one of his colleagues. On the other hand, Audette, who was also a lawyer, had actually been a friend since childhood.<sup>8</sup> Barry O'Brien also became acquainted with Connolly through a legal connection. In February 1933, gold mine magnate John Ambrose O'Brien (Barry O'Brien's father) became Connolly's first client, and subsequently he remained close to the entire family throughout the thirties.<sup>9</sup> Considering that Connolly was well known to these officers it should hardly be surprising that they shared their trials and tribulations with each other throughout the war.

Although he did not disclose the purpose of his trip in October 1943, Connolly always claimed that he was acting on Macdonald's instruction. In private, however, he gave credit for this investigation to Audette. Having returned from the United Kingdom in November 1943 Connolly wrote to Audette where he made a remarkable admission: "I guess you have not seen Jim Mitchell, but I have arrived back, after

*Lieutenant-Commander L.C. Audette, RCNVR, commanding officer of HMCS Amherst. Connolly credits Audette with first providing the information that started his investigation.*



a most profitable experience. Inasmuch as the original suggestion came from you over a year ago, I feel that you should get some credit."<sup>10</sup> Accepting this praise Audette congratulated Connolly on the success of his investigation and then continued that they should "try to get back to where we met [almost] 14 months ago and we could have such a pleasant chin."<sup>11</sup> This correspondence indicates that Audette made the original suggestion for Connolly's investigation in late October 1942. It was during that month that the Director of Trade, Captain Eric Brand, RN, accompanied Connolly to St. John's. Officially, Brand claimed that his visit was primarily concerned with Naval Control Service matters, but in private he called it his "fake trip to the Maritimes."<sup>12</sup> Instead, having developed a close professional relationship with Connolly since February 1942, Brand's real purpose was to help show the executive assistant "how the poor lived." The "poor" being the sailors of the RCN's escort fleet.<sup>13</sup>

Exactly why Brand felt compelled to "educate" Connolly is a mystery. However, it appears that other members of the naval staff had ostracized Brand, who was also the Royal Navy (RN) Attaché. For example, according to naval historian Joseph Schull, Brand was "a great source of annoyance to the trembling virtuosos of the permanent Canadian navy... they resented and feared him; and relegated him carefully to his own affairs."<sup>14</sup> In part, this possibly provides an explanation. If his colleagues would not listen to his concerns about the state of the navy, it is conceivable that Brand felt that he had no other option but to appeal to Connolly rather than the officers on the naval staff.

Irrespective of Brand's motives, however, Connolly had his own reasons for travelling to St. John's in late October 1942. This was most likely the result of a series of reports that Macdonald had received from an embittered naval reserve officer. Since July 1942, Lieutenant

Commander Andrew Dyas MacLean, RCNVR, and a group of anonymous reserve officers had protested directly to the minister that the permanent force kept an unwarranted number of promotions, shore postings and awards for themselves. Although some of these officers complained about inadequate equipment and training on Canadian escort vessels, the vast majority of their gripes fixated on the perception that the permanent force discriminated against reservists because they were seen as "rank amateurs."<sup>15</sup> In turn, it was argued that this mentality was having a detrimental effect on the morale of the RCNVR officer corps. Although Connolly was in St. John's to assess the validity of these charges, it was not long before he was given an appreciation of the state equipment on RCN escorts.

While in St. John's Connolly took the opportunity to visit with Audette whose ship was in port. Soon after his arrival, Audette gave a compartment by compartment tour of the *Amherst* providing both Connolly and Brand an indication of the conditions on Canadian corvettes. Audette recorded their reaction,

John and I were good friends as children...He had never seen a corvette, which is why he came down. I took them all around the ship. Back In the wardroom Eric [Brand] sat down with a drink and said with a sparkle, "its been interesting, but I can't imagine how you get the bloody thing from A to B or how you fight it."<sup>16</sup>

During this tour Audette observed that on his most recent convoy (ON 137) he had had serious troubles with the Canadian designed and built SWIC radar that apparently "could not compare

with the [British] 271."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Connolly's interest had been peaked especially since he found that many sailors were afraid to answer his questions. But Audette was more forthright in his depiction of the navy's problems especially with regard to equipment. Also, Connolly took the opportunity to meet with O'Brien. Over the ensuing year, both of these officers became valuable informants, the more so because they were well respected throughout the fleet and therefore could provide valuable insights.<sup>18</sup>

According to Brand, this experience had taught Connolly "what was going on in the Navy at the time." While Audette introduced Connolly to the concept that the RCN was suffering from equipment problems,<sup>19</sup> it would be an oversimplification to attach too much emphasis to this impromptu trip. Having spent only four days in St. John's and visiting only a handful of ships [*Amherst*, *Trillium*, and *Arvida*], it is unlikely that Connolly could have gained a true picture of the state of the fleet. However, he was alerted to the fact that there were deficiencies, telling one individual "that if war problems were not so terribly pressing, I think conditions in the Service would be radically different than they are."<sup>20</sup> But it is significant that Connolly met (or was reacquainted with) a number of operational reserve officers who were willing to provide him with direct observations on conditions within the fleet. For example, Sub Lieutenant J.S. Hodgson, RCNVR, told Connolly after he had returned to Ottawa,

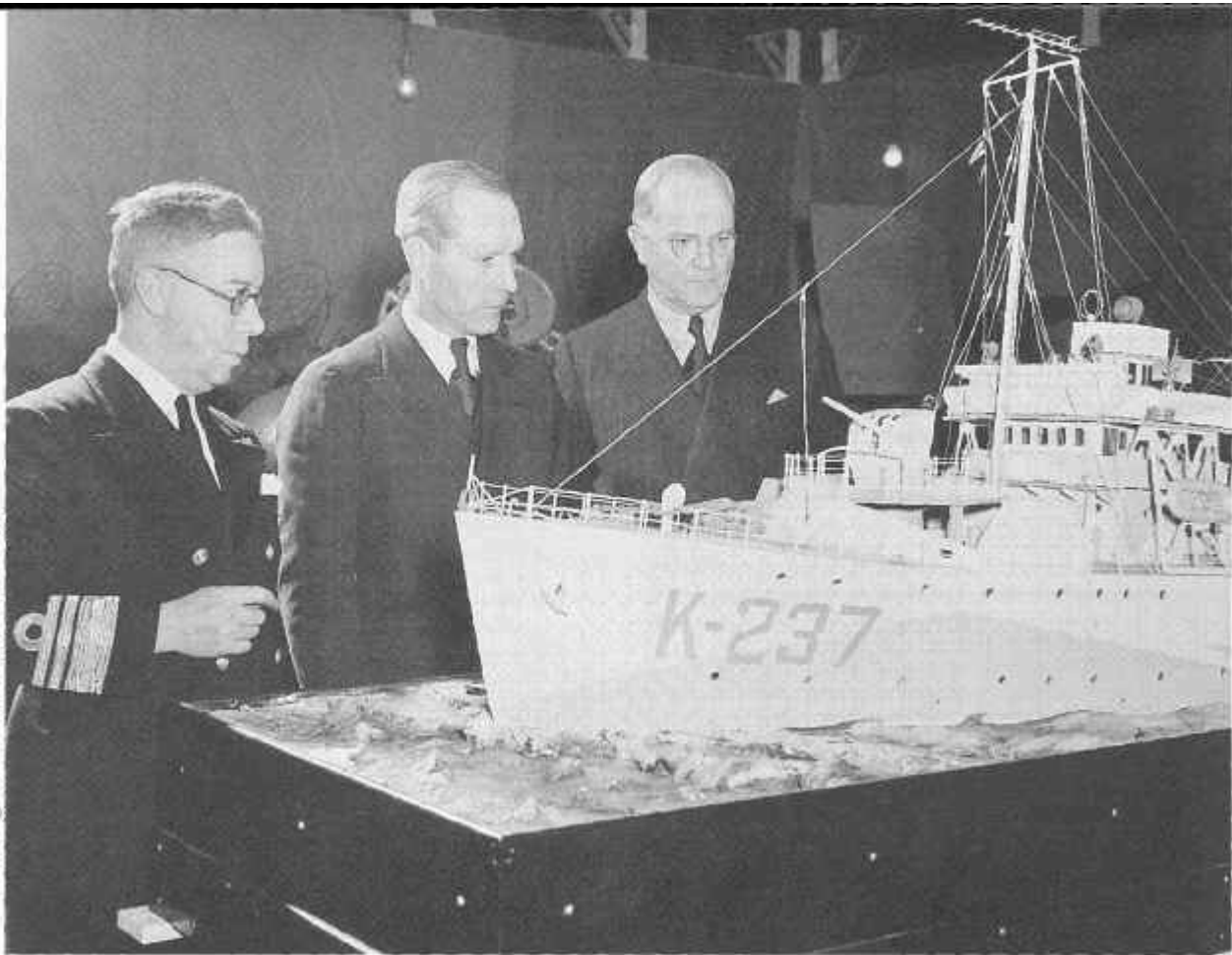
Glad you considered your trip a success. Being so much nearer the ships makes it possible for one to feel "useful" without the need of farsighted analysis. "Bubs" [Lt. J.C. Britton] has been asking about you, and asked to be remembered as did his colleague [Lt. J.H.] Kyle, also [LCdr.] Bob Keith, [Lt.] Charlie Donaldson - and all points west. Haven't seen Louis [Audette] since you left, but hope to see soon. 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 [please].<sup>21</sup>

Hodgson's offer to provide information must have interested Connolly. Prior to joining the navy, Hodgson had been an executive assistant with the Department of Labour and therefore had an understanding of Connolly's duties. Also, he had previously been posted to NSHQ where he was a secretary at naval board and staff

meetings. As indicated in his letter, it was clear that Hodgson believed that there was a divergence between NSHQ's perception of the war at sea and the realities he was witnessing in St. John's.

Despite Audette's comments on equipment another issue preoccupied both Connolly and Macdonald once the executive assistant returned to Ottawa. MacLean, who had returned to his civilian profession as an editor, was threatening to make his gripes with the navy public unless Macdonald instituted reform. MacLean's allegations that the morale of reserve officers was being effected by severe discrimination by the permanent force had to take priority. Not only did MacLean have access to a public medium,<sup>22</sup> but he was also a staunch Conservative with strong ties to the Party. During the early 1930s he had been Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's private secretary and the present leader of the opposition, R.B. Hanson, was a personal friend. Therefore, Macdonald could not afford to ignore this well-connected and influential man, especially since MacLean was clearly embittered towards the navy because he had just retired his commission under duress.<sup>23</sup>

Although Macdonald's attention was drawn to quality of life issues within the reserves, his interest in operational details had been heightened. On 8 December 1942, he met with the Radio Direction Finding Officer at NSHQ, Lieutenant Commander Thomas J. Brown, RCN, for what only could be described as a tutorial on naval equipment. While the minister's notes from this meeting indicate that Brown described the function of all major pieces of equipment used by the RCN, they also reinforce an important point first made by historian Marc Milner that Macdonald possessed an extremely weak understanding of naval technology and warfare.<sup>24</sup> For example, Macdonald described the highly technical Asdic as, "a type of radio - you get echo from hull of submarine."<sup>25</sup> While Macdonald's sudden interest in naval equipment is compelling, it would take ten months and the introduction of Strange's report before Connolly would take this matter in hand and convince the minister to implement Audette's plan.<sup>26</sup> In part, this was because there were important developments throughout the first half of 1943 that distracted the minister thereby contributing to this gap.



*Vice-Admiral Percy W. Nettes, Chief of the Naval Staff (left), and Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services (centre) view a model of one of the fleet's newest escorts, HMCS Halifax, a revised corvette.*

One of the most serious of these events occurred in January 1943 when MacLean made good on his threat to publish his grievances with the navy. As a result, between February to April, Macdonald and Connolly were busy defending the navy as both Parliament and the press wanted to know whether MacLean's charges of reserve persecution at the hands of the permanent force were valid.<sup>27</sup> The MacLean episode was a delicate and embarrassing affair as one officer had reported to the minister that he had recently been to Toronto where he found that MacLean's charges were an extremely popular topic of conversation amongst the populace.<sup>28</sup> Therefore both Macdonald and Connolly were extremely susceptible to any issues that threatened to become political.

Also, on 6 January 1943, the government authorized the transfer of all four RCN Mid-Atlantic Escort Groups to the RN. Ostensibly, this was to help the RN rearrange various convoy routes in order to alleviate an oil crisis in Britain. While this was given as the primary reason for the transfer the British also believed that Canadian ships were inefficient and wanted to

reassign the RCN groups to the UK to Gibraltar route where they would benefit from longer layover periods and closer proximity to training facilities.<sup>29</sup> This was an indication from the British that there was something wrong with the RCN - a fact that must have caused Macdonald some discomfort in Cabinet.<sup>30</sup> However, he could take comfort that once these ships returned from British control they would be better trained and possibly equipped. Due to operational requirements in the mid-Atlantic the transfer was neither as complete nor as long as originally envisioned by the British.<sup>31</sup> The degree to which these ships were modernized during this period of British control is debatable, but issues such as training and equipment, while not forgotten by the RCN's higher echelons, certainly appeared to be secondary considerations.<sup>32</sup> This would change once Strange was introduced to the RCN's modernization problems.

Strange, a rising star in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, was recruited into the Naval Information Branch in January 1942. As Assistant Director of Naval Information, one of Strange's principal duties was to write articles

and speeches on the RCN for public consumption. Since joining the RCNVR, Strange had spent the majority of his time at NSHQ and he therefore had little sea time or experience with anti-submarine warfare operations at sea - naturally making it difficult for him to write on the subject. In July 1943, he secured a "roving commission" that would give him the freedom to go from ship to ship and observe the war at sea. For his first passage it was recommended that he travel on HMS *Duncan*, which was commanded by one of the most respected U-boat hunters of the war, Commander Peter Gretton, RN. During this trip Gretton managed to convince Strange "albeit reluctantly, to revise my first impression...HMC Ships were, almost without exception, inadequately equipped to fight submarines..." This encounter with Gretton merely proved to be the first of many conversations with British and Canadian officers on the matter of equipment.

On the morning of 13 July, Strange met with Commodore G.W.G. Simpson, RN, who was Commodore (D) in Londonderry. Simpson immediately opened the conversation by observing that the RCN was woefully behind the RN in the modernization of their escorts and that this was effecting their efficiency at sea. The inference was that NSHQ had mismanaged the RCN's war effort because of its fixation on quantity rather than quality, and that "fewer ships with better equipment...would be more effective, and our final record more impressive." Strange believed that he had become Simpson's confidant, at least in part, because he had been a member of the RN during the First World War.<sup>33</sup> Out of his depth, Strange insisted that these matters lay beyond his sphere of influence, but Simpson persisted, explaining that he would take any advantage to speak with officers from NSHQ and hoped that the Information Officer would "convey his views to whatever authority I [Strange] might think appropriate from the view point of effectiveness." Clearly, Simpson was advocating that the chain of command had to be by-passed as Strange became convinced that "...the Minister should be informed of this conversation, and any others that might arise therefrom."<sup>34</sup>

Wanting to take advantage of this opportunity, Simpson arranged a meeting on 15 July between Strange and Commander R.R.

Shorto, RN, who was the Fleet Engineering Officer, and whose comments closely coincided with Simpson's. Shorto realized that re-equipping the RCN would not be an easy task, but believed that NSHQ had to overcome these deficiencies or else be prepared to face the consequences. For example, once he returned to Ottawa, Strange would repeat to Connolly a dire prediction made by Shorto:

The dissatisfaction arises from the fact that it is impossible to birth alongside, or near RN ships... without immediately observing the disparity in equipment between them and the vessels of the RCN. Commander Shorto personally feels a time may come when this feeling, at present only partially pent up, will come out into the open with consequences which cannot be foretold, but might be serious. He stated that there were certain [Canadian] officers, whose names he did not give, who were determined to take some form of drastic step to secure action in this matter of equipment. I did not press inquiry in this direction.<sup>35</sup>

Considering that Strange was not an expert on naval equipment, it should not be surprising that these observations had such an impact on him. It was at this juncture that Strange decided that his trip had suddenly "become something of a personal investigation." In turn, he visited a number of Canadian warships where he found ample evidence to support Simpson and Shorto's claims, one Canadian officer telling him that U-boats preferred RCN-escorted convoys because they "offer safer targets due to inadequacy of...A/S equipment...I encountered very serious dissatisfaction [by Canadian officers]," Strange later remembered, "combined with the most vigorous criticism of the responsible authorities [NSHQ]."<sup>38</sup> By the end of his trip, Strange had become "obsessed" with the state of equipment on Canadian warships. Although Canadian officers confirmed Strange's suspicions, it is clear that it was RN officers, most notably Gretton, Simpson, and Shorto who managed to impress the importance of equipment as being one of the key issues that effected the efficiency of the RCN.

Indeed, even before Strange's visit various RN officers and their Canadian subordinates overseas had been anxious to help the RCN recognize and remedy their modernization deficiencies. For example, before listing the problems he saw with the RCN, Piers recorded

that his report was based on meetings with "such high-ranking Officers in the Royal Navy as the Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches, the Forth Sea Lord, the Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth, and Commodore Londonderry. On these occasions the successes and problems of the Royal Canadian Navy have been frankly discussed. From these conversations, and many other interesting service contacts, the following facts emerge." In particular Simpson appeared to spearhead this RN initiative. Having become Commodore (D) on 26 April 1943, one of Simpson's first priorities was the modernization of the RCN as Piers reported that "Commodore

to the fire, repeating a commonly held British view that the RCN's corvettes were "probably more useful as rescue ships than anything else" - a remarkable statement especially coming from a Canadian.<sup>38</sup> It was at this juncture that Strange decided to help Adams draft a report that would be passed through the chain of command. The tone of these two reports could not have been more different. While Strange's account was a scathing indictment, Adams' memo was more typical of any officer criticizing the actions of a superior as he politely observed that his submission was "intended to draw attention to the matter of equipment...in order to enable

*Typical of the RCN's problem in 1943, HMCS Sackville spent the first five months of the year in refit and yet emerged as she is seen here with an outdated bridge, short forecastle and no hedgehog or gyro compass.*



Londonderry and his Staff realize that Canadian personnel are not getting the chance they deserve, due to the lack of the latest equipment."<sup>37</sup> Although he had indirectly fashioned the Piers report, Simpson was growing impatient, and therefore decided to take advantage of Strange's presence in Londonderry. This was the breakthrough that the British officers in Londonderry had been waiting for as Strange was easily persuaded by their case. He was now ready to return to Ottawa and make a difference - just as Simpson had hoped.

Having already written his report, Strange boarded HMCS *Assiniboine* for his return trip to Canada. During this voyage he discussed the events of the previous week with Commander Ken Adams, RCN, commanding officer of the *Assiniboine*. Adams only managed to add fuel

to them to discharge the duties required."<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, without the need to include the formalities of addressing superiors, Strange was able to produce a much more blunt and outspoken document.

The difference between these two reports helps explain why certain RCNVR officers had more success in venting the navy's deficiencies to higher authorities than their RCN counterparts. Although Adams' memo was extremely tame in comparison to Strange's, he was still afraid that there would be consequences for criticizing NSHQ, believing that his "fat" was now "in the fire." In fact, Adams was convinced that when Nelles finally read his report in November 1943 he decided that "[i]f you're going to complain, you'll be put in charge of fixing it" - leading to his eventual appointment as the



*The original corvette bridge, like HMCS Moncton's seen here, during work-ups in May 1942, was ill-suited to the demands of war. The charthouse, in the left foreground, housed the ship's only compass—a magnetic one—and the trace recorder/or the primitive type 123A asdic set, but the captain had to fight his ship from outside and the charthouse itself prevented a full 360 degree view of events. The cramped bridge wings did well to accommodate the twin .50 calibre machine guns seen here.*

Director of Warfare and Training rather than his preferred posting to the armed merchant cruiser *Prince Henry*.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the RCNVR, who had civilian jobs to return to once the war ended, RCN officers had made the navy their livelihood and mistakes could mean the end of their career. As a result, they had to guard their professions and according to Strange "the whole atmosphere stifled initiative." In fact, Simpson had told Strange that he had "briefed more senior RCN officers in the matter [of equipment], without result [but] since I was a 'hostilities only' reserve officer, I had no career to risk, even if I were to take extreme measures...[h]e pointed out that the 'proper channels' had proved totally ineffective."<sup>41</sup> Simpson's argument was convincing, as Strange's ultimate goal was to ensure that the minister saw his report. Justifying his decision after the war, Strange remarked that: "I felt, and still feel, that in such circumstances, the only action worth taking at all is the one you know positively will be effective. The proper channels would have to be bypassed. It was quite clear that they did not work."<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the question arises how a reserve officer of Strange's relatively junior rank could have direct access to the minister? As with Audette, Connolly proved to be the link as Strange later admitted to a fellow officer that, "John, besides being a personal friend of mine, is Executive Assistant to the Naval Minister."<sup>43</sup> Strange understood that Connolly was the

"watchdog" of the navy and that the key to getting Macdonald's attention was to convince the executive assistant of the magnitude of the problem. Although one of Connolly's duties was to protect the minister from politically dangerous issues, he was also a compassionate and honest man who was deeply concerned about the quality of life for sailors at sea. Strange, therefore, realized that the minister's aid was more likely to take notice if he included some of the extravagant statements made by the officers in Londonderry. This does not mean that Strange believed that Connolly and Macdonald would only take an interest in equipment if it was "politicized." But he knew that there were a great number of issues that embroiled the minister's attention on a day to day basis, and therefore only wanted to ensure that equipment was put on the top of the list.

Strange not only hoped that his influence would lead to changes with the RCN's equipment policy, but also feared that the state of the navy could pose dangers for Macdonald's political career explaining that,

There is certain invulnerability about the "high brass" in any Service. Ministers, however, are not invulnerable. They cannot ignore serious political considerations. The threat of serious trouble in the fleet, which I had heard voiced, and which common sense would show must obviously exist in the circumstances I described, was not one which any politician could ignore. Apart from this, Mr. Macdonald would

immediately appreciate the broader implications of the whole matter.<sup>44</sup>

Considering the political climate during August 1943 Macdonald had good reason to be concerned with the state of the navy. In fact, Macdonald had been embarrassed at the Quebec Conference after Winston Churchill had mentioned that he had no idea that the RCN's contribution to the Battle of Atlantic was as large or important as prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had told him. This struck as another indication from the British that the Canadians were not pulling their weight when it came to sinking U-boats.<sup>45</sup>

Such revelations could not have come at a worse time. King's government was in a virtual state of panic as the ranks of the Ontario Liberal party had been decimated in a provincial election and four federal by-elections all went against the government. But as King observed there were some cabinet members who appeared to be more worried than others recording in his diary that, "Angus Macdonald was very pessimistic about the Party's position."<sup>46</sup> It is not difficult to imagine, therefore, what the consequences would have been for Macdonald had serious problems within the fleet been publicly revealed in August 1943.

Since he was responsible for the navy, there can also be little doubt that Macdonald was disturbed by Shorto's claim that some Canadian sailors were on the verge of taking drastic action to secure equipment, or that there were unforeseeable consequences for the feeling of frustration amongst the sea-going navy. In fact, the minister personally telephoned Strange and told him "that he had read the memorandum, which had caused him deep concern. He asked me to give the most definite assurance of the truth and accuracy of statements." Macdonald then reassured Strange that, no matter what might happen next, he would be protected from any retaliation from "the navy." But Strange was not afraid - after all he had a career with the

*The nerve centre of the early corvettes: a single Admiralty pattern 1960 magnetic compass binnacle, with a handwheel mounted to control the direction of the ship's Type 123A Asdic transducer, and a simple chemical recorder on the left with earphone jacks on the stand for the Asdic operator and anti-submarine officer.*

CBC waiting for him if need be.<sup>47</sup> Also it had been his goal to get Macdonald's attention in the most graphic way possible and clearly this aim had been achieved.

No doubt effected by the political climate, Macdonald immediately turned to the naval staff for answers. On 21 August, he ordered Nelles to report on the state of equipment on Canadian warships. He gave no indication that his request was based on Strange's observations, but just that he wanted a report as soon as possible. Responding on 1 September Nelles treated Macdonald's appeal in general terms and claimed that it was impossible to draft a comparison between equipment on RN and RCN ships.<sup>48</sup> Macdonald was unhappy with Nelles's answer and thereafter questioned any further information he received from his CNS. He felt that the naval staff had hidden this problem from him, and Connolly even suspected a cover-up. In fairness, however, Nelles had told Macdonald in early 1943 that there were equipment problems with the Canadian navy. For example, in February the CNS had stated to Macdonald that he "considers it essential to have forecastles extended, bridges improved and all desirable modifications to armament on RCN Corvettes





NAC PA 184193

*What a modernize corvette bridge looked like by mid-war: HMCS Brandon in November 1943. The square box on the front of the bridge housed the asdic equipment, a gyro compass repeater is mounted just ahead of the magnetic compass binnacle and mounting for 20 mm Oerlikon guns can be seen on either side.*

[made] as soon as possible." Nelles admitted that 59 corvettes needed to be modernized but providing that the British could assist in this process all would be well with the navy.<sup>49</sup> Further, Macdonald had attended various naval board meetings throughout the winter of 1942-1943 when the equipment requirements of the navy were discussed. Finally, besides complaining about permanent force discrimination, one of MacLean's central arguments was that the equipment on some types of Canadian escorts was substandard claiming that "[t]he more technical side of the Fairmile equipment was in an even more disgraceful state of official ineptitude."<sup>50</sup> These complaints fixated on the RCN's East Coast fairmile fleet, which MacLean had been the Senior Officer, but his charges amounted to a damning indictment of NSHQ's attitude towards equipping the entire escort fleet in general. In fact, while preparing the minister's defence to MacLean's charges, Connolly and the naval staff had told Macdonald that "no claim to perfection should be made. The Naval Service in three years of war grew phenomenally in men and ships, mistakes have been made..."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Macdonald's contention that the naval staff had never conveyed the RCN's modernization problems to him was not entirely true.

But herein lies the difference between the manner in which reserve officers (such as Strange) communicated the problems with

modernization to Macdonald as compared to the naval staff. Using highly technical terms and statistical data naturally would not have had the same impact on a civilian minister as Strange's ostentatious memo. Indeed, the Londonderry officers had picked the perfect messenger, as Strange's colourful use of adjectives and metaphors was reminiscent of his past experience as a writer for the CBC. Although he had successfully captured the minister's attention, the unfortunate byproduct of Strange's methodology was that he also caused Macdonald to lose faith in his naval advisors. This led to a complete breakdown in communication between Macdonald and his naval staff.

In fact, there were no simple answers to the RCN's equipment dilemma. Canadian shipyards were inexperienced and shorthanded and in any event their numbers were barely sufficient to handle the RCN's construction programs - let alone its refit requirements. Shipyards could not be built overnight and therefore it is understandable why NSHQ appealed to the British for help. In an unfortunate turn of events for the naval staff their plan for British assistance had to be abandoned. On 24 August the Admiralty informed NSHQ that they "regret that heavy pressure of refitting and other ship work in hand and in prospect in this country renders remote any likelihood of undertaking even a substantial part of work on remaining [Canadian] ships in question."<sup>52</sup>

Unaware that Macdonald's attention had so recently been drawn to equipment by Strange, the naval staff made a fatal blunder by not immediately telling the minister that the British could not assist in the modernization process. In time this episode would be used to show the naval staff that they had been derelict in their duty to properly brief the minister. At the time, however, Macdonald needed a new source of information. Since he no longer trusted his naval advisors, allowing his executive assistant to investigate the situation appeared to be the most logical means to gather more data.

Questioning the naval staffs reliability, Connolly turned to his friends in the RCNVR for information. While Connolly had communicated with these officers before Strange's interference, their correspondence became more critical during the second half of 1943. Interestingly, they often used poetry or coded messages when discussing problems within the fleet. In part, this was probably because they were discussing highly sensitive matters that would be governed by the Defence of Canada regulations. Also, since these officers were bypassing the chain of command it would not be beneficial to expose themselves to a possible charge of insubordination if discovered by anyone else but Connolly. It appears that the executive assistant recognized this threat himself as he warned one of these officers that their letters "should be composed with circumspection."<sup>53</sup>

Much of this poetry is difficult to decipher, but it is obvious that it was used as a means of

communication. For example, after describing leadership problems at NSHQ, Strange recorded:

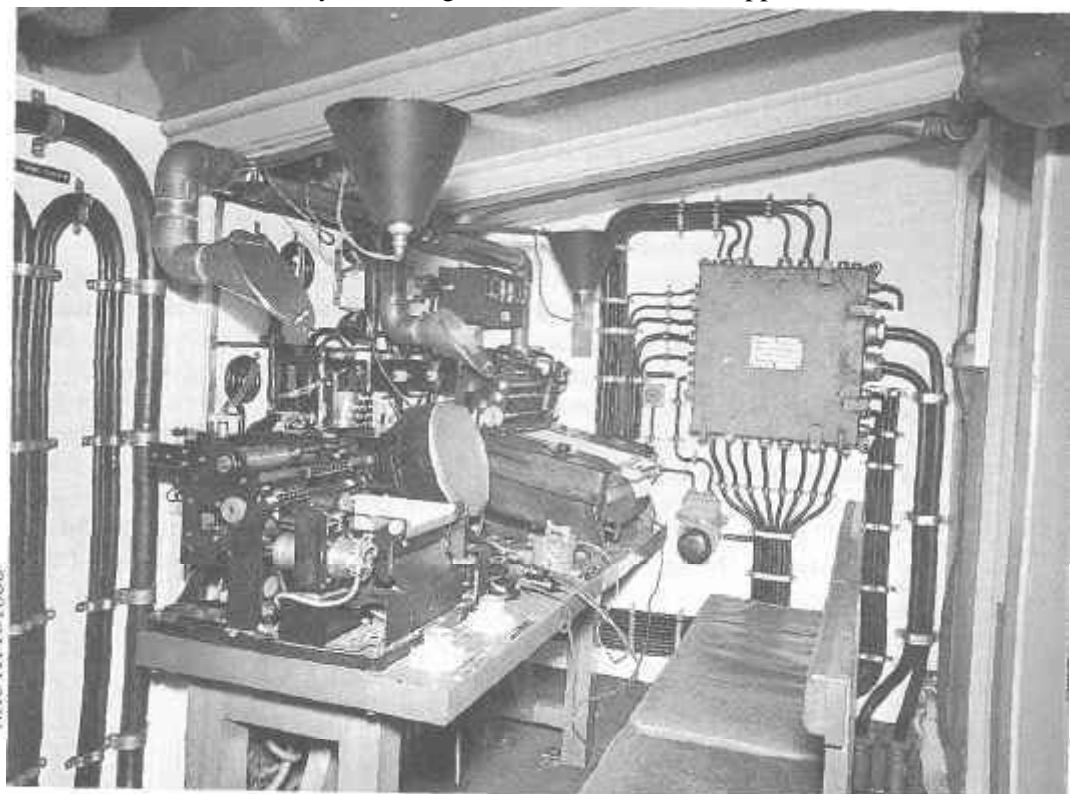
I have written this  
For the few people whom I know  
Who will understand what I am getting at.  
One used to believe in Christmas and the Navy.  
Who knows now in what he believes.<sup>54</sup>

Complaints on naval leadership were a common theme within Connolly's poetry file, but equipment was also discussed. In these instances, it was common for medical conditions to be used to replace naval terms and secret equipment. For example, in a letter to Audette in November 1943, Connolly wrote:

I am very much concerned about your wife's condition [HMCS Amherst]. I would be particularly interested to know the result of her operation [refit]. I should love to be available for the conference of surgeons under Simpson, when you get to that point... I wish you would let me know what the surgeons I refit facilities] did during the summer and if you feel she is in as fit condition as the other ladies [corvettes] particularly the English ladies... I am, personally dissatisfied about the treatment which people like yourself have been given for your wives' condition. I need not tell you that Angus [Macdonald] is too.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, Connolly was asking about *Amherst's* refit, especially since Audette never married. Replying to this letter, Audette reported that his "wife" was in a much better state but that the Canadian "doctors" (shipyards) took too long "as they are doing in all similar cases." Appreciative

*What a modern asdic set looked like in 1943: a type 144 in an unknown RCN ship. Compare this with the type 123A set illustrated on page 15 which was common to RCN corvettes in 1943.*



of his friend's interest, Audette then felt compelled to tell Connolly that,

Anything you can do for girls [corvettes] in her position will be more than an ordinary good turn. I shall not fail to pass onto other husbands [corvette captains] in my fix that you are helping. It will buck them up no end when they so often feel let down.<sup>56</sup>

Incidentally, Jim Mitchell also used this type of terminology to keep Connolly abreast of the conditions on the *Orillia*.<sup>57</sup> While their method

position of having access to the minister's executive assistant. As commanding officers they felt that the problems with the RCN's escort fleet were hindering their efforts to hunt U-boats. Additionally, the equipment deficiencies endangered the lives of their crews and those of the merchant ships they were trying to protect. But it is important to note that, with the exception of Audette, these types of communications only began once Connolly needed assistance. Since Connolly no longer trusted the naval staff he required another



*The object of the RCN's desire in 1943: the fully modernized corvette, HMCS Shediac in 1944. Note the hedgehog just forward of the bridge.*

DND RE 84

of communication may have been creative, the most important point is that these RCNVR officers were passing information directly to Connolly who would then show some of these submissions to Macdonald. For example, after reading one of O'Brien's poems Macdonald scribbled a note to Connolly that "[t]his officer has a gift for writing which he should continue to develop."<sup>58</sup> Also, as indicated by Audette, they were spreading word to other RCNVR officers that Connolly was sympathetic to their cause.

Through their pre-war friendship with Connolly these officers were in the unique

source of information, and there was no one better to ask than old and trusted friends who happened to be serving where the problems within the navy would be most apparent. There was no malicious intent in Connolly's request for assistance, nor in these officers decision to help, just a desire to see the welfare of the fleet improved.

The Strange memo proved to be the impetus that convinced Connolly to follow Audette's October 1942 suggestion for a thorough investigation into the RCN's modernization problems. On 20 September 1943 Connolly

wrote to Audette claiming that Macdonald had finally agreed to his plan. At this juncture Audette recommended that Connolly join him in the *Amherst* in order to experience a transatlantic sea voyage. But *Amherst* was scheduled for a refit and Connolly could not afford to wait. Unable to assist in his brainchild, Audette was "very disappointed our plans have fallen through, however, it obviously can't be helped... I wish you every good luck & lots of joy and knowledge."<sup>59</sup>

As with Audette, Strange also assisted Connolly in preliminary planning for his investigation. On the morning of 21 September, Connolly met with Strange who revealed that there was a network of officers in Londonderry who wanted to improve the state of equipment on RCN ships. Later that day Strange stated that he had dispatched letters to Simpson and Shorto, amongst many others, announcing that the executive assistant was traveling overseas. In reality he was mobilizing these officers so that they would be prepared to give Connolly their particular interpretation of the RCN's equipment problems. For example, Strange told Lieutenant Commander F.O. Gerity, RCNR, who was on Simpson's staff, that this was his "golden opportunity to say what you think, without the slightest fear of consequences, to a man [Connolly] who can quickly get it to all the places from which action will certainly come."<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Strange also wrote to Adams that Connolly was "fully in my confidence over the battle I am trying to wage for the man at sea, and is not only entirely sympathetic with the cause but is capable of furthering it considerably." Realizing that Connolly's trip was largely the result of his decision to bypass the chain of command, Strange continued by quipping "so far, very much to my surprise, I have not been shot."<sup>61</sup> While Strange deserves credit for making equipment an issue with the minister, he was correct to warn the Londonderry officers that Connolly's investigation would be the key to producing tangible results. Macdonald may have been suspicious of his naval staff, but he was unwilling to act without further evidence. The "battle" as Strange called it, would soon be in their hands.

Even though he could not travel overseas with Audette, Connolly still wanted to experience

a transatlantic voyage and so decided to sail with Mitchell in the *Orillia*.<sup>62</sup> Also it was ironic that one of Mitchell's officers was Barry O'Brien's brother, Gerald, who believed that Connolly was "checking up" on him at the request of John Ambrose O'Brien.<sup>63</sup> With close friends at hand, Connolly boarded the *Orillia* on 10 October to begin his historic investigation. Although it would be the overseas officers who would have the greatest impact on his investigation, Connolly's RCNVR compatriots were a significant factor in its formation and planning stages. It was Connolly himself who placed this into perspective when he advised Audette that "I certainly wish I could talk to you and a lot of others like you, however, you can say to your friends that if I cannot talk to you, I certainly can and have talked for you."<sup>64</sup> Clearly, Connolly was insinuating that the RCNVR had finally been heard, and that he was determined to ensure that their grievances were no longer ignored. Perhaps the best summation of this episode, however, came from Strange,

In retrospect, it appears to have been an almost nightmarish example of how a military Headquarters can become so remote from the realities as actually to stultify its own *raison d'être*. They were living in cloud cuckooland, while sailors were dying. There is a lesson here.<sup>65</sup>

Whether the naval staff was totally to blame for the RCN's equipment problems is debatable, and in fact it could be reasonably argued that both Audette and Strange's actions only managed to complicate the situation. As has been shown, the naval staff had told Macdonald that the escort fleet needed to be modernized. They had also stated that the only logical course of action was to ask the British for assistance. In hindsight, their mistake was that they failed to explain these complicated and highly technical issues to the minister in terms that he could easily comprehend. Also they did not repeat or impress its true significance upon him. In their defence, however, it is important to note that after he had been alerted to this problem over the winter of 1942-43 Macdonald never asked for updates or elaboration. As a result, Strange's flamboyant charges caught Macdonald by surprise at a time when he was politically vulnerable and instead of working with his naval staff to find solutions he agreed to allow his assistant to travel overseas to investigate.

Therefore, the explanation for how the "equipment crisis" became such a political quagmire rests with the actions of a small group of Canadian reserve officers in conjuncture with those of RN authorities in Londonderry. Beginning with Audette in the fall of 1942, these officers realized that Connolly was the crucial link to the minister and subsequently the key to producing change with NSHQ's equipment policy. Throughout 1943 some individuals, most notably the officers in Londonderry, became convinced that the chain of command was slow and often appeared to be unresponsive. Led by two senior ranking RN officers, these Canadian reservists realized that they needed to use unconventional means to get NSHQ's attention. Simpson quickly recognized that, as a reserve officer from NSHQ, Strange was the ideal candidate to be their messenger. Indeed, Strange had become obsessed; discovering that there were a number of Canadian reserve officers who desperately wanted to see the RCN properly equipped. This is not to imply that their criticisms did not have merit as the RCN was almost one year behind the RN in modernizing its ships, but there were other problems with the navy (e.g. training and manning) which were of equal importance and also required resolution.

Not all reserve officers would have agreed that equipment was the most crucial problem with the RCN, but some of those who were convinced managed to convey their concerns directly to the highest authority. Having alerted Connolly in the most graphic nature, Strange was able to turn this particular operational deficiency into a threat for Macdonald by implying that there were serious political implications associated with discontented officers and the state of equipment. Occurring on the heels of the "MacLean affair," both Macdonald and Connolly were extremely sensitive about any issue that could once again subject the navy to public scrutiny. Strange's description of the state of equipment appeared to fit the bill. Once this seed was planted, Connolly turned to his sea-going contacts for more information. Asking specific questions on equipment, therefore, only reinforced the perception that this was the primary grouse of the seagoing fleet. No longer trusting the top brass, and already convinced that equipment was a political threat to the minister, Connolly needed to gather evidence so that Macdonald

could make a case against the naval staff. The problem with Connolly's investigation, however, was that the proof came from a group of officers who did not have a complete picture of the troubles NSHQ faced when trying to modernize the RCN. Subsequently, Connolly was given a dramatic and often one-sided interpretation. Regardless, the information from his investigation was used to build a case against the naval staff as it was argued that they had *not only* mismanaged the modernization of the RCN, but also failed to properly brief the minister. In turn the naval staff denied these charges of incompetence leading to a dramatic and bitter confrontation with Macdonald throughout November and December 1943. Rightly or wrongly, it would be Nelles who paid the price as Rear Admiral G.C. Jones replaced him as the CNS in January 1944.

## Notes

1. Robert Fisher, "The Impact of German Technology on the RCN in the Battle of the Atlantic, 1942-1943," *The Northern Mariner*, VII No.4; Marc Milner, "The Implications of Technological Backwardness: The Royal Canadian Navy 1939-1945," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 19No.3.
2. Richard Mayne, *Behind the Scenes at Naval Service Headquarters: Bureaucratic and the Dismissal of Vice Admiral Percy W. Nelles*, (WLU: unpublished MA thesis, 1998).
3. For an excellent summary of these memoranda see Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), and David Zimmerman, *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). Captain Rowland wrote his memorandum on 1 May 1943 when he was Captain (D) Newfoundland. Lieutenant Commander Piers was the commanding officer of HMCS *Restgouche* and submitted his report through the chain of command to NSHQ on 1 June 1943. The final memorandum was actually composed by six officers under the authority of Captain R.E.S. Bidwell who was the Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief Canadian Northwest Atlantic.
4. Piers to Rowland, *Comments on the Operation and Performance of H.M.C. Ships*, 1 June 1943, National Archives of Canada [NAC] RG 24, 3997, NSS 1057-3-24 Vol. 1.
5. During the Second World War Canada's navy consisted of three different branches. The Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) were civilians who had joined the navy for the duration of hostilities only. The Royal Canadian Navy Reserve (RCNR) were merchant marine sailors who had joined the navy for the duration of the war. On the other hand, RCN personnel were permanent force, meaning that the navy was their career. Of course, certain RCNVR officers used humour to

- describe the differences whereby, "The RCNVR were gentleman trying to be sailors. The RCNR were sailors trying to be gentlemen, while the RCN were neither trying to be both."
6. Captain Eric Brand, Interview by E.C Russell, taped recording transcript, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, Ottawa [DHH], Brand Papers, 84/145, Vol.7,25.
  7. House of Commons, Debates, 11 June 1943, p.3564.
  8. Charles Murphy to Connolly, 17 January 1933, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG 32 C 71, Vol 2:16. The other partner in this law firm was John O'Brien. Despite similar names, this partner was not related to John Barry O'Brien. I am grateful to Mrs. Frances O'Brien for this information. Connolly to JT Hackett, 15 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2: 17. Within this letter Connolly wrote to Mitchell's employer "I knew Jim [Mitchell] when I was [practicing] with John O'Brien in Montreal."
  9. Scott Young and Astrid Young, *O'Brien: From Water Boy to One Million a Year* (Burnstown, Ontario: The General Store Publishing House, 1967), pp. 180-182.
  10. Connolly to Audette, 25 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG 32 C 71, Vol 2:17.
  11. Audette to Connolly, 5 December 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG 32 C 71, Vol 2:18.
  12. Brand Diary, October 1942, DHH, Brand Papers, 81/145, 58. *Report of Proceedings for the month of October 1942*, 9 November 1942, DHH, FONF R of P Monthly Sept 42-Mar 43, Vol.2.
  13. Connolly diary, February 1942, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG 32 C71, Vol 2: 4. Connolly thought very highly of Brand. For example, after their initial meeting he remarked that, "Brand, the CNI [sic] is an R.N. man - came in 1939 and does a whale of a job. Too bad he didn't come sooner."
  14. Schull's incomplete war memoirs, nd. NAC Joseph Schull Papers MG 31 D5, Vol.76.
  15. MacLean to Connolly, 15 July 1942, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3-8. Anonymous Report, nd. (July 1942), NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3-8. *Confidential Report on Efficiency of RCN (Atlantic Seaboard)*, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32, C71, Vol.3-8. *Comments on Confidential Report on Efficiency of RCN (Atlantic Seaboard)*, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3-8.
  16. Louis Audette, interview with AOS (Salty Dips project) in *Salty Dips*, Vol.2, ed. Mac Lynch (Ottawa: Privately Printed, 1985), p.64.
  17. Connolly Diary, October 1942, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:4. Louis Audette, *Naval Recollections*, DHH, Audette Papers, 80/256, Folder 9, 51.
  18. Brand diary, October 1942, DHH, and Brand Papers, 81/145, p.58; John Connolly to Ida Connolly, 9 October 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol 1-1. Connolly wrote to his wife just prior to his departure for Londonderry. Referring to his October 1942 trip to St. John's, Connolly found that, "This time they (RCNVR sailors) have really taken their hair down and I picked up information that I never dreamed I could get." Jack Hodgson to Connolly, 22 November 1942, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:15. Mac Johnston, *Corvettes Canada: Convoy Veterans of WW II Tell their true stories*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1994), p.270.
  19. Connolly Diary, 26 October 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:4.
  20. Connolly to Cdr Andrew MacLean, 2 December 1943, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS], Angus L. Macdonald Papers, MG 2, F 818/46.
  21. Hodgson to Connolly, 22 November 1942, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:15.
  22. MacLean was an editor for his father's company, Hugh C MacLean Publishing, while his uncle was John Bayne MacLean of the MacLean-Hunter Corporation (i.e. Maclean's magazine).
  23. MacLean to Macdonald, 3 November 1942, PANS, Macdonald Papers, MG2, F818/56.; AD MacLean, *R.B. Bennett Prime Minister of Canada*, (Toronto: Excelsior Publishing Company Ltd, 1934).; House of Commons Debates, 9 June 1943, p.3483.
  24. Milner, *North Atlantic Run*, p. 19.
  25. *Talk with LtCmdr Brown*, 8 December 1942, PANS, Macdonald Papers, MG2, F305.
  26. Connolly to Audette, 20 September 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG 32 C 71, Vol.2:16.
  27. "Fairmiles and Foul," *Boating Magazine*, January-February 1943, DHH, 94/127. For a complete understanding of the MacLean affair see the Connolly Papers Files 3-10, 3-11, and the Macdonald papers F818.
  28. Commander G.L. Roome to Connolly, 19 February 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3-8.
  29. Milner, "Royal Canadian Navy Participation in the Battle of the Atlantic Crisis of 1943," in James A. Boutilier, éd., *RCN in Retrospect*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982), pp. 168-170.
  30. Milner, "The Royal Canadian Navy and 1943: A year best forgotten?," in Paul Dickson, éd., *1943: The Beginning of the end*, (Waterloo, ON: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War and the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, 1995), pp.125-126.
  31. *Development of Canadian Naval Policy*, 21 December 1943, NAC, RG24, Vol. 11963. This report, and others like it, have reported that while the RCN was transferred to RN control "[t]he ships never actually proceeded to undertake these duties [UK to Gibraltar convoys! as the arrangements were superseded by others before they could come into effect."
  32. Zimmerman, *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa*, p.106; Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic*, (Montreal: Art Global, 1998), p. 128.
  33. Strange to Connolly, 13-15 July 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3. Strange to EC Russel, 9 December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4. Strange was born in British Honduras, and later served in the RN until 1918. He immigrated to Canada in 1929.
  34. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis - 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 3. Strange to Connolly, 13 -15 July 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32C71, Vol.3.
  35. Strange to Connolly, 13-15 July 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3.
  36. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis - 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 4.
  37. Piers to Rowland, *Comments on the Operation and Performance of HMC Ships*, 1 June 1943, NAC, RG24, 3997, NSS 1057-3-24, Vol.1. *Royal Navy List*, February 1944, DHH.

38. I am grateful to Dr. Marc Milner for drawing my attention to the fact that Adam's observation echoed ones offered by the British in 1941. For more information, see *North Atlantic Run*.
39. Adams to Rowland, *Equipment on RCN ships*, 9 August 1943, DHH, Nelles Papers, Folder B, File 10.
40. *Report of Interview with Rear Admiral Kenneth F Adams*; DHH, BIOG A, 39; *Adams Memoir*, DHH, BIOG A, 72-73. Nelles to Macdonald, 25 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3. Nelles received a copy of Adam's report from Macdonald after Connolly had found it in a backlog of messages at NSHQ. Nelles's response, while embarrassing for the CNS was that "I never knew of this report until you drew my attention to it this afternoon."
41. Strange to EC Russel, 9 December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis- 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91 / 298, Vol.4, 2.
42. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis - 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 6.
43. Strange to LCdr FO Gerity, 21 September 1943, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298.
44. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis - 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 7.
45. Milner, *North Atlantic Run*, pp.254-256. Milner was the first to link the troubles in the Liberal Party to Macdonald's dilemma with the RCN's equipment problems. Angus L. Macdonald Diary, 11 August 1943, PANS, MG2, Macdonald Papers, F 391.
46. King Diary, 15 September 1943, Vol. 192:798.
47. William Strange, *The Canadian Naval Equipment Crisis - 1943: A Personal Memoir*, December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 7. Ironically, Strange not only remained in the RCN after the war but actually became a permanent force officer.
48. Macdonald to Nelles, 21 August 1943, NAC, RG 24, 3995; Nelles to Macdonald, *Memo on the state of equipment*, PANS, Macdonald Papers, MG 2, F 276/3.
49. Nelles to Macdonald, *Weekly Report*, 25 February 1943, DHH, NS 1000-5-7, Vol.2.
50. "Fairmiles and Foul," *Boating Magazine*, January - February 1943, DHH, 94/127.
51. *Notes on the charges made by MacLean in general*, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3-10.
52. Admiralty to Murray, message 240128A, 24 August 1943, PANS, Macdonald Papers, MG 2, F276/24.
53. Untitled Poem, nd, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.4:23.
54. Strange to Connolly, *Thoughts on an afternoon before Christmas*, nd, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.4:23.
55. Connolly to Audette, 25 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:17.1 am grateful to Mr. Robert Caldwell for drawing my attention to this letter and in the translation of its contents.
56. Audette to Connolly, 5 December 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:17.
57. Mitchell to Connolly, 29 December 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:18. For example, Mitchell told Connolly that "I saw Louis Audette the other day for a moment only. He is now with us again after a long absence and shall see more of him at our next port of call. It appears that we are now all set for out face lifting so I am looking forward to a spot of leave, when I shall visit all the old haunts." The "face lifting" with which Mitchell referred, was the long awaited refit for his ship.
58. O'Brien to Connolly, *Chase me Charlie*, October 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol. 4:14.
59. Audette to Connolly, 22, 29 September 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32C71, Vol.2:16.
60. Strange to Connolly, *Confidential memo*, 21 September 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3; LCdr AM Lee to Strange, 4 October 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.3.; Strange to Gerity, 21 September 1943, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4.
61. Strange to Adams, 21 September 1943, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4.
62. Connolly to Mitchell, 16 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32 C71, Vol.2:17.
63. I am grateful to Mr. Gerald O'Brien for this information.
64. Connolly to Audette, 25 November 1943, NAC, Connolly Papers, MG32C71, Vol.2:17.
65. Strange to EC Russel, 9 December 1968, DHH, EC Russel Papers, 91/298, Vol.4, 2.

Richard Mayne received his Master's degree from WLU in 1999 where he was the Graduate Gold Medal winner for Arts. He has recently published articles on the political history of the RCN in *The Northern Mariner* and *The American Review of Canadian Studies*. Currently a Lieutenant in the naval reserve, he works at the Directorate of History and Heritage at National Defence Headquarters.