

The Gumboot Navy: Securing or Sundering British Columbia
by
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B.A., Walla Walla University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of History

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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In 1938 the Canadian government approved a plan to train fishermen as naval reservists in British Columbia. The fishermen were recruited as whole crews and trained to shoot accurately, form fours, navigate, signal properly and drop depth charges – all aboard their own converted fishing vessels. On paper, and to the general public, the specialized reserve known as the Fishermen’s Reserve or “Gumboot Navy”, was a patriotic group of fishermen doing their bit and better preparing for emergencies. However, in reality, the Canadian government instituted the Fishermen’s Reserve in 1938 for a very specific reason – to round up and remove Japanese Canadians and their boats from the coast prior to the outbreak of war between Canada and Japan. This thesis explores various aspects of the Fishermen’s Reserve from 1938 to 1941 in order to better understand the Canadian Government’s wartime policies. As there are almost no secondary sources on the subject, this paper uses extensive primary sources to uncover and analyze the Royal Canadian Navy’s recruitment policy, unconventional regulations and racist underpinnings in instituting the Fishermen’s Reserve.

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Dedication

To my Mom and Dad.

For raising me on the sea and for encouraging curiosity.

Chapter 1: “A Navy, within a Navy”¹

I suppose it’s a natural fate for any irregular force to become endowed in time with something of a clownish legend, but it often seems that the Fishermen’s Reserve, when it is remembered at all, is thought of as a species of wartime boondoggle, and its men given little more credit than draft dodgers.²

On the surface Donald Peck, the naval officer who penned the above phrase, was not an ideal candidate for military service. When the Canadian Government gave him command of a Royal Canadian Naval (RCN) vessel during the Second World War, he was in his 50s, out of shape, and had never run a naval vessel. His training was minimal, his crew small, and yet he sailed on twenty-eight-day rotating patrols for over three years in a “small, lightly armed, wooden-hulled [vessel] through water known to be occupied by enemy subs and mines...[as well as] natural hazards, which were extreme.”³ Peck was a member of the Fishermen’s Reserve (FR), commonly known as the Gumboot Navy, a group of seasoned fishermen, who left the essential industry of fishing and signed up with the Navy to protect the British Columbian coast from external and internal dangers during World War Two. Their story is an unusual one and as Peck noted, it is often poorly told.

The standard narrative of the FR is rather incomplete. It tells us that the Canadian Government created the FR as a branch of the RCN exclusively made up of white fishermen. The fishermen served on their own boats in small crews and the Navy used them primarily as a patrol service during the Second World War. Many writers call them a “stopgap” navy, suggesting that the reserve was only formed because most of the

¹ Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History Vol. II: Activities on Shore During the Second World War* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1952), 314.

² Donald Peck, “The Gumboot Navy,” *Raincoast Chronicles*, no. 7 (1977), 9.

³ *Ibid.*

regular naval forces had been sent to the Atlantic coast to protect against German naval aggression and to assist in convoy work. Historians often remember the FR for what the official naval history calls their “most significant act;” the “distasteful work” of rounding up thousands of boats owned by Japanese nationals or Japanese Canadian fishermen along the coast of British Columbia.⁴ However, historians have not even scratched the surface of the FR’s contribution to this significant act, let alone explored the FR as a whole. The Reserve was active for more than five years and at the height of the war it had over 900 members and 40 vessels; yet less than twenty pages of academic work has been written on the FR.

The FR is usually consigned to footnotes and given little attention by military or social historians. John McFarlane, a military historian, notes that, “there has been a lot of inaccurate or misleading speculation on this branch of the Navy which is frequently repeated by casual writers.” Moreover, he states that even in the official histories the FR is “poorly documented.”⁵ Historians have typically depicted the FR as a military anomaly, unimportant to the war effort, but mildly intriguing. Unofficial histories have described the FR as “a comical little fleet,” or “the most curious little force” and even the official naval histories labelled it “a navy within a navy.”⁶ Historians often depict the men of the FR as brave, but tend to focus more on the FR’s oddities or on its lighter side. *No Higher Purpose*, the official naval history from 2002, for instance, notes that the FR

⁴ W.A.B Douglas, Rogert Sarty and Michael Whitby, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943*, Vol. 2, part. 1, (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 339.

⁵ John M. MacFarlane, “The Royal Canadian Navy Fishermen’s Reserve,” *Nauticapedia.ca* 2012, http://nauticapedia.ca/Articles/RCN_Fishermens_Reserve.php.

⁶ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 314; Alan Haig-Brown, *Fishing for a Living*, (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1993), 107; Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 338; Michael Whitby, “The Quiet Coast: Canadian Naval Operations in Defence of British Columbia, 1941-1942,” In *Canada’s Pacific Naval Presence: Purposeful or Peripheral*, ed. Peter T. Haydon et al. (Halifax, N.S: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 1999), 64.

uniforms made the men look like chaplains, that the FR would fish in the middle of patrols, and cites a member of the FR saying “the dickens with the war.” Such flippant attitudes toward the Reserve are unfair. Although the official history follows these off-the-cuff statements with, “they did not allow this to interfere with their patrol duties” and “they took their responsibilities seriously,” the indication, in this and other sources, seems to be that the FR was a brave but silly little organization that does not merit a full investigation.⁷

Historians have not heretofore fully explored the FR’s role in Canadian history. The poor state of the historiography vis-à-vis this subject – and the Canadian home defence in general – provides sufficient motivation to undertake a study on the FR. This thesis attempts to help fill this gap in social and military history. By making a detailed examination of the FR from its inception in 1937 until the bombing of Pearl Harbor, this paper will help provide a foundation for future research into the FR and its operations after the entrance of Japan into the Second World War, especially its controversial and tragic role in the rounding up of over 25,000 Japanese Canadians.

“Ships of Wood, Men of Steel” – A Background

The scant secondary literature on the FR appears notably in the official naval histories and in monographs dealing with British Columbian defence from 1937-1945 and in some social histories though, surprisingly, to a very limited extent in histories of the Japanese Canadian plight during the Second World War or in histories of the Canadian fishing industry.

⁷ Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 338.

General overviews of operational activities during the war are of little use to the study of West Coast defence. These far-reaching histories focus on the overseas activities of the entire military, which leaves little room to examine a home defence force that saw almost no enemy action. Books offering a more social analysis on the war – incorporating economic, industrial, social, political and technological aspects – only provide context for the FR. Books such as W.A.B. Douglas's and Brereton Greenhous's *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*, Jeff Keshen's *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada and the Second World War*, and Jack Granatstein's and Desmond Morton's *Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945* offer a tangential analysis of West Coast defence and include nothing on the FR.⁸

Save for one mysterious unfootnoted sentence, “a Royal Canadian Fleet reserve and a Fishermen's Reserve were organized, the latter to cope with special problems of the Pacific coast,” in *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*, a seminal look at the Canadian military's recruiting policies, organization, international relations, and home front during the Second World War, C.P. Stacey ignores the FR.⁹

Gilbert Norman Tucker's official history *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History Vol II: Activities on Shore During the Second World War* surveys shore activities and the organizational structure of the RCN during the Second World War and

⁸ W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*, (Toronto; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jeff Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004); Jack Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945*, (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989). *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers* focuses on the social mores of the home front during WWII. Although Keshen dedicates a large section to material scarcity, such as the housing crisis in Vancouver, he does not mention the Japanese Canadian dispossession, let alone the FR. *Out of the Shadows* was one of the first histories to explore the home front in Canada during WWII and is thus preoccupied with pioneering more 'big picture' home front aspects than the specific social aspects of the FR. *Nation Forged in Fire* focuses on the daring deeds of the regular army, navy and air force and includes one paltry chapter on the home front.

⁹ Charles Perry Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970).

devotes a large section to the defence organization of the Pacific theatre. Tucker, the first scholar to write about the FR, states that the FR was like a “navy within a navy” and “requires separate consideration” from the general look at personnel and training he had explored in preceding chapters.¹⁰ Over five pages he surveys its unique rankings and training facilities, as well as its regulations during expansion and disbandment but his brief investigation of the reasons behind the creation of the FR, offers a simplistic line of reasoning. Tucker summarized the FR, “The brief career of the Fishermen’s Reserve had been troubled, yet it had provided an inexpensive and adequate reconnaissance force while it lasted.” Tucker notes that the government saw great potential in the FR, but problems with training, rank, and morale complicated the effectiveness of the Reserve. His attention focuses almost exclusively on the FR after the entrance of Japan into the Second World War. Nonetheless, his work provides one of only a handful of useful - albeit brief - surveys of the FR.¹¹

No Higher Purpose, a second official naval history published in 2002, is disappointing. Despite being researched for over ten years and written by W.A. B. Douglas and two other solid naval historians, Michael Whitby and Roger Sarty, instead of relying on all archival sources, it borrows heavily from secondary sources. For example, Douglas and company state, “Stills were not uncommon onboard, and those less enterprising could find liquor at the many fishing hamlets or canneries they visited during patrols.” This statement is not in quotation marks, nor does the footnote at the bottom of the paragraph indicate that this is directly quoted from an earlier article by Whitby in which he partially, and rather poorly, quoted from Carol Popp’s *Gumboot Navy* and

¹⁰ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 314.

¹¹ Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 310.

Gilbert Tucker's official history.¹² Although *No Higher Purpose* did help to advance studies of the FR slightly, especially after Pearl Harbor, its brief account of the birth of the FR leaves the man who conceived the idea of the FR, Rowland Bourke, out of the picture completely.¹³

These two official histories, although lacking substance and proper analysis and consisting in total of twenty pages to the FR, hold more scholarly prose on the FR than all other histories combined.¹⁴ Furthermore, they focus on the later years of the FR, leaving its birth incomplete. Yet, most of the other works dealing with the FR simply replicate the information from these two official histories.

General overviews of the Royal Canadian Navy offer advancement in the study of the navy in general, but do almost nothing to further an understanding of the FR. Edited collections such as *The RCN in Transition, 1910-1985* and *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*, as well as Marc Milner's *Canada's Navy: The First Century* and Commander Tony German's *The Sea is At Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy* lack deep analysis

¹² *No Higher Purpose* devotes several pages to evaluating the FR's role in dispossessing the Japanese Canadian fishermen's boats, giving operational examples, as well as examining whether the dispossession was an act that "perpetuated regional feelings of insecurity by seeming to confirm their validity," and questions whether leaving the Japanese fishermen on the coast "in a climate of hysteria" would have "absorbed far more effort," than it was worth. The authors conclude: "If there is a moral to this sad story, perhaps it is that armed forces and governments should focus on the enemy that has actually proven hostile rather than the one whose existence is no more than hypothetical." Although the wisdom of this statement could be debated at length, the fact that this sort of analysis is made is another reason that this official history reads rather unofficially (Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 346).

¹³ To be fair to the authors of *No Higher Purpose*, only Carol Popp in *The Gumboot Navy* seems to give Rowland Bourke any credit as the originator of the FR. Even at that, Popp is not completely accurate. She wrote that the concept of the FR was "revived by Lieutenant Commander Roland Burke (sp), V.C., D.S.O. (R.N.V.R.)" and that when he presented it to the NSHQ, they were accepting of the plan only because if a war broke out "the nation's regular warships would be concentrated on the Atlantic coast." Popp gets Bourke's name and credentials wrong, mislabels his idea as a revival from a Walter Hose idea, and states that the Canadian government only agreed to the FR because it foresaw a shift of its ships to the Atlantic (Carol Popp, *The Gumboot Navy: Memories of the Fishermen's Reserve* (Lantzville, British Columbia: Oolichan Books, 1988), 11).

¹⁴ Popp's, *Gumboot Navy* is not included in this page count. Although it devotes the entirety of a book to the Fishermen's Reserve, and advances the study of the FR, it is a collection of memoirs and not a scholarly investigation.

of the FR.¹⁵ Francis Pullen, one of the contributors to *The RCN in Retrospect*, is the only author to mention the FR specifically, asserting that the primary purpose of the force was as a “coastal patrol.”¹⁶

Some studies of specific aspects of West Coast defence mention the FR and provide context for it. Works such as P. Whitney Lackenbauer’s, “Guerrillas in Our Midst: The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45,” Brendan Coyle’s *War on Our Doorstep: The Unknown Campaign on North America's West Coast*, T. Murray Hunter’s “Coast Defense in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities,” Peter Moogk’s *Vancouver Defended: History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defenses 1859-1949*, Michael Whitby’s “The Quiet Coast: Canadian Naval Operations in Defence of British Columbia, 1941-1942,” and Chris Weicht’s “Jericho Beach and the West Coast Flying Boat Stations” show that Canadian authors and historians are investigating the Pacific theatre more carefully.¹⁷

These works explore the importance of the West Coast during the war and offer further context in which the FR can be placed.¹⁸ Only Coyle, Lackenbauer and Whitby

¹⁵ W.A.B. Douglas, ed., *The RCN in Transition, 1910-1985*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); James A. Boutillier, ed., *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982); Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century*. 2nd ed. (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2010); Tony German, *The Sea is At Our Gates: The History of the Canadian Navy*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

¹⁶ Hugh Francis Pullen, “The Royal Canadian Navy Between the Wars, 1922-1939”, In *The RCN in Retrospect*, 113.

¹⁷ P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Guerrillas in Our Midst: The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45," *BC Studies* no. 155 (2007): 95-131; Brandon Coyle, *War on Our Doorstep: The Unknown Campaign on North America's West Coast*, (Nanose Bay, BC: Heritage House Publishing, 2002); T. Murray Hunter, “Coast Defense in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities” *BC Studies* No. 28 (1975); Peter Moogk, *Vancouver Defended: History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defenses 1859-1949*, (Surrey, B.C.: Antonson Pub., 1978); Chris Weicht, “Jericho Beach and the West Coast Flying Boat Stations”, In *Canada's Pacific Naval Presence: Purposeful or Peripheral*, ed. Peter T. Haydon et al. (Halifax, N.S: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 1999). Other shorter histories, such as the ones covering the Naden training center or Esquimalt, are so narrowed in focus that they offer little aid, let alone context for the FR.

¹⁸ Hunter and Moogk examine the development and efficacy of coastal artillery and forts, in Moogk’s case the guns surrounding Vancouver. Coyle offers a brief survey of the defence structure of the west coast before turning his attention to Canada’s involvement in the Aleutian campaign. Lackenbauer explores the

mention the FR specifically. Lackenbauer's account is a simple footnote and Coyle's is confined to a brief condensation of Tucker's history and one new operational account of the FR. The passage tells of a rescue operation when regular naval ships turned back because of "mountainous waves...in excess of nine metres."¹⁹ Several FR skippers, undaunted by the weather, volunteered for the rescue and were ready to set sail when they were overruled by naval command and made to stay in port. This account shows the bravery and seamanship of the FR but the rest of Coyle's work lends little else to the historiography. Moreover, Coyle's research is questionable. For instance, he mislabels Lieutenant Commander Colin Donald as a "retired Royal Navy officer living in British Columbia" who was given use of the "tug" *Skidegate* to recruit the FR. In this case Coyle is mixing the stories of Rowland Bourke and Donald. Rowland Bourke is the retired officer who had the idea of the FR; Donald is the man who was given use of a former fishing boat named the *Skidegate* to recruit with (it was not a tug).

Whitby draws mainly on Tucker and Popp but pushes their work further by asserting that the roots of the FR lay in British Columbia's attitudes towards security and race in the 1930s."²⁰ Although other historians had mentioned rounding up Japanese Canadian fishermen as one of the many tasks assigned to the FR, Whitby was the first to postulate that it was the *raison d'être*.

An American author, Bert Webber, offers some valuable insight into West Coast defence. Although neither his, *Retaliation: Japanese Attacks and Allied Countermeasures on the Pacific Coast in World War II* nor his *Silent Siege: Japanese Attacks Against*

expansion and role of the militia in British Columbia during WWII, while Weicht explores the Air Force's contribution to west coast defence. Michael Whitby offers an insightful look at the overall naval defence of British Columbia during 1941 and 1942.

¹⁹ Coyle, *War on Our Doorstep*, 70.

²⁰ Whitby, "The Quiet Coast", 64.

North America in World War II mention the FR, he does provide an incredibly interesting look at Japanese operations along the West Coast of North America.²¹ Besides offering insight into the Japanese strategy he dedicates a section to notable events in British Columbia. Webber explores the arrival of the *Queen Elizabeth* in Victoria, the shelling of Estevan Point and the sinking of the *SS Coast Trader* in the strait of Juan de Fuca, all events in which the FR actively participated.²² Despite his informal tone and an abundance of personal speculation and correspondence, the book is contextually valuable to the study of the FR, but unfortunately only after the entry of Japan into the war.

Many authors have briefly looked at how the developing relationship between the United States and Canada in the 1930s affected Canada's West Coast defence policy. C.P. Stacy and the retired American Colonel, Stanley W. Dziuban analysed the relations between Canada and the United States on all fronts but did not specifically focus on West Coast defence command.²³ Galen Perras' article "Who Will Defend British Columbia? Unity of Command on the West Coast, 1934-1942" and Sarty's *The Maritime Defense of Canada* offer a more in-depth look at Canadian-American relations specific to the West Coast.²⁴ Perras shows how Prime Minister Mackenzie King's policies on the defence of British Columbia were directly affected by pressure from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sarty's chapters "Entirely in the Hands of the Friendly Neighbour," "Mr. King and the Armed Forces," and "Canada's Coastal Fortifications of the Second World War"

²¹ Bert Webber, *Retaliation: Japanese Attacks and Allied Countermeasures on the Pacific Coast in World War II*, (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1975); *Silent Siege: Japanese Attacks Against North America in World War II*, (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1984).

²² Bert Webber, *Retaliation*, Chapter 8.

²³ Their works are from 1967 and 1954 respectively.

²⁴ Galen Perras, "Who Will Defend British Columbia? Unity of Command on the West Coast, 1934-1942," in *On Brotherly Terms: Canadian American Relations West of the Rockies*, John M. Findlay and Kenneth Coates, ed., (Seattle and Montreal-Kingston: University of Washington Press and McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 181-202.

provide insight into the nuances, political dealings and problems in the history of West Coast defence. Sarty argues that the Canadian Government enacted defence policies on the West Coast due to a fear of Japan and a fear of losing Canadian sovereignty to the United States through a weak defence policy. Neither work mentions the FR specifically, but they are essential in developing a full analysis on the FR.

A few newspaper and magazine articles concern the FR, but most simply quote Popp and Tucker. Bill Twatio's "The Gumboot Navy: the Fishermen's Reserve Answers the Call" is a good example.²⁵ Twatio mashes prose from Whitby, Popp, Tucker and Roy Ito into a rather charged account of the FR. The article lacks cohesion and accuracy. For instance, he cites the shelling of the Estevan lighthouse by the Japanese sub I-26 as being the *reason* the Canadian Government finally uprooted the Japanese Canadians from the coast. This is incorrect as the shelling happened in June 1942, whereas the Canadian government notified Japanese Canadians of their exile in February 1942 and began sorting them at Hastings Park as early as March – 3 months before the shelling. Such historical inaccuracies and the lack of any new information make articles of this genre, rather useless.

"The Gumboot Navy," an article by former FR skipper Donald Peck, is a notable exception. Like Carol Popp's *Gumboot Navy*, Peck relates anecdotes and memories of the men's service and gives personal examples of the problems alluded to by Tucker and Stacey, including an FR unnamed official who continually belittled the Reserve and drummed up charges against Peck and other skippers.²⁶ Peck concluded,

²⁵ Bill Twatio, "The Gumboot Navy: the Fishermen's Reserve Answers the Call," *Espirit de Corps* (January, 2004), 19.

²⁶ Peck calls the official "a real calamity in uniform we shall call the Brown Bomber." He is probably referring to J.A. Brown, a commander of the Naden barracks for some years during the war.

The popular image of the F.R. doesn't gall me so much, since our men cared little about public recognition, as the attitude of military officialdom, which was one of towering disdain not in the least tempered by their own incompetence in dealing with our problems.

Unlike Popp, Peck lists many of the FR's problems with command and provides specific names, boats and places which provide leads to primary sources. As the only source to offer more of a bittersweet than a rosy account of the FR it is useful. Yet, is incomplete, relies on memory, lacks footnotes and focuses entirely on the FR after 1941.²⁷

The only book that is exclusively dedicated to the FR is Carol Popp's *The Gumboot Navy: Memories of the Fishermen's Reserve*. Popp admits it is "not...a book of history but a collection of memories" and that she "cannot vouch for the accuracy of each incident only the intent of accuracy." The book is dedicated to the memory of the men serving in the FR, but unlike many regimental histories it provides very few names in the stories and does not identify the storytellers. Popp left "out the names in any incident that could prove embarrassing." Although the lack of specifics is frustrating for future research – there is not even a list of interviewees – the memories shared by the members of the FR give a deeper understanding of the FR. Her introductions to the book and its chapters and appendices offer the only discussion beyond reported memories. Her introduction is a reworded copy of Tucker's official history and she, like Tucker, stresses that pre-war naval command instituted the FR only as a stopgap reserve, because it was focused on the Atlantic theatre. She claims that "Canada's naval planners agreed that in the event of war, the national regular warships would be concentrated on the Atlantic coast" and that "in 1938 it seemed improbable that Canada would ever have to face an

²⁷ Donald Peck, "The Gumboot Navy," *Raincoast Chronicles*, no. 7: (1977), 9-12.

attack from Japan.²⁸ Popp sells the Pacific theatre short. Even in 1938, Canada was concerned with an attack in the Pacific and was also wary of a war between Japan and the United States. Her analysis is superficial; for most of the book she simply acts as a censored tape recorder for the men of the FR to recall pleasant memories.

Yet, Popp brings aspects of the FR to life. The interviewees recount some tales that are simply amusing and others that could act as a starting point for future research.

For instance, one man recalled that:

Long before the attack on Pearl Harbour,[sic] we were instructed to stop Japanese vessels up and down the coast to look over what firearms they had... We knew where we were going on that fatal Sunday, and away we went... we were all coordinated about what to do about the Japanese here.

This indicates that some of their early training and instruction involved policing and monitoring those of Japanese ancestry living along the coast. Another fisherman retold his experience going up Sidney Inlet to blow up a copper mine owned by the Japanese emperor. And another recounted an instance when a FR patrol found a huge sunken Japanese diesel tank in Esperanza Inlet.²⁹

The last historical field that should, but does not, offer much foundation for the FR, is social history. The men of the FR were commercial fishermen, and their unit's primary role was to round up Japanese Canadians. Yet, the story of the FR is missing from histories of the Japanese Canadians although they provide valuable context to better understand the Canadian Government's reasons for instituting the FR.³⁰ Likewise, a fuller analysis of the FR will contribute to the study of the Japanese Canadian exile.

²⁸ Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, 10-12.

²⁹ Popp, *Gumboot Navy*, 63, 51, 36, 42.

³⁰ See: Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991); Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers,

Very few histories have been written on the fishing industry in the 20th century and only two mention the FR. *Salmon, Our Heritage: The Story of a Province and an Industry*, written by Cicely Lyons in 1967, mentions the FR briefly, but her racist overtones toward the Japanese Canadian fishermen and a lack of citations, organization and scholarly perspective render it a weak source.³¹ Alan Haig-Brown's *Fishing for a Living* offers a better quality examination of the fishing industry. Although lacking scholarly apparatus, the book does give an interesting account of the fishing industry in the 20th century. The chapter dedicated to the FR focuses on how the FR boats transitioned in and out of the fishing industry, with pleasant anecdotes intermixed.³²

The best hybrid account of both fishing interest and the Japanese Canadian exile is Masako and Stanley Fukawa's *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen*.³³ After giving an overview of the Japanese Canadian contribution to the fishing industry, and the political and social tensions of the relationship between Japanese, Aboriginal and white fishermen in the 1930s, the Fukawas provide a detailed account of the Japanese vessels being rounded up, towed and "protected" by the FR.³⁴

1981); Roy Ito, *We Went to War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians Who Served during the First and Second World Wars*, (Stittsville, Ont: Canada's Wings, 1984); Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41*, (Vancouver, B.C: UBC Press, 2003); Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

³¹ Cicely Lyons, *Salmon, Our Heritage: The Story of a Province and an Industry*, (Vancouver, B.C.: Mitchell Press, 1969).

³² One story revolves around the knowledge of seamanship within the FR versus the Navy. Another instance describes the new "supercharger" diesel engines in the FR boats and how two American destroyers stopped a FR boat when it strayed into deeper water testing out the new engine's capabilities. The final story recalls the painting of a FR boat from its battleship grey to green and white (company colours of Nelson Brothers packing) in order to raise less suspicion as they searched an inlet for a suspected submarine (Haig-Brown, *Fishing for a Living*, 113, 108, 109).

³³ Masako and Stanley Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen*, (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Pub, 2009).

³⁴ One Japanese Canadian fisherman recalled that after the Japanese Canadian vessels reached New Westminster "these navy guys were looting our boats of everything they could tear off and selling it for beer. I guess it is natural. I've seen it happen in other places. But the navy was supposed to be the protectors of our property." Another account tells of Tsunetaro Oye, a Japanese Canadian fisherman who strayed from the five-day naval convoy from Ucluelet to Stevetson. He wound up in the United States and

There is a major gap in the historiography surrounding the FR. The remainder of this thesis aims to examine the FR within the context of antebellum and wartime Canada in order to better understand the FR and the people and communities it affected. Primarily relying on sources from the Library and Archives of Canada and the Esquimalt Naval Base Archives, it pieces together a more comprehensive narrative of the FR, exposing the Reserve as a more nuanced organization than historians have previously suggested. Chapter two focuses on the initial proposal of the FR, the system of recruitment, and the subsequent formation of the force within the context of depression-era Canada. The third chapter explores the training of the FR as well as the FR officials' unconventional regulations to attract recruits and offset the perceived dangers of the Japanese to the West Coast. The fourth, and final, chapter focuses on the evolution of the FR from a training reserve to a wartime reserve after the start of the European war, as well as the struggle its leader and the Naval Services Headquarters went through to keep the FR ready for a war with Japan.

This paper does not overlook the brave actions of the FR and the hard work of its officers. Yet, by examining the reasons behind the Canadian government's creation and upkeep of the Reserve, this thesis exposes racism, greed, commercial jealousy, political tension and bigotry in many levels of Canadian society in the 1930s and 1940s. Departing from previous narratives, that place the genesis of the force in 1938 as an outcome of increased danger in the Atlantic, this thesis argues that the FR was conceived in 1937 as a tool to round-up the Japanese living in British Columbia. The institution of such a reserve

was picked up by the US Coast Guard. When they handed him over to Canadian officials, Oye was "completely covered with bandages." When asked about his experience, he indicated through hand gestures, that he had been beaten and had his throat slashed by American officials. He died that same night. (Fukawa, *Spirit*, 119, 120).

demonstrates the prevalence of racism not only within Ottawa and the naval command, but especially throughout the fishing industry. Moreover, the primary sources reveal that the FR was not always a cohesive unit that endured the war without dissention. Throughout its existence, FR officials had to balance the desires of fishing company owners, Naval Service Headquarters in Ottawa, and the fishermen themselves in order to keep the FR afloat. Still, examining the actions and intentions of the founding commanders and officers of the FR, shows that these men adapted the FR so that it could be useful beyond its intended – and problematic – role. Ultimately, this paper argues that historians should not treat the FR as a “comical little fleet,” but rather as a patriotic, albeit misguided, group of men, whose existence gives us the means to better dissect the Canadian past.

Chapter 2: “A scheme that should be investigated...”¹

Apart from the ever-present topic of the Japanese fishermen on the coast, it is considered that having immediately available a body of men, complete with boats, who know the coast thoroughly would be of great value to the defence organization. They could proceed to harbours and along the coast to places to which, and under conditions when, a destroyer or minesweeper could not. And they could relieve the RCN and other Reserve forces of an immense amount of work.²

In 1937, Edmund Rollo Mainguy, the director of Royal Canadian Naval Reserves (RCNR), recommended to Naval Services Headquarters (NSHQ) that the RCNR be expanded in a very specific direction. Mainguy suggested that commercial fishermen, with their expertise in seamanship and intimate knowledge of the British Columbian coastline and navigable waters, represented an unexploited resource for naval manpower. Although the RCNR was established in 1923, only one fisherman had joined the Vancouver branch; the majority avoided the Reserves, presumably because RCNR training in summer interfered with their fishing seasons.³ Mainguy believed that an all-fishermen unit would be possible if the Navy trained them in the off-season. He asserted that these men would be a valuable addition to the Navy should the government need an inshore patrol to round up enemy aliens in British Columbia. As it happened, Ottawa in

¹ Percy Nelles to Ian Mackenzie, 19 February 1938, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RCNR, Fishermen's Reserve West Coast Organization (hereafter FRWCO), R112-614-4E, 5681.

² E.R. Mainguy to Canadian Naval Secretary, 15 November 1937, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

³ Rowland Bourke to CNS, 25 March, 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Typically, the RCNR trained in the summer, right during the fishing season for salmon. Even men who usually fished halibut or pilchards in the winter often worked during the summer months in some capacity.

1938, was seeking a way to do just that, and Mainguy's proposed Fishermen's Reserve (FR) looked like a solution worth investigating.

In the 1930s, the strength of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in the Pacific was insufficient to defend against an invasion or to deal with internal sabotage along the long and craggy coast of British Columbia. Canadian military advisors described defences on the West Coast as "insufficient," "devoid of defence," and "totally inadequate"; during a trip to Vancouver in 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called them "almost non-existent."⁴ The newly re-elected Liberal Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, caught between a depression-level budget and the need to defend Canada's sovereignty, could only muster enough money to implement a piece-meal defence for the Pacific: four new destroyers, additional artillery, and improved antisubmarine defences at Esquimalt. Yet, military advisors and civilians alike insisted that additional naval forces were needed to defend against threats coming from overseas and within British Columbia itself.

In 1937 Canadian military strategists considered sabotage from Japanese residents in British Columbia as a "defence problem of peculiar importance."⁵ By 1940, they had plans for impounding enemy alien vessels and rounding up of enemy aliens in the time of

⁴ Captain (D)., HMCS Skeena to Naval Secretary, 1 December, 1937, LAC, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772; Commander of Auxiliary Vessels (hereafter COAV) to Commander of Pacific Command (hereafter COPC), 15 March 1940, LAC, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681; Memorandum of the Joint Services Committee (hereafter JSC), Pacific Coast, "On the Matter of Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada," 12 July 1940, LAC, FOPC, JSC West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772; Norman Armour memorandum, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Sumner Welles Papers, box 161, file Canada, November 9, 1937, cited in Galen Roger Perras, "Who Will Defend British Columbia? Unity of Command on the West Coast, 1934-42," *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*, ed. John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 186.

⁵ Defence Scheme No. 3, March, 1937, paragraph 6 in G.W.L. Nicholson, Army Headquarters, No. 3, "The Employment of Infantry in the Pacific Coast Defences," 1 June 1944, p. 2, Director of History and Heritage, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/ahqr-rqga/ahq003.pdf>.

war to prevent such sabotage.⁶ Yet, although the Canadian Military called for “adequate” forces to implement such a round-up, they lacked the appropriate unit to carry out this task effectively.⁷ Mainguy proposed the FR to fill this role.

The Problem with the Japanese: Internal and External Pressure in BC

The FR was conceived in 1937, a pivotal year in international relations. Earlier that summer, Japan invaded China, officially starting the Sino-Japanese war. This event created complications for a resource-rich Canada that was attempting to claw its way out of the Great Depression. The war increased demand for Canadian resources; exports such as nickel, scrap iron, zinc and copper nearly doubled in a single year but, many Canadians, horrified by newspaper reports of wartime violence, favoured foregoing economic benefits in Canada at the expense of human lives in China. The Chinese community in Canada was especially outspoken against Canadian trade policy, and equated Canadian exports to Japan with the slaughter of its countrymen.⁸ British Columbians, wary of Japanese warmongering, urged Ottawa to bolster defences in anticipation of war with Japan. Some Canadians went a step further, using the bellicosity of Japan to spark the smouldering “Japanese Problem” and call for the expulsion,

⁶ Memo of the JSC, Pacific Coast, “On the matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada,” 12 July 1940, FOPC, JSC West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772; The report claimed that “the possibility of sabotage and of internal raids organized by Japanese residents is one of vital importance.”

⁷ Ibid. See also; Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver, B.C: UBC Press, 2003), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uvic/Doc?id=10125060>; Enemy alien is an ambiguous term used by defence reports. However, in the case of West Coast defence, the term typically denoted a Japanese person.

⁸ John D. Meehan, “Canada and Japan between the Wars, 1929-1941,” *Contradictory Impulses: Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Greg Donaghy and Patricia E. Roy, (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 94; Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 171-180. Roy lists examples of Canadians who spoke out against supplying Japan’s war machine but also notes that, “given the Depression, for most British Columbians possible economic advantages overrode any moral or military issues” they might have with Canadian exports to Japan. Roy notes that Chinese residents “raised funds for war relief, circulated pro-China propaganda, and boycotted Japanese goods.”

containment or harsh scrutiny of those of Japanese ancestry living in Canada.⁹ King and his advisors stood firm on their economic policies, exports continued almost unabated until 1939, but inevitably the turbulence in the Far East drew much of his attention and slim defence budget toward the Pacific Ocean.¹⁰

The war in Asia and Canada's willingness to supply the belligerents, called into question issues of internal security, defence strategies and obligations both moral and diplomatic. Two prominent Allies, Britain and the United States, criticized Canada. Britain questioned the ethics of Canada's economic policies; the United States, wary of Japanese expansionism, called for Ottawa to improve defences in British Columbia.¹¹

Prime Minister King attempted to steer an independent course but Canada remained caught between the orbital pulls of Great Britain and the United States. Because Britain's attention was often focused on European affairs, Canada began gravitating toward the more attentive United States. Geographic proximity and similar ways of life created mutual concerns over defence, trade and resources. By the 1920s, the United States had become Canada's largest trading partner and invested more money in the Canadian economy than any other country.¹² By 1937 Canada and the United States were, as Roosevelt put it, "good neighbors" and the President assured Canada that the United States would defend "our neighborhood" from attack.¹³ Roosevelt reaffirmed the

⁹ In brief, the Japanese problem was the fear that white Canada had toward an Asian influx. Since the late 19th century the "Oriental Problem" or "Japanese Problem" or "Yellow Peril" was the idea that Asian sojourners with their low standard of living, would work white men (who had to provide for families) out of existence. Furthermore, it encapsulated the idea the Asian races were inassimilable, disloyal and untrustworthy.

¹⁰ Meehan, "Canada and Japan between the Wars, 1929-41," 89.

¹¹ Perras, "Who Will Defend British Columbia," 186-187.

¹² Scott W. See, *The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations: The History Of Canada* (Westport Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 119.

¹³ Stanley W. Dziuban, *Military Relations between the United States and Canada 1939-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1959), 3.

United States' adherence to the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine, no foreign country would be allowed to gain a foothold in North America.

Although the relationship between Canada and the United States was improving, especially with the re-election of the Liberals in 1935, points of tension remained.¹⁴ Particularly trying were their differing diplomatic strategies and outlooks toward the Empire of Japan. Canada's support of Britain's appeasement attitude toward Japan caused some consternation in Washington. With the United States as perhaps its most powerful ally, Canada could not afford to offend its southern neighbour. Canada's system of international relations was complicated but good relations were necessary for defence. Canada traditionally relied on the British Navy in the Atlantic but had no such fallback in the Pacific.¹⁵ Spurred by the war in the Far East and concerned over Canada's position between Great Britain and the United States should war erupt, Canadian politicians scrambled for a solution in an effort to be prepared.

Canadian politicians found themselves in a diplomatic quandary. As an editorial in *The New Canadian* a Japanese Canadian newspaper published in Vancouver, summed it, "Canada, a peace-loving nation, is anxious to maintain Japanese-American friendship. But, her anxiety that Great Britain and the United States shall not be on opposite sides in

¹⁴ Canada had been in precarious political situations with the United States, Britain and Japan before. In the 1920s, Canada was waffling in its support of the Washington Naval Treaty. When pressed to find its place between Britain and the United States concerning Japan, Loring Christie, a legal adviser in Canada's Department of External Affairs warned that America would be upset when "given the choice of friendships in this new state of the world you [Canada] chose the yellow man rather than us [the United States]" (A.R.M., Lower, "Loring Christie and the Genesis of the Washington Conference of 1921-1922", *Canadian Historical Review* (March, 1966), 45).

¹⁵ During the First World War, Canada relied on Japanese naval supremacy in the Pacific to defend her territories. When the Anglo-Japanese Alliance expired, thanks in part to a fervent Canadian opposition, the Washington Naval Treaty replaced it. The new treaty caused a strain on Anglo-Japanese relations. Because of this strain, and because Japan was the perceived belligerent, Canada had to look to the US and to her own Navy for defence in the Pacific (Gregory A. Johnson and Galen Roger Perras, "A Menace to the Country and the Empire: Perceptions of the Japanese Military Threat to Canada before 1931," *Contradictory Impulses*, 62-70).

a Pacific war is even greater, for her position in such an event would be extremely difficult.”¹⁶ Were a conflict to arise between Japan and the United States or Great Britain, Canada’s diplomatic and geographic position would have created a very tricky situation. Canada’s precarious position caused King to reflect on what the shift in world power meant for Canada, lamenting privately in 1936 “that British protection means less and less, U.S. protection [the] danger of losing our independence.”¹⁷ As Galen Perras argues, Canadian policy makers perceived three scenarios that seemed most likely as Sino-Japanese disputes, Japan’s military expansion, and trade embargos pushed the United States and Japan closer to war in the 1930s. The first scenario involved Canada’s allying with the Americans against Japan regardless of Britain’s position, the second saw Canada joining an “Anglo-American coalition,” and the third scenario had Canada taking a neutral stand, attempting to stay out of the war entirely.¹⁸ All three scenarios presented arduous situations for Canada, and all three required a stronger Canadian Navy on the West Coast.

In 1936, Canada and the United States began discussing the joint defence of the Pacific coast. President Roosevelt met with Prime Minister King in Quebec City and vowed to protect Canadian soil from invaders, urged joint cooperation, and implored King to bolster the pitiful Canadian defences along the West Coast. In addition, Roosevelt promoted the idea of a highway to aid both Americans and Canadians in moving troops through British Columbia to Alaska.¹⁹ King and his military advisors,

¹⁶ *The New Canadian*, 1939, Vol 2, 21.

¹⁷ William Lyon Mackenzie King Diary, 9 September 1936, LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, Diaries, MG26 J13, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/search.aspx>

¹⁸ Perras, “Who Will Defend British Columbia,” 185.

¹⁹ Timothy Wilford, *Canada’s Road to the Pacific War: Intelligence, Strategy, and the Far East Crisis*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 22.

however, feared that such a road could challenge Canadian neutrality should Japan and the United States go to war. Moreover, King suspected that if American troops were allowed onto Canadian soil, they would never leave. As Perras observes, the Canadians making defence policy doubted American intentions, reflecting Wilfrid Laurier's opinion that "[Americans] have very many fine qualities but what they have, they keep and what they have not, they want."²⁰

Nevertheless, both nations were uneasy about the absence of proper defences in British Columbia. At the same time, increasing concern with internal security revived the "Japanese problem" in British Columbia. This "problem" emerged in the late nineteenth century regarding economic and racial concerns from white British Columbian residents toward Japanese immigrants and sojourners. According to Ken Adachi, a historian of the Japanese in Canada, British Columbia was founded "as a bulwark against Americans and other more undesirable foreigners," and so since its founding, white residents had not been receptive to immigrants who did not appear to fit the British model of citizenry.²¹ During the first half of the twentieth century, British Columbian politicians attempted, in various ways, to curb Japanese immigration to Canada.²² Canadian prime ministers, although often sympathetic to these ideas, worried about trade and international obligations and so vetoed the more problematic provincial bills and used their majority to squash or alter questionable bills sponsored by British Columbia MPs in Ottawa.

²⁰ Wilfrid Laurier, quoted in Perras, "Who Will Defend British Columbia," 183.

²¹ Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*, revised edition, (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991), 37.

²² Politicians curbed Japanese immigration in the second half of the 20th century as well. John Price notes that Canada's immigration policies heavily restricted immigration from Japan and China for twenty years after the end of the Second World War.

Even so, British Columbia was able to restrict the rights and activities of the Japanese in the province by such measures as disfranchising them and denying them employment in certain industries, on government contracts, and in some professions such as law and accountancy. Yet, the Japanese gained footholds in several industries and proved resilient. By 1920 the Japanese held fifty percent of the fishing licenses in British Columbia and many canners and packers praised them for being among the most efficient and effective fishermen on the coast.²³ In 1922 the Canadian government, via the Duff Commission, instituted regulations that began cutting licenses to Japanese fishermen – with the ultimate goal of eliminating them from the industry entirely.²⁴ The Japanese Canadian community, in turn, demonstrated its indefatigability, sense of community, and adaptive nature. In many cases the Japanese made communal decisions, deciding collectively which members needed licenses the most and which members had the ability to transition into other industries such as agriculture, mining, and logging.²⁵ Meanwhile the community raised funds and took its case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which eventually overturned the racist legislation against the Japanese

²³ Department of Marine and Fisheries, *Annual Report* for 1916-1917. In 1917 the government listed licenses for gillnetters; Whites, 1,257, Indians, 842 and Japanese, 2,506. An example of effectiveness was the Japanese Canadians development of the *moyai* method of seining, a method that saw them catch 7000 chum per boat compared to the non-Japanese who caught 700 per boat. The government outlawed the method as a “conservation” method. Japanese fishermen remained competitive even when racial restrictions disallowed Japanese fishermen gas boats in gillnetting in the 1920s (Masako and Stanley Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet : BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen*, (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Pub, 2009), 36); My father ran a seiner for 25 years and claims that even in the 1980s fishermen credited Japanese fishermen for knowing the ins and outs of catching Sockeye salmon with a seine net.

²⁴ The Duff Commission was instituted in order to answer three questions related to the fishing industry in British Columbia: “(a) the prohibition of gasoline boats in salmon drift-net fishing in District No. 2. (b) *the squeezing of white men out of the fishing industry and the end of the industry as a result of too many licenses being issued to orientals [sic]*, and (c) the depleted condition of the Fraser River in so far as the sockeye fishery is concerned” (British Columbia Fisheries Commission, *Report and Recommendations*, (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1922)).

²⁵ Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei*, 113.

fishermen.²⁶ The Japanese took every opportunity to prove that they were not transient, and that Canada was their home.

During the early 1930s intolerance was less overt than previously and the Japanese in Canada quietly forged lives for themselves and their children.²⁷ With Japanese aggression in the Far East serving as an impetus, however, politicians, newspapermen and other public figures renewed racial hatred and conjecture. Mixed with economic and racial apprehensions was fear of a fifth column working within British Columbia. Allegations of Japanese naval officers masquerading as Canadian fishermen surfaced in newspapers and became a talking point among provincial and federal legislators. Rumours circulated that these men maintained supply caches in remote areas for Japanese submarines and that maps of the coastline of British Columbia produced in Japan were more accurate than those produced in Canada.²⁸ Such rumours affected general opinion toward the Japanese in Canada. White Canadians viewed both foreign-born and Canadian-born Japanese as being first, loyal to Japan and second to Canada.

As tension at home and abroad escalated in the late 1930s King was forced to address the “Japanese Problem.” The government reacted to complaints concerning illegal Japanese immigrants with a Board of Review set up in 1938 and a Commission

²⁶ Privy Council Decisions, *The Attorney General of Canada (Appeal No. 73 of 1928) v The Attorney General of British Columbia and others (Canada)* [1929] UKPC 80 (15 October, 1929). It is interesting to note that this court case was partly funded by the Japanese government.

²⁷ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 131.

²⁸ In *The Gumboot Navy*, Popp quotes several men of the FR as being able to verify that many Japanese fishermen were ex or current Japanese Naval officers. One account has a member of the FR recalling a Japanese fisherman getting drunk and coming out in naval regalia, stating “See, Japanese Navy Officer... and very soon we come over here and take over... we train Japanese Navy.” (Carol Popp, *The Gumboot Navy: Memories of the Fishermen’s Reserve* (Lantzville, BC: Oolichan books, 1988), 69). Yet, there is no conclusive proof of these allegations. Naval and police reports demonstrate that there may have been caches on the Pacific coast, but they are never verified. Likewise FR skippers reported finding detailed maps of the British Columbia coast in abandoned Japanese logging camps. For an example see: Report of Sgt. Dunbar, BC Police, 24 July, 1942, Flag Officer of the Pacific, LAC, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11806; Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 169, 228.

instituted in 1940.²⁹ The first body acted as a sounding board for British Columbians who wished to offer complaints or testimony regarding illegal immigration. In the end the board found minimal evidence of illegal immigration, stating that most allegations levelled against Japanese persons relied on second-hand information and hearsay.³⁰ The 1940 commission went beyond immigration and looked at the “Oriental Problem” as a whole. After much investigation and testimony, the commission found that the Japanese were “law-abiding and decently-behaved citizens” but that rabble-rousers had created an “unjustified suspicion” of them.³¹ The committee urged press censorship regarding unsubstantiated claims against the Japanese community and encouraged the RCMP to remain vigilant against those who sought to agitate loyal citizens.

Enter the Navy

The racial fears in British Columbia and the complicated and turbulent international scene in the Pacific were a godsend for the survival and revival of Admiral Nelles’ little fleet. The RCN had dodged the threat of eradication in the early 1930s and barely stayed afloat, thanks in no small part to Nelles’ mentor and predecessor Walter H. Hose, when Ottawa looked to cut \$2 million from the RCN in 1933.³² However, in 1935 the Liberals came into power and the Navy became a defence priority.³³

²⁹ The former, headed by H.L. Keenleyside of the Department of External Affairs, was known simply as the 1938 Board of Review. The latter commission sponsored by King’s cabinet in 1940 was titled, “The Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia.”

³⁰ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 197-199.

³¹ “Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia: Reports and Recommendations, 1940,” 15-16, FOPC JSC West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

³² Marc Milner, “Walter Hose to the Rescue: Navy Part 13,” *Legion Magazine* (online edition), (January 1, 2006), <http://legionmagazine.com/en/2006/01/walter-hose-to-the-rescue/>. In May 1933, Prime Minister Bennett asked his Chief military advisor how he could cut \$3.6 million from the defence budget. His advisor, considering the navy inferior to the army and air force and nearing obsolescence world wide, recommended cutting the RCN completely. Walter Hose fought back, arguing for the RCN in front of the Treasury Board. Hose notified the Board that if they made further cuts to the Navy the service would

With international pressure mounting, the Liberals doubled the naval budget between 1936 and 1937 particularly to address problems on the West Coast where military advisors predicted the most imminent threat. When Maritime residents complained, Minister of National Defence, Ian Mackenzie, the Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre, declared that the East Coast was not being neglected but for “obvious reasons, special consideration” had been given to the western defences.³⁴ These “obvious reasons” concerned British naval supremacy in the Atlantic but not in the Pacific.

Although Canadian military advisors were concerned over German and Italian aggression in Europe they saw Japan as the greater and more imminent threat. Naval historian Roger Sarty notes, “virtually without discussion, the government and military agreed” in 1936 that the rearmament of the Pacific Coast needed to be a priority for Canada. The King cabinet called on the Joint Services Committee (JSC) to ascertain the minimum level of military improvements required for the adequate defence of Canada’s borders. The JSC’s assessment called for a five year building plan that would bolster the navy by adding six modern destroyers to defend British Columbia – as well as improving land and air power along the coast. However, Parliament was unwilling to foot the 200 million dollar bill prescribed by the JSC’s analysis, so the plan was scrapped and the government instituted a smaller scale defence scheme instead. From 1936 to 1940 Canada built a series of anti-submarine nets, anti-torpedo defences, and a long range coastal battery at Esquimalt, Canada’s western naval base. Other coastal fortresses were

collapse and Canada would be defenceless along her coasts. Hose pled his case and the government listened, only cutting \$200,000 from the force in 1933, instead of the proposed \$2 million.

³³ Military spending increased with the Air Force receiving the most attention and funding, closely followed by the Navy. Most of the improvements were focused on home defence. (Ian Mackenzie, House of Commons, *Debates* (hereafter HCD), 26 April 1939, 3237.)

³⁴ Ian Mackenzie, HCD, 13 May 1938, 2941.

outfitted with modern artillery, and the naval base at Prince Rupert was overhauled to facilitate dockage for larger vessels.³⁵ The Navy also received new ships. The most notable, and celebrated, addition to defence was the purchase of four older destroyers from the British Admiralty. Britain, at this time in a naval arms race with Germany, had been “encouraged” by Canada’s limited rearmament. Looking to bolster a stronger fleet for the British Empire, Whitehall sold Ottawa the ships at a discounted price.³⁶ This purchase immediately improved the size and effectiveness of the RCN greatly and saved Canada millions of dollars.³⁷ By 1938, all four of the RCN’s newest and most powerful vessels were sent to Esquimalt to defend British Columbia.

Both civilians and military personnel praised the improved coastal defences as a good start but remained bewildered and upset by King’s persistent frugality in the face of, what they perceived as an imminent danger to the West Coast.³⁸ They demanded increased defensive security. Torchy Anderson, writing in the *Vancouver Province*, admitted the new defensive bolstering was “putting a little flesh – very little – on the skeleton of Canada’s defence scheme” but speculated that without further improvements

³⁵ Roger F. Sarty, *The Maritime Defence of Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996), 98-99. Areas approved to receive artillery in 1937 were Yorke Island, Stanley Park and Grey Point (Naval Staff Report to JCSF, March 1941, LAC, FOPC Defence, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11801; Peter N. Moogk, *Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859-1949* (Surrey, B.C: Antonson, 1978), 59).

³⁶ W.A.B Douglas, Rogert Sarty and Michael Whitby, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943*, Vol. 2, part. 1, (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 31.

³⁷ Canada, expected to be allied with the United States and/or Britain should a war break out and so tailored its Navy to fulfil “secondary” roles such as anti-submarine warfare. The purchase of four destroyers was intended to defend Canada but also supplement the RN. Britain was happy to see Canada improving its Navy with destroyers, as these ships’ role (hunting submarines) “received little attention and were career backwaters” in Britain, according to the official RCN history (Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 37).

³⁸ Mackenzie King had a limited budget and did not want to commit the same extent of manpower to a war effort as World War I. Bolstering the Navy and Air Force would be his way of contributing to defence and to the empire without the loss of life that was seen in the Great War (Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 31).

Canada would not be wholly secure.³⁹ Captain V.G. Brodeur, Commanding Officer of the Pacific, urged Ottawa to build advanced airbases and more anti-aircraft defences, arguing that attacking planes could potentially destroy all of their targets before the air force defence could get airborne. Brodeur also pushed for the purchase of at least two more destroyers. He contended that splitting up the four RCN destroyers between the North (Prince Rupert) and South (Esquimalt) of British Columbia would be ineffective, claiming that two destroyers against an enemy capital ship would be nothing more than a “suicidal force.”⁴⁰

The Birth of the FR

At this time of perceived internal and external threats from Japan Mainguy recommended to Ottawa that a Fishermen’s Reserve could be a valuable addition to West Coast defence. Rowland Bourke, a retired Royal Naval Reserve officer who was then working as a civilian clerk for the RCNR in British Columbia, drew on his work with fishermen in the Royal Naval Reserves during the First World War and gave Mainguy the idea of the FR in 1937. After being turned down by Canadian armed services during the Great War due to poor eyesight Bourke had gone to Great Britain and enlisted in the Naval Reserves there. While commanding an auxiliary craft, where many of his subordinates were fishermen, Bourke won the Victoria Cross for rescuing sailors in Belgium while under heavy fire.⁴¹ He returned to Canada a war hero, moved to British

³⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 14 December 1937, as cited in Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 182.

⁴⁰ Captain (D), HMCS Skeena to Naval Secretary, 1 December 1937, FOPC Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. A capital ship, as Brodeur uses it, probably would have been a battleship, heavy cruiser or aircraft carrier. That is a ship with heavy firepower and armour, meant to inflict great damage on ships or targets on shore.

⁴¹ Bourke received a Distinguished Service Order for rescuing 38 sailors and towing a Motor Launch out of harm’s way. Two weeks later Bourke won the Victoria Cross for the following actions: “On May 9-10, Bourke’s ML followed the blockship HMS *Vindictive*...into the Belgian harbour. While backing out after

Columbia to try his hand at farming in the Kootenays, and by 1937 was working as a civilian for the RCNR.

Bourke was concerned that the RCNR was completely bereft of fishermen and questioned why the Navy had not tried to recruit from this pool of maritime experts. At the same time, Bourke became increasingly worried about internal and external Japanese threats and by the lack of Canadian naval power. Combining his two concerns, he proposed using one to solve the other. He wrote to Mainguy, painting the FR as a means of addressing the danger of the Japanese living within Canada. In recommending the FR to his superiors in Ottawa, Mainguy attached Bourke's original proposal. The opening two paragraphs give a general break down of why Bourke thought the FR was necessary, and of the role he envisioned for the FR:

The very large number of Alien fishermen on this coast constitute a grave danger in the event of war. As this is generally realized it is not necessary to quote facts and figures in proof. . . The remedy appears to be to intern enemy aliens as quickly as possible in the event of war. Considering the very large number of small fishing boats owned by aliens and the nature of the West Coast with its numerous islands and channels the best way to round up enemy aliens would be to use Canadian, British and Scandinavian fisherman in their own vessels, suitably armed, to round up all enemy aliens and intern them in camps, *definite plans and location of which, I trust, have already been settled.*⁴²

Bourke laid out the make-up and purpose of the FR as a group of savvy, white fishermen who had the knowledge and wherewithal to root out the "alien fishermen" living along the coast. Although most military advisors usually stuck with the ambiguous and

the raid, he heard cries from the water. Bourke made a prolonged search of the area amid very heavy gunfire at close range. He found a Lieutenant and two ratings from the RN ship badly wounded in the water. Bourke's own launch was hit 55 times and two of the crew were killed. Nevertheless, he managed to bring out his vessel in one piece." ("Commander Rowland Bourke, VC, DSO," CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum website, http://www.navalandmilitarymuseum.org/resource_pages/heroes/bourke.html (Accessed 10 January 2013)).

⁴² Memorandum to RCNR Special Section (FR), 1937, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. My emphasis.

technically incorrect term “enemy aliens” rather than naming the targeted party, Bourke clarified later in his memo that in this case, and indeed all cases on the West Coast, enemy aliens would “presumably [be] Japs.”⁴³ According to Bourke, the potential danger of Japanese fishermen in British Columbia was so apparent and well known that he did not have to make a case for *why* they were dangerous, but only needed to show *how* the government could go about immobilizing them. Finally, this passage indicates Bourke’s assumption that the government had already planned enemy alien internment sites for when war broke out with Japan.

In 1936 the Canadian government had already begun to make contingency plans for a war with Japan, although Bourke’s assumption was wrong, as no definite plans had been made for the internment of internal enemies. Regardless, Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) was interested in Bourke’s plan.⁴⁴ Admiral Percy W. Nelles, chief of the Naval Staff, viewed the FR as a cheap and effective way to bolster West Coast defences against the risk of fifth column activities.⁴⁵ Nelles forwarded Mainguy’s memo to Ian Mackenzie, the Minister of Defence, outlining the benefits of the FR. Nelles

⁴³ Ibid. In order to get a fishing license in Canada a fisherman had to either be a naturalized Canadian or born in Canada. As Patricia Roy points out, the fact that Bourke, and others, label Japanese Canadian fishermen, “enemy aliens,” is “incorrect legally but speaks volumes about prejudices.” There were accounts of white and Japanese Canadians renting fishing licenses to immigrants without Canadian citizenship, as well as aliens owning boats and renting them to white and Japanese Canadians who held licenses, but this was not the norm. (See Masako and Stanley Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen*, (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2009).

⁴⁴ Captain (D)., HMCS Skeena to Naval Secretary, 1 December 1937, FOPC Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. Although some defence measures were recommended in earlier reports it was not until 1940 that Canadian military strategists pushed for a limited internment of enemy nationals and listed Japanese residents by name. They also called for barring all Japanese fishermen from certain areas of the coast and dedicated several pages of the report to the possibility of sabotage from Japanese residents and how the military would deal with such an internal threat. (Memo of the JSC, Pacific Coast, on the matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada, 12 July 1940, FOPC JSC West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772).

⁴⁵ Fifth Column is a term stemming from the Spanish Civil War when a general claimed that as his four columns approached a city, that a fifth column inside the city would rise up. Basically in this case it is the idea that Japanese spies were lying in wait to cause trouble, blow things up, and sabotage British Columbia should a conflict arise.

posited that the Reserve, “a valuable adjunct in an emergency,” would first, be a means to round up enemy aliens on the West Coast “immediately *prior* to the outbreak of war,” and second to be used after the outbreak of war as an “inshore patrol” of the British Columbian coast.⁴⁶ Nelles labelled the FR as a pre-emptive strike-force against a population living along the coast. Although Nelles did not specifically indicate the intended target, Mainguy’s original proposal cited the “ever-present problem of the Japanese fishermen” and Bourke’s initial proposal singled out the Japanese by name. Thus it is safe to conclude that Nelles also had the Japanese in mind.⁴⁷ The chief of the Naval Staff concluded his report by requesting that a man be sent up the coast to gather information from men in the fishing industry which would be followed by a full recruitment trip in the summer if the trial run proved a success.

Before Parliament convened in January 1938, Mackenzie approved the idea of the FR “in principle.” With not much time to include the FR into the budget of 1938, he requested the navy to investigate “immediately” and report on the feasibility of such a reserve.⁴⁸ The Naval authorities chose Bourke to do the initial expedition up the coast. The seemingly obvious choice as the originator of the concept, Bourke had other assets. Although he worked as a clerk for the RCNR, he was neither currently enlisted in the Canadian military nor had he ever been. Thus, authorities could deny they were officially involved in the expedition should it cause a negative reaction from the Japanese consulate, the fishing unions, or the fishermen themselves. However, if the investigation proved successful, the RCN could claim Bourke as one its own. As a Victoria Cross

⁴⁶ Memo to the Deputy Minister, 10 January 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. My emphasis.

⁴⁷ E.R. Mainguy to CNS, 15 November 1937, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681; Memorandum to RCNR Special Section (FR), 1937, LAC, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

⁴⁸ Memo to the Deputy Minister, 10 January 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Handwritten note by Mackenzie at the bottom of the document.

winner and proven defender of the empire via the Royal Navy, Bourke would make an ideal poster boy for the RCN and in turn stimulate recruiting and publicity.

NSHQ brought Bourke to Ottawa and asked him to return to the West Coast to meet with fisheries officials, RCMP officers, RCNR recruiters, business owners and other influential “gentlemen” to gain their opinion on the FR, to work out how the FR would obtain or charter boats; gather “rough estimates” of men and boats willing to sign up, to find a boat to be used as a RCNR recruiting vessel, to uncover the best time to train fishermen in the North and South, and to gain any other information that might be useful to naval authorities. Headquarters also insisted that there be no public meetings and no promises made regarding the future of the FR. This was to be an unofficial, trial trip only; the government did not want any publicity, so it instructed Bourke to keep his findings “strictly confidential.”⁴⁹

The secrecy of the trip was related in part to communist leanings of the coastal fishermen’s unions. During the 1930s some unions had caused major disruptions to the fishing industry including a case in the early 1930s when the RCMP in Prince Rupert called on the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) to guard government buildings against strikers.⁵⁰ The government furnished Bourke with a list of unions he should contact for recruiting fishermen and ones he should avoid, with “Good” pencilled in beside those for the former, and “Red” pencilled in for the latter.⁵¹ Bourke and future recruiters worried that communists would find a way to turn the FR into a vehicle of their

⁴⁹ CNS to Bourke, pp 1-2, 22 January 1938, LAC, FOPC Proposed Organization of the Special Section of the FR, vol. 11820.

⁵⁰ The RCNVR usually consisted of men who were not expert seamen whereas the members of the RCNR were almost always former naval officers or men who were expert seamen.

⁵¹ Organizations of Fishermen, British Columbia, pp 1-2, 24 February 1938, LAC, FRWCO, R112-614-4E, vol. 5681.

own political and commercial gain. In a FR recruiting trip later that year the RCMP informed FR officials that “communists thought it a great idea to plant their men in the Reserve and embarrass the government...as opportunities arose.”⁵² Thus, Bourke and recruiters were careful about what they said to the press and usually wary of foreigners from Central Europe; men from these areas were not banned from the Reserve but FR officials recruited Italians and “Slavs” with caution.⁵³

Another reason for secrecy concerned relations with Japan at a time of international uncertainty. Trade with Japan boomed due to Japanese military build up; yet, this same expansion brought about a renewed fear of Japan, and caused Canadians to question the ethics of supplying raw materials for Japan’s war effort. This negative attitude towards Japan in turn provided an atmosphere on which anti-Japanese agitators in British Columbia could gain traction. MPs began proposing new bills targeting the Japanese in British Columbia and King was forced to ask MPs to be careful about what they said so as to not offend the Japanese government or people. Along the same lines, creating a reserve of fishermen to round up “enemy aliens” could be perceived as a pre-emptive move against Japan. By making the Reserve open to whites only, it left little doubt as to what race of fishermen constituted “enemy fishermen.”⁵⁴ The press or Japanese government could interpret the reason for the FR in damaging ways.

⁵² FR Naval Training, February 1939, p. 6, 1 March 1939, LAC, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁵³ Letter of Proceedings, Prince Rupert, HMCS Skidegate, p. 2, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

⁵⁴ Aboriginal fishermen were not considered for the FR initially. Yet, they were also not suspected as an enemy. Their place in the FR is discussed in the next chapter.

Consequently, Bourke was told to keep quiet until the kinks in the FR were worked out and the idea could be presented in a positive light.⁵⁵

With prudence and secrecy, Bourke began his journey up the coast of British Columbia in February 1938. Aboard a borrowed fisheries vessel, he spent three weeks visiting the most important fishing centres (Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, Ucluelet, Bamfield, Port Alberni, and Prince Rupert) where he pursued recruits and interviewed important men in the industry. In March he submitted his findings to NSHQ and the Commander of Pacific Command (COPC) in Esquimalt. Within the report he noted the cooperation and excitement from fisheries officers, politicians, businessmen, cannery owners, and the three big fish packing companies that controlled many of the licenses, owned many of the boats, and employed a large number of fishermen. Bourke stated that they all “realized” the need for the Reserve and that the idea was “received with enthusiasm by everyone but the fishermen themselves.”⁵⁶ Although Bourke still generated interest from 150 fishermen, they were not as keen on the idea as those in the industry who would not be serving directly.⁵⁷

Bourke attributed this reticence to the stubborn and unique attitudes found amongst the seiners, gilnetters, trollers and halibutmen. Although he called the men “hardy” and “self-reliant,” he also noted that they were “slow in making up their mind” about the FR and “[had] a great fear of being, as they put it, ‘Put in the Navy’.”⁵⁸ Fishing, according to Bourke, attracted an independent group of men and those he contacted were

⁵⁵ CNS to Bourke, 22 January 1938, FOPC Proposed Organization of the Special Section of the FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

⁵⁶ Rowland Bourke to CNS, p.5, 5 March 1938, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁵⁷ Eighty of the recruits had their own boats and seventy did not.

⁵⁸ Rowland Bourke to CNS, p. 1, 11 May 1938; Rowland Bourke to CNS, p. 1, 5 March 1938, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

wary of any scheme that would jeopardize their independence. Compounding the problem, the pool of men from which he could draw – white, British subjects, in Canada for at least two years – was rife with foreign born fishermen who were even more leery of the government. He mentioned several times throughout his report that concessions would have to be made in order to achieve full recruitment.

During peacetime, the men saw only a few problems with the Reserve, most of them having to do with chartering fees, insurance issues, or the perceived propensity of the government to use the naval reserves to help break strikes during the 1930s.⁵⁹ The make or break assurance required by the fishermen centred on regulations in time of war. If war broke out, the men wanted to be guaranteed that the RCN would only require them to serve on converted fishing boats along the British Columbian coast and that they would not be transferred to serve on larger warships or in other theatres of war. Many fishermen saw the training offered by the Navy in the offseason as a benefit and the organization as helpful, but had no interest in serving on larger boats with true naval discipline and a uniform that would make them look as if they were “dressing up.”⁶⁰

Bourke recommended this independence be recognized and that the fishermen be made into a “special section” of the RCNR with a completely separate set of regulations.⁶¹ In order to accommodate the recruits and to ease pressure on naval facilities, he proposed small deviances from the RCNR handbook such as the lack of an official uniform, travel pay for training, bunking on the boats instead of in barracks and

⁵⁹ Captain J. Oliver, “Dam the Fish: Full Speed Ahead!” *West Coast Boat Journal*, in Maritime Museum, Victoria, BC. Captain J. Oliver notes that the men did not want any part of breaking up commercial disputes as their sympathies would lie most likely with the strikers.

⁶⁰ Bourke to RCN Barracks, 6 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

⁶¹ Often times in the early years (1937-1939) the Fishermen’s Reserve was referred to by three different acronyms: FR, RCNR SS and FRS. The inconsistency remains in reports throughout WWII and writers after the war have used terms interchangeably. The FR is the most prominent.

cooks on each boat instead of a mess hall. He also insisted on larger deviances from the standard RCNR handbook; for example, that men should be recruited as a crew and not as individuals, that enlistees should be required only to serve on the West Coast of Canada, and that the RCN should create a pay scale for charter fees and insurance on the boats of the FR when in training or at war. Bourke argued strongly that recruiting would be stymied without a specific handbook. All his recommendations – in some form – were ultimately instituted into a specialized handbook for the FR early on in the Reserve’s existence. However, every deviance from the regular handbook later created a headache for NSHQ.⁶²

At the time of Bourke’s report, Nelles did not comment on the necessity of a unique handbook, other than to state that he thought the inability to transfer these men to other vessels or coasts would be a moot point, as he was sure the men would do their duty wherever they were called.⁶³ He was impressed with Bourke’s work and recommended that an enlisted officer be immediately appointed to head the new FR organization and draw up regulations. As requested, Nelles sent the report to Mackenzie so he could consider including the FR in the upcoming defence budget.

Defence Minister Mackenzie did not comment on the specifics of the handbook but approved the scheme and presented it along with his 34 million dollar defence budget to Parliament two weeks later. Mackenzie justified the FR as a key element of the Liberals’ defence plan which focused on guarding Canada’s borders.⁶⁴ He announced that earlier that year the King government had sent one of “our most distinguished naval

⁶² These will be addressed in Chapter 4.

⁶³ Nelles Memo to Deputy Minister, 19 February 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4E, 5681.

⁶⁴ In March of 1938, Ian Mackenzie was quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* stating “in the present disturbed condition of the world our greatest responsibility is to preserve peace in Canada.”

officers in Canada” to research a new fleet capable of bolstering the defence of the West Coast.⁶⁵ He called Bourke’s investigation successful and revealed that the FR would be instituted on the West Coast in 1938 and on the East Coast the following year – assuming the MPs passed his new budget.⁶⁶

Mackenzie endorsed a plan that he hoped would appeal to MPs in British Columbia: defending British Columbia, giving an opportunity to constituents in fishing communities, and having the potential to further check the Japanese living in British Columbia. In his speech, he specifically addressed A.W. Neill (Independent, Comox-Alberni), praising him for having had an idea similar to the FR and insinuating that the government had British Columbian interests in mind. Neill had demanded better defence on the West Coast for years and had recently spearheaded two bills targeting Japanese Canadians in British Columbia.⁶⁷ One would limit Japanese in the fisheries; the other would ultimately end immigration from Japan. The majority of MPs from British Columbia, representing three parties, supported Neill’s bills, heralding them as important for both economic prosperity and coastal security and not because of any sort of racial agenda.⁶⁸ H.C. Green (Conservative, Vancouver South) speaking for other British Columbia MPs, informed Parliament that the bills were urgent and necessary since the current situation with the Japanese had become “doubly menacing,” first because there

⁶⁵ Ian Mackenzie, HCD, 24 March 1938, 1648.

⁶⁶ The training and recruiting of men on the West Coast was to be used as a template for a similar organization on the East Coast that was to be instituted the following year. Yet, whereas the West Coast provided the particular political underpinnings and sleepy backwater nature to nurture such a reserve in 1938 the East Coast did not have such an environment in 1939 and a FR never came about.

⁶⁷ In the same month that the FR was introduced in Parliament A.W. Neill, the MP from Comox-Alberni, lead the charge on two anti-Japanese bills. With the first bill, Neill sought to reinstate the Duff Commission of the 1920s in order to free the fishing industry from “the hands of Japanese fishermen.” The second bill was designed drafted to ultimately end Japanese immigration into Canada by abolishing current agreements with Japan.

⁶⁸ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 195, 306. Neill in Parliament took (or feigned) offense that the Japanese Canadian community in British Columbia had painted him as a racist. He insisted that everything he did, he did for the safety, security and well-being of the British Columbian people.

were no proper defences on the West Coast to deal with an external attack from Japan and second due to the fact “that there were settled in our province thousands of their [Japanese] compatriots in strategic positions” willing to aid, from inside the province, a coastal attack.⁶⁹ Prime Minister King feared that Neill’s targeting of the Japanese would disrupt relations, and consequently, trade with Japan.⁷⁰ King asked Neill to withdraw his exclusionary bill pointing out how “embarrassing it would be to the existing world situation to Great Britain, etc.” King also offered secret correspondence to change Neill’s mind and even threatened to sink Neill politically if he stayed his course, but despite King’s best efforts, Neill refused to drop the bill. Therefore, the Prime Minister probably instructed Mackenzie to create a middle path, that is, to bolster defences in order to satisfy (and quiet) Neill and his supporters, but at the same time be sensitive to trade relations with Japan.⁷¹ Mackenzie used the FR as part of this middle path.

To facilitate this, in his parliamentary speech Mackenzie did not mention the Japanese in British Columbia, but when he met some of the British Columbia MPs privately, he informed them that the true purpose of the FR was as a defensive reserve that would target the Japanese living in British Columbia, thereby suppressing the Japanese further and opening up opportunities for white fishermen in British Columbia.⁷² Although the British Columbia MPs continued supporting the two bills against the Japanese (both would ultimately fail), a short while after the closed door conversation,

⁶⁹ H.C. Green, HCD, 1 April 1938, 1967.

⁷⁰ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 201.

⁷¹ King Diary, 16 February 1938. In order to convince Neill, Mackenzie threatened to withdraw Liberal support to him in future elections, to “stall” his Bill in Committee, and even tried to convince him by reading him a “secret dispatch” related to the precarious international situation. Yet, despite their best efforts, King and Mackenzie were unable to convince Neill. In the end King noted that Neill was “wholly unreasonable” and “seemed anxious to have his Bill voted down which, of course, was simply to embarrass our Party, and help himself.”

⁷² Ian Mackenzie, HCD, 16 May 1938, 2931.

what the *Vancouver Sun* labelled, an unusually “sympathetic and harmonious House” approved Mackenzie’s increased RCN budget⁷³

After Mackenzie’s budget speech, rumours circulated amongst the press concerning the new Reserve. Some British Columbian journalists thought (correctly) that the government was creating a new naval unit specifically to deal with the Japanese living along the coast.⁷⁴ Naval officials made no comment as the Naval Secretary had told Bourke and others in the know to remain tight lipped with the press.⁷⁵ However, Bourke disagreed and wrote to J.O. Cossette, the Naval Secretary, a day after Mackenzie brought up the FR in Parliament, suggesting that a press release could clear these rumours and provide a more accurate story to the newspapers. Moreover, according to Bourke, an official statement “would be of great interest to the general public and particularly pleasing to the people of British Columbia as a demonstration that the Government is taking whatever steps are possible to offset the Japanese menace in the event of war.” He included a list of salient points on the FR, none of which pointed specifically to the Japanese, but instead spoke to coastal defence more generally. However, a day after Bourke sent his recommendation to Ottawa, in which he praised the press for being “extremely good in not publishing” information about the FR, the *Vancouver Sun* printed a story about the FR, beating the government to the punch and showing Canadians the purpose of the Reserve.⁷⁶ The piece focused on the internment

⁷³ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 196. See footnote 69 for a brief explanation of the bills. Roy explains what else King did to satisfy those who supported the Bill. Neill claimed that if party whips were removed the bills would have passed easily (Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 191; *Vancouver Sun*, 26 March 1938).

⁷⁴ Bourke to CNS, p. 1, 25 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Like the instructions to Mackenzie above, this was probably a request passed down directly from King in an attempt to maintain harmonious Japan-Canada relations.

⁷⁶ Bourke to CNS, p. 1, 25 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Bourke was particularly impressed with the Prince Rupert press as this was “big news” up there and this must have been a “big temptation” for the journalists to print the story.

aspect of the FR and praised the government for this step.⁷⁷ It cited Bourke telling possible recruits in Ucluelet that in a time of war "your first duty would be to intern all nationals of the enemy country." Bourke was incensed, and demanded an apology from the *Sun*, but the government let the episode pass quietly; the FR, and its purpose, was no longer a secret.⁷⁸

Picking a Leader, Choosing the Men.

With budget approval anticipated, Mackenzie gave the RCN the green light to begin the search for an officer to lead and organize the FR. Although the FR was Bourke's brainchild, as a civilian he was not in a position to lead it. He continued to advise naval officials, but his role in the FR waned over the next year. Nelles asserted that the FR required a leader who was local and had "on the ground" knowledge and was not just an "officer chosen at random."⁷⁹ NSHQ understood that recruitment would be more successful if the recruiter was able to relate to the independent and gruff nature of the fishermen. Moreover, the political climate demanded a man of tact and intelligence, who could rally support for the Reserve from cannery owners and from the fishermen themselves. This delicate situation and independent nature of the recruits led to the appointment of Lieutenant Commander Colin Donald.

Donald was an ideal leader for the FR. He was British Columbian – born and raised on Vancouver Island. He had a long service record in the navy: training reservists, serving on ships and submarines in the RN, and commanding vessels in the RCN. Donald

⁷⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 26 March 1938.

⁷⁸ Bourke to CNS, 28 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Bourke called the article "inaccurate" and stated that "Unless some way can be found of protecting the newspapers that respect the Department's wishes, it seems unlikely they will be willing to continue to do so."

⁷⁹ Memo to the Deputy Minister, 10 January 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

was also well connected and liked by others in the RCN; he counted many personal friends of rank at Naval Headquarters in Ottawa.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Donald was gregarious, down-to-earth, and outdoorsy. He was a former boxing champion in the RN, captain of the Naval Rugby team in Victoria, and had sailed the British Columbia coast aboard naval vessels and on pleasure craft during fishing trips. In short, he was rough and tough enough to connect with fishermen, while at the same time disciplined enough to toe the line of naval duty. Although an ideal candidate by his own merits, a major boost to his application was the recommendation of the director of Naval Reserves, Mainguy. Mainguy and Donald were childhood friends in Chemainus and had maintained their friendship through their years at the RCN academy in Halifax, being only a year apart, and throughout their naval careers. Although Nelles and Mackenzie had the final say, Mainguy, was in charge of the Reserves and had much influence on the appointment. During the spring of 1938 Donald was summoned to Ottawa from his reservist post in the Maritimes.⁸¹

Nelles informed Donald as he passed through Ottawa that he had “a very hard job ahead” of him; other friends and officers told Donald that leading and organizing the FR would be “the dickens of a job.”⁸² Despite the warning, he accepted his new role with great anticipation and set about constructing the skeleton of regulations that would support the diverse and independent body of men from which he had to draw. He understood early on that he would need to tread lightly in this new command, balancing

⁸⁰ Donald to Brodeur, p. 1, 14 February 1946, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives, Donald Fonds, 993.90.1. From personal letters it can be concluded that Donald was friends with the following rather powerful RCN officers: Rear-Admiral Victor Brodeur, Rear-Admiral H.N. Lay, Commodore Ronald Ian Agnew, Commodore W.J.R. Beech, Rear-Admiral R.E.S. Bidwell, Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray, Rear-Admiral C.R. Taylor, and Vice-Admiral E.R. Mainguy.

⁸¹ J. F. Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island: Who Was Who, 1850-1950* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2010), 244.

⁸² Donald to Brodeur, 14 February 1946, Donald Fonds, 993.90.1; Donald to Taylor, 28 July 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.40.

concerns coming from his superiors, politicians, officials in the fishing industry, and the fishermen all at once. Over the next months, he did just this, solidifying most of what would become the FR handbook and soliciting compromise along the way from both his recruits and his superiors.⁸³

Donald's first hurdle was dealing with Bourke. Although Donald kept many of Bourke's original ideas for the FR he quickly began to formulate his own vision for the Reserve independent of Bourke. As the originator of the Reserve, Bourke took offense to this and complained to Mainguy that he had laid the groundwork for the FR in February and thus completed "possibly the hardest part" of creating the Reserve.⁸⁴ He demanded, for the second time in less than a month, a naval commission and consequently increased authority in the FR (his exact words were, "I *know* you will see that my promotion goes through for sure and with little delay as possible").⁸⁵ The Victoria Cross winner asserted that the FR would fail without his help and exclaimed to Mainguy, "for goodness' sake tell Donald to give me his confidence and allow me to give him my assistance." He added that he would prefer not to recruit with Donald and that much better results would be obtained if just Bourke and McLeod – the newly appointed paymaster from Prince Rupert – were the ones to recruit along the coast.⁸⁶ In the end, Bourke received only half of his demands; he was commissioned as a Lieutenant Commander, but would not gain any

⁸³ The finished handbook remained in place with only minor amendments for four years. In 1942 the FR was completely reorganized to deal with unexpected issues emerging due to the war with Japan.

⁸⁴ Bourke to Mainguy, 5 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681. By doing so Bourke skipped several levels of required command hierarchy, but then again, Bourke was technically still a civilian (much to his chagrin).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* In Bourke's defence, Mainguy had promised him a promotion for his work in the FR sometime in February, but it had never gone through. My emphasis.

⁸⁶ Bourke to Mainguy, 5 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681. Bourke assured Mainguy that he "knew what he was talking about" and considered his own recruitment plan of the "greatest importance."

influence in the FR, as soon thereafter was transferred to the RCNVR to help with recruiting.

Bourke stayed with Donald for a little under a year. From time to time after that he was called on to offer suggestions for the FR, but ultimately Donald steered the Reserve in the direction of his choice. Donald set about solidifying an effective recruitment policy that offered enough incentive to a group of tough, independent fishermen, who had hitherto avoided any sort of relationship with the Navy, while at the same time adhering to the requirements laid down by his superiors. Recruitment and organization could not be presented in a “take it or leave it” fashion as was the case in the regular army or navy – where a recruit joined and agreed to adhere to the regulations, or was rejected. Instead, recruiters had to sell the Reserve and coax potential recruits into joining.

Donald canvassed political and commercial sources outside the RCN, including some of the recruits themselves, to complement Bourke’s original report and better understand what would attract men and make the Reserve successful. The same fears of “being put in the Navy” were reiterated by the men interviewed, as were concerns over charter fees and insurance policies.⁸⁷ Donald also sought help from politicians in British Columbia. A.W. Neill saw the FR as another opportunity to curtail the Japanese community in British Columbia and so encouraged businessmen and officials along the coast to support Donald’s efforts.⁸⁸ Officials in Ottawa supplied Donald with a list of men who would be valuable in helping him to pick the right type of fishermen and

⁸⁷ Pete Jorgensen to Donald, 30 April 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.12.

⁸⁸ Letter of Proceedings, Prince Rupert, HMCS Skidegate, p. 2, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820.

reminded him to avoid fishermen belonging to communist unions.⁸⁹ As requests and suggestions flooded in, Donald carefully formulated a general recruiting policy and a list of key names. After several months of preparation, he began active recruiting for the FR in July 1938.

Aboard the recently purchased HMCS *Skidegate*, Donald and his crew of four set off up the coast to spark interest in the Reserve.⁹⁰ Starting in late July, the *Skidegate* visited various key fishing towns around Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland before heading to Prince Rupert on August 1. Donald took with him hundreds of copies of a flyer titled “Possible Conditions for Service” to hand out to recruits. This condensed version of the yet-to-be approved FR handbook provided the fishermen with the terms of service. The first four bullets outlined eligibility: white, healthy men, of any age, who made their living by fishing. The next nine points laid out further information on what would be expected of enlistees and what they would receive in return for their service. Each man would have to commit to a 5 year agreement as a reservist, extended indefinitely if war broke out, and four weeks a year of training in Esquimalt. In return he would receive “practical” naval instruction in handling a boat, hunting for submarines, firing weapons, using semaphore, understanding the benefits of naval discipline, and dropping depth charges. Additionally the navy would pay each man a \$100 retainer every

⁸⁹ Donald was to contact men in and outside of the fishing industry with a wide diversity of backgrounds, including, bankers, retired army officials, cannery owners, doctors, lawyers, fisheries officials and other men who might help him recruit effectively.

⁹⁰ I recently discovered that the HMCS *Skidegate*, which was built in the 1920s as a fishing boat and bought by the RCN in 1938, was renamed *The Santa Rosa* and converted into a seiner after the war. In 1986 my father, Jeff Kier, skippered the *Santa Rosa* for 3 seasons. From the ages of one to four I spent my summers aboard the vessel that recruited the majority of the FR.

year and provide them with wages and a victualling allowance during training - \$3.75 for skippers, \$1.85 for able seamen, and eighty-five cents a day per man for food.⁹¹

Donald coupled these written assurances of duties and benefits with verbal assurances in speeches at town hall meetings or conversations on the docks. When speaking with fishermen Donald, outlined the purpose and duties of the FR in order of importance, as indicated in his notes:

- (a) The rounding up of enemy aliens, sympathizers and undesirables in out of the way sections of the Coast.
- (b) Seizing of the above mentioned boats and property.
- (c) A slow reconnaissance Patrol. (Reporting, etc.).
- (d) Larger Seine and Halibut boats could possibly carry out Searching Sweep duties.
- (e) Pilotage duties for larger vessels in uncharted waters.
- (f) Packing and freighting for the Department of National Defence.⁹²

The first two objectives translated into the most important recruiting points for Donald. The recruits were likely keen on the idea of disrupting any economic footholds gained by the Japanese living along the coast. White fishermen, with their exclusive unions, had attempted to eliminate the Japanese from the industry for over thirty years, nearly succeeding in the 1920s with the Duff Commission. It seems that many fishermen viewed the FR as a means of finally taking back the fishing industry from the Japanese. In an interview half a year after Donald's recruiting drive, the *Daily Province* noted that the fishermen said they agreed to sign up and train with the RCN in order to "curb the Japanese who are encroaching on their preserves."⁹³ In the same piece, the reporter noted

⁹¹ Bourke, "Possible Conditions of Service," March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681; The retainer was a yearly fee of \$100 that the RCN paid to each man. In exchange the men were required to lend their service in a time of war.

⁹² FR Naval Training February 1939, p.5, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁹³ *Victoria Daily Province*, 15 February 1939. Old-time fishermen, in informal conversations with the author, verified this sentiment. One was of the opinion, that if it were not for the Second World War, the

a skipper during training cry, “Full speed ahead to Steveston!” to his crew as they practiced on the machine gun.⁹⁴ As over half of the Japanese fishermen resided at Steveston it is clear that the FR recruits knew what they were being trained for – the subjugation of their competitors.

Although Donald denied to the press that this constituted racial targeting, in private correspondence and while recruiting he validated the *Province*'s allegations. He and J.E. McLeod convinced a skeptical president of one fishermen's union that without the FR Canada could very well lose the war and then “there would be no fishing industry for white men.”⁹⁵ In another case, after receiving word that Californian fishermen wanted to replicate the Canadian FR, Donald confided to a friend, “no doubt the threat of the Japanese to bring floating canneries to this side of the Pacific is having its effect on the minds of fishermen of both countries.”⁹⁶ Donald viewed this perceived commercial threat to white fishermen's livelihoods as a means of creating a Reserve from a group of men who would normally reject a naval recruiter immediately. Men were motivated to join Donald's Reserve for a variety of reasons (patriotism, boredom, money), but commercial self-preservation was the most prominent selling point.

Although the fishermen understood the potential benefits of joining the FR, they still feared being pressed into service and being used as strike-breakers. Donald assured them that they would not be transferred off the coast and that the FR would not be

Japanese would have taken over the fishing industry in British Columbia. He recalled that the FR had a good old time patrolling and running up and down the coast, but that they also joined because the Japanese were taking over the industry and needed to be stopped.

⁹⁴ *Victoria Daily Province*, 15 February 1939.

⁹⁵ Letter of Proceedings, Prince Rupert, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, LAC, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820. Donald credits McLeod's rapport with the men and ability to make the fishermen see reason as the main cause of success in recruiting.

⁹⁶ FR Naval Training February 1939, p. 6, 1 March 1939, LAC, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. These floating canneries were prominent in Japan and would be operated by Japanese citizens out of Japan.

involved in labour disputes.⁹⁷ Still, the fishermen had problems with the regulations. Boat owners complained about the absence of a chartering fee in wartime, stating that the peacetime remuneration was inadequate for the dangers of war; Donald promised to canvass boat owners and work out a reasonable rate for boats taken into the Navy during times of danger. Skippers and seamen also viewed the *per diem* for food as insufficient for a working man, but Donald noted to his superiors, that although they grumbled, they did not “push the issue.”⁹⁸ The men were also divided over issues of a uniform. The older men were against any form of uniform, claiming it made them look “theatrical,” whereas the younger men were adamant there should be a uniform, true to the convergence of fisherman and naval cadet with the practicality of gumboots and warm sweaters, but the professionalism of a naval uniform.

Issues great and small, Donald noted in his report, were “thrashed out” with the men, and, in turn, recruitment increased. With the help of McLeod, Donald quickly surpassed the 200 recruits and 20 boat quota required for training in 1939 and as such was able to pick and choose recruits and boats based solely on merit.⁹⁹ Although Bourke had recommended choosing men from all “districts, organizations and originating from all countries” so as to maintain a strong interest throughout the fishing industry, Donald

⁹⁷ At that time, both the Navy and potential recruits were satisfied with Donald’s regulations. However, at one point during Donald’s 1938 trip, the Navy told him to stop assuring men they would not be transferred. When McLeod found out about NSHQ’s change of heart, he threatened to withdraw from the recruiting drive. Donald and Bourke pleaded with officials in Victoria and Ottawa that should McLeod withdraw, and should these regulations be altered, that there would be no recruits. NSHQ backed down, but was never pleased with the regulation and, as we will see in chapter four, a year later NSHQ attempted to revoke the transfer regulation again and the FR nearly collapsed over the issue.

⁹⁸ Letter of Proceedings, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820.

⁹⁹ Letter of Proceedings, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820. Men who ran their own boats and who were normally signed up as skippers, were told they could only enlist as crew members until the FR was expanded.

decided to go a different route.¹⁰⁰ He preferred fishermen from the north as their knowledge of the “danger spots,” that is the Queen Charlottes and Northern Coast, was far superior to that of the southern fishermen.¹⁰¹ Northern fishermen were also considered better recruits due to their predominately Norwegian heritage. Donald praised Norwegians as “loyal” and with no “liking for Communism,” whereas he was wary of Italian and Slavic fishermen from the south for the “inherent difficulties” they often posed through their “politics, language and anti-cooperation propaganda.”¹⁰² Although he wrote that the Norwegians were “not very intelligent” and sometimes overly “independent” he also noted that they were of a “steadier mentality” and would be of “great value in times of hostilities,” whereas Slavs and Italians would have “little likelihood of...being trained as successful reservists.”¹⁰³

Regardless of their nationality, Donald ran a background check on each man with the RCMP to reduce the risk of there being any trouble. After verifying that they had no serious criminal record and no communistic tendencies, Donald selected 200 candidates for training with the FR. By playing on racial fears, allowing some leeway in the regulations, accepting local support and offering a subsidy to the men in the fishing offseason, Donald, as the *Vancouver Province* put it, convinced a group of “big raw-

¹⁰⁰ Bourke to CNS, 25 March 1938, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681.

¹⁰¹ Letter of Proceedings, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820.

¹⁰² Letter of Proceedings, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820; FR Naval Training February 1939, p. 5, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Bourke in his original recruiting trip called the Norwegians “slow at making up their minds.”

¹⁰³ Letter of Proceedings, HMCS Skidegate, 22 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, vol. 11820.

boned guys, toughened by years of wrestling a precarious living from coastal waters” to sign up as some of the “keenest and most efficient recruits” to ever join the RCN.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

In a little over six months, the FR transitioned from an idea on paper to a body of men ready for instruction. By the end of February 1939, the members of the FR completed their first year of training and the RCN gained a usable force for deployment in the event of war. By exploring the genesis of the Reserve, it is apparent that the FR was not formulated simply in order to serve as an auxiliary role as most historians have hitherto postulated. Instead, Ottawa specifically created the FR to target the Japanese in Canada. In order to encourage recruitment, naval officers presented the Reserve as a means through which possible recruits could improve their futures by eliminating the Japanese from the fishing industry.

The FR was sufficiently important to NSHQ that modifications previously unheard of in the RCN were made to the naval regulations in order to attract the much-desired recruits. Moreover, in a strange twist of racism, Donald attempted to implement a radical amendment to naval regulations in order to keep relations between Japanese and Aboriginal fishermen in check. At the behest of Donald, NSHQ considered abolishing regulations which prohibited Aboriginals from serving in the RCN in order to further isolate the Japanese living in Canada. As we will see in the next two chapters, this concession, along with the original concessions which Donald promoted, caused major points of contention between interested parties of the FR.

¹⁰⁴ *Victoria Daily Province*, 15 February 1939.

Chapter 3: Fishermen “*Take a shot at this Navy Game*”¹

I seem to be having a hell of a time doing a lot of jobs at once, but no doubt everything will come out alright in the end.²

At the end of the summer of 1938, Prime Minister Mackenzie King was optimistic about Canada’s defence program. On 20 August 1938 he penned in his diary “I think at last we have got our defence programme in good shape. Good neighbour on the one side; partners within the Empire on the other. Obligations to both in return for their assistance. Readiness to meet all joint emergencies.”³ King was pleased because relations with the United States and Great Britain were improving, and his plan to bolster defence at home was within budget and, in his mind, succeeding according to plan. Canada was constructing coastal fortresses in British Columbia, had purchased destroyers from England and moved them to the West Coast, and the Fishermen’s Reserve (FR) was finally ready to be trained.

On the same day as King expressed his optimism, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) officially enlisted its first batch of FR recruits. After a busy summer of recruiting, Lieutenant Commander Colin Donald enjoyed four months of relative quiet before training began. He used this lull to start the preparations necessary to transform the FR from an idea into a reality. With only one official assistant, Donald tackled issues of supplies, schedules, uniforms, instructors, victualing, dock space, publicity, handbooks, fuel, charter fees, ammunition, and a myriad of other matters. He called balancing the

¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1939.

² Donald to Bell-Irving, 19 May 1939, CFB Esquimalt Naval & Military Museum, Donald Fonds, 993.92.17.

³ William Lyon Mackenzie King Diary, 20 August 1938, LAC, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, Diaries, MG26 J13, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/search.aspx>

various needs of the FR, a “hell of a time”; yet, with his guiding hand the FR was able to flourish in its first year.

Knowing he could not run such an operation alone, Donald brought in former RCN commander and First World War veteran, H.R. Tingley to come out of retirement to run the pilotage courses. At the same time, he became friends with former RNVR lieutenant Henry Bell-Irving – of salmon-cannery fame – and used him as an advisor and for his political connections in Victoria and Ottawa. Donald also had significant help in Prince Rupert from J.E. McLeod, a customs official for forty years who was friendly with the fishermen in the north and Captain J.R. Elfert, a veteran of World War I, an advocate for aboriginals, and a learned man familiar with sea life. Over the next two years, Donald relied on these men, along with the originator of the scheme, Rowland Bourke, to help make the training and organization of the FR a success.

After conferring with his advisors and fisheries officials, Donald spent 28 days in January and February training the men.⁴ Training had to be scheduled inside a narrow window during the dead of winter to balance the availability of naval facilities and training officers and the off season for most fishermen. Many of the recruits fished more than one type of fish and were busy throughout the year, either on the water or in net lofts preparing for the next season. Donald chose February because it did not interfere with the two biggest fishing seasons, halibut and salmon, and normally was not likely to affect the herring and pilchard fisheries. Alas, in 1939 the herring season remained open until early February and many of the bigger boats were consequently unable to be used in training.⁵

⁴ The men arrived in Esquimalt between January 27-29 and training officially started on January 30.

⁵ Donald to Bidwell, 12 July 1940, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), FR West Coast Organization (hereafter FRWCO), R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

Donald, who was very interested in the bigger boats' potential as minesweepers tried to adjust the schedule at the last-minute, but could not do so.

Donald also used the time between recruitment and training to respond to official and unofficial queries vis-à-vis the FR. Lieutenant Lail Kane of the United States Naval Reserves, for example, wrote from California to applaud Canada's creation of the FR, noting that he recognized the "necessity and advantage" of such a Reserve on the West Coast of both countries.⁶ He requested information and advice from Donald as he hoped to start a similar reserve in California. Unable to help, but excited at the interest, Donald forwarded this request to Naval Services Headquarters (NSHQ). Over the next two years when other mariners from the United States asked for information Donald used this interest to demonstrate to his superiors that the FR was a smart investment and worthy of expansion.⁷

Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) officials wanted to know how they might use the men and boats of the FR both as rescue crafts and for reconnaissance – particularly in poor weather. They contacted Donald through the naval representative of the Joint Services Committee (JSC) for specifics regarding wireless capabilities, patrol structure, and the effectiveness of the various boats.⁸ Donald's response and the early success of the

⁶ Lt. Lail Kane to NSHQ, 6 January 1939, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

⁷ Donald to NSHQ, p. 9, 1 March 1939, LAC, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁸ Third Meeting of the Joint Services Committee Pacific Coast, pp. 4-13, 28 October 1938, LAC, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. The Joint Services Committee – Pacific Coast, consisted of representatives from the Air Force, Navy and Army. It met weekly in Vancouver and was formed to foster cooperation and consistency among the three military branches on the West Coast. It discussed the role and uses of the FR two weeks after its inception.

FR must have convinced them that the plan was viable; the RCAF added fishing vessels to its command in 1939 and expanded the program in 1941.⁹

In addition to the military, newspapers from all over British Columbia and across Canada wanted information about the reserve and its training. Newspapers in major fishing towns such as Prince Rupert, Victoria, Nanaimo and Vancouver ran several brief articles after summer recruiting and more detailed ones when the training commenced. Unfortunately, an article in the *Victoria Colonist* in December had so many inaccuracies regarding pay, training specifics and service conditions of the FR that Donald feared the effects on future recruiting and issued a press release to clear up the facts.¹⁰

Papers outside of British Columbia also began to take notice of the FR. *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto reported that the “interesting little boats” were meeting in Esquimalt in February and that their crews would receive training. The paper emphasized that it was “extremely fortunate” that Canada was employing men who knew the “nooks and crannies” of British Columbia as well as, if not better than, the Japanese fishermen who

⁹ The Commanding Officer’s HMCS Givenchy Report, October 1940, LAC, Flag Officer Pacific Coast (hereafter FOPC) War Diaries General, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11809. I do not have a complete list of FR vessels used by the RCAF but several served exclusively with the RCAF such as the *HMCS Combat*, *HMCS Snow Prince*, *HMCS BC Star* and *HMCS B.C. Lady* (after serving for two years in the FR). Others, such as the *HMCS Van Isle*, *HMCS Johanna*, *HMCS Signal*, *HMCS Maraudor* and *HMCS McDonald* were lent for short periods by the RCN to the RCAF. Vessels were sometimes crewed exclusively by members of the FR and sometimes by airmen. The only converted fishing vessel to be lost with all hands was the *BC Star*, crewed exclusively by airmen. While on route from Bella Bella to Rose Harbour on 24 July 1943 the ship went missing and was never heard from again. Searches turned up a badly decomposed body of an airmen stationed aboard the *BC Star* and various wreckage which indicated an explosion.

¹⁰ *Victoria Colonist*, 14 December 1938; Report from Donald, 14 December 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. The paper’s inaccuracies included: Claiming that the skippers would be sworn in 1st of February when they were already sworn in. Stating that “many units of the size contemplated could easily have been raised.” Donald retorted that this was “absolutely untrue.” Stating that the charter fee was \$4.00 per day when it was actually a sliding scale according to size of the boat. Calling the FR a part of the RCNVR instead of the RCNR. Quoting the skipper’s wage at \$3.50 instead of \$3.75. Claiming training to be 26 days instead of 28 days. Stating that most of the training period would be spent on shore “where they will undergo Naval and Rifle Drill” which was not only untrue but something Donald was avoiding because the men of the FR disliked marching and drills.

might “desert their netlaying pursuits” to serve in the Japanese Navy or aid the enemy in wartime.¹¹

By January and February 1939, British Columbian newspapers were featuring articles on the FR weekly and even daily especially since home defence issues, had become prominent in the news. Japanese aggression in China created more consternation for British Columbians who were crying for boycotts and embargos against Japan in 1938 and 1939. *The Victoria Times* heralded Freda Utley as she toured in British Columbia promoting her book *Japan's Feet of Clay* and raising the alarm against Japanese expansionism – demanding that Ottawa place an embargo on any item which could be used to fuel Japan's war machine.¹² The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council led a boycott of Japanese goods during the 1938 Christmas season which received media attention and saw Japanese imports fall by 24 percent.¹³ On 26 January, *The Victoria Times* noted that the Canadian Government was reacting to current dangers and that in 1939, Canada would have the highest peacetime military budget in its history, with much of the expenditure going to improve western defences.¹⁴ On 28 January, the day most fishermen began arriving in Esquimalt for training, rumours surfaced that the United States government was interested in coordinating home-defence on the Pacific coast with Canada. *The Victoria Times* and the *Vancouver Sun* ran front page stories claiming “exclusive” knowledge that the United States and Canada were trading technical military

¹¹ Bruce West, “Naval Reserve Groups Built Up for Wartime,” *The Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1938.

¹² *The Victoria Times* (hereafter *Times*), 28 October 1938 as cited in Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2003), pp. 175-176, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uvic/Doc?id=10125060>. Freda Utley argued in her book that “the driving force of Japanese Imperialism is primarily loot, and an attempt to escape from her insoluble domestic problems; and secondarily the search for raw materials.” Roy notes that her book tour acted as a trigger on Vancouver Island for action against the Japanese but not in Vancouver.

¹³ Roy, *The Oriental Question*, 176. Popular Christmas items from Japan included oranges, silk stockings, and toys.

¹⁴ “Canada's Defence Vote Placed at Peace-time High,” *Times*, 26 January 1939.

details and strategizing on joint defence.¹⁵ These issues sparked interest in anything Pacific Coast related, including the new training of the FR.

Training the Men

Thus, when the fishermen started arriving in Esquimalt, the newspapermen were waiting, eager to feed Canada's desire for home-defence stories. The journalists instantly labelled the FR an oddity – a mixture of dishevelled jerry-riggers who were being thrown into the neat and tidy structure of the RCN. They described fishermen as: “tough,” “big,” “raw-boned,” “bronzed,” “staunch sons of the sea,” “rugged,” “clean-cut lot used to roughing it” and “husky fishermen, with whip cord muscles.”¹⁶ Writers employed such physical descriptions, to offer a contrast to the straight-laced, black-and-white discipline of the Navy. The reporters wondered if fishermen, who were “totally unaccustomed to routine discipline” could handle a month of training with the Navy.¹⁷

Upon investigating, reporters soon found that the fishermen were quick to shrug off any difference in discipline. Skippers, who were responsible for their crews during the fishing season recognized that working with the navy required some adjustment, but most thought it would not be a problem for their crews. One skipper claimed that his crew was a bit “frisky” in the beginning, but it was “amenable” to naval discipline.¹⁸ Another commented that his men did not find the discipline “irksome” at all.¹⁹ A *Vancouver Sun*

¹⁵ “Canada and U.S. Discuss Defences,” *Times*, 2 February 1939; Bruce Hutchison, “Canada and U.S. Join in Pacific Defence,” *Vancouver Sun*, 27 January 1939. The *Sun* claimed to have been the first papers to break this story, even before United States' newspapers. At the time, Mackenzie King sidestepped questions in Parliament regarding the matter, although the truth of the allegations would be confirmed later – the United States and Canada were trading some secrets and working together on continental defence.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 28 January 1939; *Daily Province*, 15 February 1939; *Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1939; *Times*, 3 February 1939.

¹⁷ “Navy Fishermen Get Into Shape,” *Times*, 3 February 1939.

¹⁸ *Vancouver Sun*, 28 January 1939.

¹⁹ *Daily Province*, 15 February 1939.

reporter noted that by the end of the training, the “efficiency and discipline” of the navy had left a “visible impression” on the fishermen. His end-of-training interviews led him to conclude, “These fishermen have been trained in the harsh discipline of the sea. They didn't mind a bit the strict rules and discipline of the navy.”²⁰

Donald, who had also worried that the ways of the navy might be troublesome for the recruits, was pleasantly surprised by the decorum of the fishermen during training.²¹ Fishing companies, even those who supported the FR, had warned recruiters that the fishermen would probably not be able to “take it” in the Navy and would likely fold under the rigors of naval discipline.²² However, in the winter training, this fear proved unfounded. According to Donald, the men were “quick to pick up naval ways and customs” and had risen to the anticipated challenges with discipline.²³ In an interview with the *Daily Province*, he claimed that the men were “100% better than...expected” and that the “majority” of skippers thought the RCN should be even stricter on them.²⁴

Journalists followed the navy’s schedule carefully, covering many different aspects of the FR training – a task facilitated by the RCN which coordinated press conferences and photo shoots, hired a film crew, and took reporters to sea for certain drills. Donald orchestrated this coverage and encouraged other means of attracting attention to the FR, such as having journalists join the tours he gave to the premier and to

²⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 27 February 1939.

²¹ Rowland Bourke to NSHQ, 5 March 1938, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Bourke, the original recruiting officer, noted that most fishermen had a “strong prejudice against Naval or Military training” and that they would “require very careful handling.”

²² *Times*, 15 February 1939. Quote comes from an interview with Donald.

²³ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

²⁴ *Daily Province*, February 15, 1939.

the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. All the while, Donald organized social activities for the men, kept Ottawa up-to-date, and oversaw the training schedule.²⁵

With cameras clicking and schedule in hand, Donald officially mustered all hands at 07:45 on the 30th of January. The 202 recruits fell-in on the wharf where ratings were broken into eight divisions and skippers were divided based on geography: southern (Vancouver and Vancouver Island) and northern (Prince Rupert area). Ratings were supplied with uniforms, but skippers remained in civilian clothing until later that week when they complained that they felt “out of place” without proper uniforms. After receiving a kit, a recruit from each division was chosen to man the duty boat, serve on fire patrol and stand guard for the first week. This selection was followed by a medical examination for each man and finally a lecture on proper naval discipline, a different version being given to the skippers than to the ratings. At the end of the day, Donald provided the men with a welcome dinner in the base gymnasium and announced that divisions were to return to their boats that night but be at the ordinance wharf at 07:45 the next morning for drills and instruction; each division was to pick a captain to take charge of forming intramural teams for basketball, volleyball, softball, soccer and other sports to be played over the next month; and that a dance the following week would honour the FR and allow the men to interact with the public.²⁶

The programme of activities on 30 January is a good example of the balance that Donald hoped to achieve in his schedule. A year earlier, he had advised NSHQ that the

²⁵ Donald to NSHQ, p. 6, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Donald complained later that although he had unofficial advisors, the everyday operation of the FR fell on his shoulders alone. He told Ottawa that “an assistant Officer seems indispensable in the Training Seasons as when the Organizing Officer was at sea with various sections, the organization of the Reserve devolved on Lieutenant Commander Donaldson, RCNVR, who already had a multifarious number of duties to perform.”

²⁶ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

success of the FR was contingent on the RCN handling the fishermen correctly during the first year of training.²⁷ Thus, training was a carefully calculated mixture of activities designed to assure two things. First, and most important, was to insure that the men were competent and could be relied on to be an effective force. Secondly, only if the men were happy with the training would they be willing to return the next year. Training officers were tasked with making the fishermen into proper naval men. This was manifest from day one through lectures on proper protocol, medical examinations, and assigning guard duties. Donald also bent the regulations at times to facilitate a slower integration into naval life. He formed sports leagues to create some healthy competition and fun and he allowed the men to sleep on their own boats where there was no supervision or lights out, instead of the barracks. The dance Donald planned allowed the men to meet some ladies and show off their uniforms. Moreover, Donald's policy regarding two different uniforms was an attempt to adhere to the perceived desires of both older and younger recruits.²⁸ This mixture of work and play was purposeful, but it also created somewhat of a summer camp atmosphere or as one skipper called it, a "holiday...at government expense."²⁹

²⁷ Letter of Proceedings, Prince Rupert, *HMCS Skidegate*, p. 2, 3 August 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

²⁸ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the FR skippers had requested not to have a uniform as they did not want to appear theatrical. However, after the start of training, their attitudes changed and they requested uniforms. Donald quickly made the arrangements to supply the FR skippers with a hodge-podge uniform. He thought it urgent to supply them with proper uniforms so as to give the FR skippers an improved sense of pride in the unit. The skippers were still considered officers, regardless of their unofficial uniforms.

²⁹ Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, 19. Standard training was also included in the schedule, but Donald was not afraid to jettison activities that did not resonate with the FR. For example the time usually reserved for typical training drills, such as push-ups and forming fours was kept to a bare minimum in order to facilitate more appealing physical training such as Volleyball, tug-of-war or baseball. Forming fours is a squad drill employed by the RCN for parade that involves numbering and marching. Push-ups were not entirely eliminated for training. One recruit recalled that seeing skippers doing push-ups and having their "bellies dragging the bloody boards" was quite humorous, (Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, 19). Organizers used this

Donald did not hide the watered-down or rose-colored version of true naval life as was apparent in his candid opening address to the FR which stressed that he would honour his promise to keep parade marches and onshore drills to a minimum and to emphasize training of a more practical nature.³⁰ He also acknowledged that training and discipline needed to be slightly adjusted for the FR because, although their knowledge of the sea was superior to that of the usual naval recruit, they were much less malleable. A recruit remembered Donald levelling with the men, admonishing them:

We take fellows from the prairies that have never seen salt water and they make better sailors than what you guys will ever make, 'cause when we tell them to do something, they do it. When we tell you fellows to do something, you go, 'Aaaaah, eeeh!'

Many recruits appreciated Donald's open mindedness and unorthodox approach, one commenting that he was impressed that the Navy had enough sense to "train old dogs" differently from prairie greenhorns.³¹

The press noticed the deviation from regular naval training and some applauded Donald's approach. The *Times* noted that the Navy viewed the FR as valuable "and in order to put [the fishermen] at ease all frills and formalities will be dispensed with during the training period."³² Five days later it reported that the men were "taking to the new training methods with a will and respond readily to...orders." That they were "enjoying the unusual experience greatly" eating

alternative exercise and competition, pitting divisions of northern fishermen against southern division through various sports, in order to offset the fishermen's "dislike" for meaningless drill (Report from Donald, 14 December 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820).

³⁰ Report from Donald, 14 December 1938, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

³¹ Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, pp. 15-16.

³² "Fishermen Work Without Frills," *Times*, 30 January 1939.

exceptionally well and living on their boats and, at the same time, receiving useful training that would be “invaluable to them in an emergency.”³³

Perhaps most valuable, and according to Donald most interesting to the men of the FR, were sea drills. Like shore activities, Donald tweaked these favourites, such as station-keeping, manoeuvres, gunnery and signalling to create a less formal atmosphere.³⁴ In one such adjustment, Donald pitted Vancouver divisions against Prince Rupert divisions in a Lewis Gun shooting competition. While a ship maintained full speed, gunners on the bow were tested in their ability to hit a target at 200 yards being pulled by *Skidegate* at four knots. The most accurate division was to receive prizes from the Bapco Paint Company, and the most accurate ship was to receive \$10 from British Columbia’s premier T.D. Pattullo. If the second place ship was from his constituency of Prince Rupert, he offered \$10 to that ship as well.³⁵ In this way, the RCN taught the men a valuable skill, but in a more relaxed environment.

Despite the integrated revelry, the content of the FR training remained professional and thorough. These men, whose livelihood and very lives depended on being able to handle a boat in all types of weather, were pleasantly surprised to find courses in piloting, signalling, first aid, charting and station-keeping useful beyond their intended naval uses. Recruits even appreciated swimming lessons as many of them, despite being surrounded by water their entire lives, had never

³³ “Navy Fishermen Get Into Shape,” *The Times*, 3 February 1939.

³⁴ Donald to NSHQ, 14 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

³⁵ Donald to Brodeur, 25 February 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. In Donald’s first summer recruiting he noted that he expected the Prince Rupert fishermen to make better cadets. This proved true in some regards. The average for the Prince Rupert flotillas during the shooting contest was around 30 hits, whereas the average for the Vancouver/Vancouver Island flotillas was 16 hits.

learned the basic task.³⁶ Other instruction, such as gun-cleaning, small-arms target practice, depth charge deployment and submarine chasing, although useful for naval purposes, was a novelty and less applicable to their work.³⁷

Overall, the men performed admirably and were happy with the training. After the first week, Donald noted that he and the other instructors were “agreeably surprised” at the “keenness and general tractability” displayed by the men of all ages. He bragged to NSHQ that the men could easily assemble a Lewis machine gun after only two half days of instruction, an operation that took regular recruits a week or two to manage properly.³⁸ He also verified that they were expert mariners and were comfortable problem solving while at sea.

In one case, Donald noted that the men had originally encountered some difficulties with station-keeping, due to the various size and power of each fishing vessel. However, the men had adapted, compensating for the engine disparities on the fly, and had eventually succeeded in the coordinated manoeuvre. At the end of the training, Donald happily relayed that “no complaints” had been submitted or overheard and that the cadets seemed “well pleased.”³⁹ In fact, the most notable

³⁶ Donald to Brodeur, p. 1, 13 February 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. The training took place at Crystal Gardens Pool. By the end of the month all recruits had passed the swimming test.

³⁷ Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, 19; 13 February 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. Only one task, rowing, was a complete oversight on the part of Donald, as the seasoned veterans of the sea were incredulous to have a young naval instructor teach them to do a basic and essential task to fishing.

³⁸ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

³⁹ Donald to NSHQ, p. 9, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

complaint during training, according to Donald, was that the men considered one month inadequate to learn everything the navy had to offer.⁴⁰

By the end of February, training for the year was finished. Before dismissing the men, naval doctors checked them over and paymasters divvied out training pay.⁴¹ The first year wrapped up with festivities and merriment. The Navy hosted a “smoker” for all hands, to show the men that their service was appreciated. Other organizations in Victoria also hosted events to celebrate the men. For instance, the Home Oil Company hosted a soiree to which it invited skippers and select ratings to rub elbows with politicians, businessmen and other interested, influential and notable individuals in Victoria.⁴² FR officials and the men both welcomed this kindness. According to Donald, this sort of “hospitality” not only attracted further publicity for the Reserve but also “meant so much to the men.”⁴³ In the end, several skippers were so pleased with how the Navy treated the men that they organized a party of their own for their hosts.⁴⁴

After the fishermen returned home and the excitement subsided, the FR officials met to reflect on the training. Discipline had not proved the problem that some had anticipated; the only two men discharged were released for medical reasons and the majority of the fishermen were eager to return to Esquimalt the following year. The

⁴⁰ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

⁴¹ Medical examinations were put in place to assure that the men did not have anything contagious and to assure that the men did not have an ailment that might be aggravated through service in the RCN. The check-up at the end of the year was to assure the same thing. The following year the rather lax medical check-up for the FR came under scrutiny from NSHQ.

⁴² Memo to FR Personnel from Donald, 23 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. Each skipper was allowed to bring one of his crew members to the dance.

⁴³ Donald to Brodeur, p. 2, 28 June 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁴⁴ *The Daily Province*, 15 February 1939. The party thrown by the skippers involved a trip to the fishermen’s flotilla, where bottles of rum and scotch were available and stories from the sea were exchanged.

training was considered a total success.⁴⁵ To Donald's superiors in Ottawa, more importantly, the RCN now had a trained force on hand should hostilities arise in the Pacific. NSHQ requested a full report before March 15 so that officials in Ottawa could become better informed of the situation. The Minister of Defence, Ian Mackenzie, in particular wanted proper details and assurances before he included the FR in his budget that spring. More important than a recount of the training, NSHQ and Mackenzie wanted Donald's assessment. Now that he had seen the men in action, they wished to know in which specific ways the RCN could use this force.

Donald assured his superiors that the potential of the FR, originally presented by Bourke, could easily be realized if war broke out. The training had clearly shown that the recruits were capable, and that the reserve would be ideal for its perceived roles of rounding up enemy aliens living along the coast and serving as an inshore patrol against sabotage or enemy supply caches. Moreover, he believed that the FR could also be useful in general wartime activities such as minesweeping, submarine hunting, pilotage duties and packing freight for the Department of National Defence.⁴⁶ Finally, the already economical training had cost around \$1,500 less than expected: a major selling point for a defence minister trying to pinch pennies.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Donald to NSHQ, 5 February 1939, FOPC Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. 202 men arrived in Esquimalt for training. Command was pleased that only two potential recruits were released from the reserve and that by releasing two they arrived at their ideal and intended number of recruits (200). One man was released for having poor eyesight and the other for being "almost stone deaf."

⁴⁶ Donald to NSHQ, p. 4, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁴⁷ Naval & Victualling Stores Division to Brodeur, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. The savings were as follows: Intended Victualling cost: 3,660.00, Actual cost: \$3,375.00, Savings: \$264.60; Intended Fuel and Allowances: \$3,900, Actual cost: \$3,064.25, Savings: \$835.75; Intended Charter Fees: \$5,900.00, Actual cost: \$5,798.00, Savings: \$102.00; Intended Indemnification Fees: \$2,700.00, Actual cost: \$2,319.00, Savings: \$381.00. Other costs were Naval Stores budgeted at \$3,460.00; Pay and Allowances of ratings: \$11,250; Pay and Allowances Officers: \$5,500.00. Overall cost: \$34,766.25 for the week long training (does not include costs of recruiting trips). Total RCNR budget: \$319,800.00. Training took up roughly 11% of the RCNR budget.

Mackenzie received the report and was enthusiastic to have a force that fit King's defence plan so well. On 26 April, Mackenzie informed parliament that air and naval power were being expanded in order to be Canada's "first line of defence." Listed objectives to achieve this first line of defence included ceaseless patrols against possible belligerents, knowledge and watchfulness of the "myriad of bays and coves along the deeply indented coastline," and "forces and weapons" at the ready for whatever situation would arise on the coast. These overarching objectives mirrored the projected FR roles that Donald had listed, that is using the FR as the eyes and ears of the Navy with its ceaseless patrols by men who had deep knowledge of the intricate coastline and as a "force" that was ready for a very specific operation at the outbreak of war – the removal of the Japanese living along the coast.⁴⁸ To fulfil these intended roles, Mackenzie assured Parliament that the FR was now officially a "new branch of the RCNR" and would be expanded in several areas the following year.⁴⁹

Lessons from Training

Mackenzie gave Parliament a glowing report about the FR, stating that training had been "successful in every way."⁵⁰ This optimism, although a boon for the FR, was probably overenthusiastic as it left out much of Donald's report which focused on possible problems. In reality, once the Reserve was approved, FR officials struggled to create a useful, smooth-running organization. Donald and Bourke's reports, along with

⁴⁸ As seen in Chapter 2, Admiral Nelles original recommendation called for the Japanese to be rounded up *prior* to the outbreak of war. However, this original ideal seems to have been dropped from the Navy's plan – probably for legal reasons.

⁴⁹ *HCD*, 26 April 1939, 3237-3241.

⁵⁰ Mackenzie, *HCD*, 18 May 1939, 4289. Mackenzie also assured MP Charles Grant MacNeill, (Vancouver) that the boats would be appropriately equipped – some with minesweeping capabilities.

subsequent correspondence to NSHQ, and post-training events help provide a clearer understanding of the work it took to get the pre-war FR off the ground.⁵¹

Although the FR was popular in Ottawa immediately after training, Donald foresaw a less than accommodating NSHQ should its focus shift to a war in the Atlantic. In anticipation Donald, with some help from men like Commander Brodeur, J.E. McLeod, Henry Bell-Irving and Bourke, set to work trying to keep the perception of the FR positive and, more importantly, to improve the running of the FR itself.

Donald and Bourke appreciated the need to adapt the FR to new conditions, anticipate new problems and create a better-run organization.⁵² Each man argued in separate reports that if the FR failed in its infancy it would likely result from the organizing officers not being given permission to stay actively involved with the men. Bourke asserted that if the NSHQ wished to encourage retention or to promote expansion, the RCN should have a naval officer aboard the *Skidegate* visit members of the FR and boat owners throughout the year, not just during training. Donald concurred with Bourke. After speaking with “responsible officials” and “boat owners,” Donald felt so strongly

⁵¹ Bourke to NSHQ, 6 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Bourke was not asked to submit a report to NSHQ. However after lobbying his superiors he was given permission to submit a report, only if it was done on his own time. He sent his fourteen page report to NSHQ five days after Donald’s and a year and a day after he submitted his original report on the FR.

⁵² Donald to Commander Taylor, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39. Donald and Bourke certainly disagreed on a few smaller points. For instance, Donald argued, at the request of his men, that five days were not sufficient for the Prince Rupert men to travel 550 miles in the dead of winter to Esquimalt. Bourke on the other hand, thought seven days was a preposterous waste of time and money and encouraged a reduction to four days insisting that the men were taking advantage of the present system; using the extra days and pay to see friends and drink in Vancouver. Reducing the number of paid travel days would cost the government \$2268 less than the new proposed seven days or save \$768 from the original five days. Other small disagreements existed between the two men regarding uniforms, barracks, insurance and chartering fees but their dedication to the success of the FR remained steadfast.

about the idea that he called the concept axiomatic, arguing that the “whole scheme may lapse” should the department ignore his advice.⁵³

This stance was not necessarily an overreaction, as the environment of the FR was certainly complicated. By pulling the recruits from the fishing industry, the RCN had introduced a variety of outside commercial influences, some positive and some negative. One of the most convoluted relationships between commercial and military interests involved the Reserve’s use of a charter system. All the boats in the FR were owned by individuals and fishing companies who lent them to the RCN for a small charter fee. For various reasons, including self-preservation and patriotism, the companies saw the merit of the Reserve and consequently had been happy to lend their boats. One owner even called the FR “one of the best things ever done on this coast as a measure of defence.”⁵⁴ Yet, generosity aside, the owners were still running businesses and their goodwill only lasted as long as lending the boats did not hurt their bottom-line. When some of these owners’ attitudes changed, as shown in the next chapter, patriotism proved insufficient to keep them from causing waves for the Navy.⁵⁵

Commercial interests also complicated relations between officers and men in the FR. In the RCN and RCNR, a commanding officer’s word was law, and enlisted men had no say in how things were run. This was not the case in the FR – men could quit and

⁵³ Donald to NSHQ, p. 10, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁵⁴ Journal of Donald, 12 August 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.42.

⁵⁵ Fish packing companies saw their political influence improve at the start of the war when the Canadian government labelled fishing an essential industry because of the need to feed England. The companies had to make some concessions but they were also given greater influence over the industry. The Department of Defence set up an advisory board made up of fisheries officials and fish packer owners – allowing the owners to dictate more terms than they had before. In one case BC Packers demanded that the *Algie*, a fishing packer that had been used during training in February and called up after the start of the war, be returned to the company. Although the FR seemingly had the law on its side, BC Packer’s request was honoured, and the *Algie* was returned.

return to the fishing industry. In the FR, superior officers were forced to lead with a wariness that their actions might cause their subordinates to quit. Donald had allowed the fishermen to dictate their own terms in order to get them into the Navy – with full crew sign-ups, non-transfer agreements, and assurances against commercial interference – by doing so he disrupted the normal naval power balance.⁵⁶

Such delicate relationships encouraged Donald to preach balance and a proactive nature to his superiors. Donald enacted a policy of “studying [the men’s] difficulties and bringing forward at once any ideas, grievances, etc., that may arise.” He thought that by making frequent trips up the coast he could hear the men out and deal with problems before they became serious. Besides checking on issues regarding chartering, Donald also watched for subversive elements within the FR after the RCMP warned him to be on the lookout for communist factions along the coast who were eager to infiltrate the FR and use it to “embarrass” the government.⁵⁷ Donald viewed communist ideals or “undesirable propaganda by Union officials and others” as one of the main threats to the stability of his scheme.⁵⁸ On his trips he asked the men about such rumours. Donald wanted to be available and as candid as possible to prevent any rumours and interference from malevolent elements within the fishing industry that might poison the loyal men under his command.

Donald believed his men were loyal, but also that they were a cantankerous bunch who were wary of authority. Nevertheless, he vouched that each man could be “led,

⁵⁶ Donald to NSHQ, p. 8, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁵⁷ Donald to NSHQ, p. 7, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁵⁸ Donald to Brodeur, 22 April 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Donald also justified the trip by arguing that no RCN ship had been up around the Queen Charlottes in some time and it could lead not only to “ascertaining the ideas of the Fishermen” but also gaining knowledge of the coastline.

especially if he sees the sense of an order” but he could not be “driven.” He warned his superiors that the men were accustomed to independence and “wild as hawks” and therefore would have to be “handled with gloves for a long time to come.”⁵⁹ A typical example of his handling can be seen in his interaction with Pete Jorgenson. A fisherman out of Alert Bay, Jorgenson had signed up as a skipper in the FR and had supplied his own vessel for training in February.⁶⁰ Before training in the summer of 1938, Donald took Jorgenson duck hunting and sport fishing to discuss the merits of the FR and get advice on how to recruit other fishermen. Jorgenson, who had become a keen supporter of the FR, attended training and after returning home in February, wrote to Donald. After some informalities about sports fishing and suggesting that they go hunting again as he wanted to test his new shotgun, and providing some updates on local news, he got to serious business. He mentioned two naval vessels coming into Alert Bay and hinted at espionage among the Japanese, or as he put it, “our yellow friends from across the bay” who came out to take pictures of the warships. He then praised Donald’s training and stated that his fellow fishermen came back very pleased with how they were treated by the Navy and by Donald, explaining that, “the general public have the idea that once in a while the navy and the authorities show some sense, and that this was one time lots of it was shown.”⁶¹

This conversation is not uncommon in form and demonstrates several attributes of Donald’s approach to his men. For one, it highlights that Donald understood he could not treat these men as a Lieutenant-Commander of the RCN would normally treat enlisted men – as inferiors and with very little social interaction. On his visits, he did not lecture

⁵⁹ Donald to Commander Taylor, 28 July 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39.

⁶⁰ Pete’s brother Lars had also joined up.

⁶¹ Pete Jorgenson to Donald, 30 April 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.12.

or supply complaint forms, but spoke with them on the docks or while hunting or fishing, putting the men at ease and allowing for more informal and more useful conversation. In doing so, he not only created a better FR but helped to create a safer Canada by establishing a web of informants along the coast. The men, who usually had very little time for official letters or formal complaints, became the eyes and ears of the navy in British Columbia, passing suspicious sightings onto Donald via personal letters or in a more bar-room style atmosphere when he visited. The interaction with Jorgenson suggests that men, who did not usually trust government or naval decisions, saw sense in the FR and in Donald's approach. This open-door policy between recruit and commander built trust between them and allowed the men to see Donald as their advocate and not just as a company man.

Donald did not just listen, he acted. When the RCN made decisions that did not keep the best interest of the FR in mind, Donald sought change. For example, when NSHQ proposed to divide the single training period into two periods, one for the Northern fishermen and one for the Southern, in order to save money, Donald was resistant. From discussions with McLeod, he discovered that the fishermen were "kicking" over the thought of not all being together for training and were threatening to abandon next year's training all together because of the change.⁶² Donald wrote unofficially to his friends in Ottawa and to political supporters urging retention of the single training session and supplying a solid plan to keep it.⁶³ He rallied and reasoned until his superiors pointed to the cost effectiveness of the new plan and told Donald to

⁶² Donald to Commander Taylor, 28 July 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39. McLeod listed the reasons for the Prince Rupert fishermen "kicking" at the idea of training separately were that they did not want to travel 550 miles "in the depths of winter" and not "see their friends" or be able to "compete" against the Fishermen from Vancouver.

⁶³ Donald to Commander Taylor, 28 July 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39.

live with it.⁶⁴ Only at this point did Donald turn to making the best of the split. He found ways to make it appealing to the men and recommended four training sessions instead of two in order to allow bigger vessels and aboriginals to join the Reserve.

NSHQ approved the splitting of training into four and Donald's idea to use the *Skidegate* to keep in contact with the skippers and with canneries and fish companies. During the hot summer of 1939, Donald took two trips up the coast – including one around the Queen Charlotte Islands. The relationships he built and the advice he obtained from the men of the FR, industry officials and other informants proved crucial to keeping the FR from disintegrating when war broke out in September. Using the information gleaned from these relationships, Donald was able to put forth recommendations for the FR that balanced Canadian commercial interests with the Canadian defence agenda.

“Coast-watchers” and halibut boats.

A primary example of commercial integration into naval affairs is the attitude of FR organizing officers toward the chartering of boats. In peacetime, charter fees were in place for 28 days during training, but there were no concrete regulations for charters during emergencies. Should war break out, the fees would have to rise to address the requisite full-time use of the boats. Discount charter fees for a month during the off-season were acceptable, but giving up vessels for the whole year, especially during high earning periods such as salmon or halibut season, made a new system necessary. Donald had amended the regulations in the autumn of 1938 to guarantee that the fishermen would be consulted on how to determine the fees, i.e. by engine size, boat size and/or earning ability. It also stated, “any boat owner who is dissatisfied with the scale of remuneration

⁶⁴ Taylor to Donald, 15 August 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.44.

then laid down will have the option of retiring from the Reserve.”⁶⁵ This meant that Donald needed an equitable system for determining charter fees so skippers would stay during times of war.⁶⁶

The charter fee situation raised red flags for FR officials regarding military requirements. The commercial interests of boat owners could be a thorn in the establishment and maintenance of a consistent fleet of vessels in wartime. Donald planned for the tension by maintaining good relations with skippers and fishing company officials and also by implementing new schemes to satisfy the needs of the public and the private sectors.

After much discussion with his advisors and the men of the FR, Donald put forward a new idea to inject better boats into both the FR and northern fishing waters.⁶⁷ In their dealings with the men of the FR, he and Bourke had learned that due to their smaller boats, most Canadian halibutmen could not compete with American vessels in northern waters. Under an international treaty Americans and Canadians enjoyed the same opportunity to catch halibut offshore in certain areas at certain times of the year. Halibut fishing was broken into three areas. Areas one and two were easily accessed by vessels of both countries, but area three, which was open until late October, was 240 miles northwest of Prince Rupert and many Canadian vessels were too small and

⁶⁵ Regulations and Instructions for the RCNR (Special Section), Donald Fonds, 993.92.59.

⁶⁶ Bourke to NSHQ, 5 March 1938, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. Bourke had noted this as far back as March 1938, that “Fishermen wish to be assured they will not have to accept the same small remuneration for their boats in the event of war that they will receive now for use of their boats for training purposes during the off season for fishing. Will some form of committee be set up in the event of war to deal with this question? The fishermen should be informed now how this matter will be arranged, in order to facilitate recruiting.”

⁶⁷ Donald claimed in a later report that this idea came from RCNR paymaster J.E. McLeod, one of Donald’s biggest helps for recruiting in Prince Rupert. In Donald’s report in 10 October 1939, he claimed that the original idea was forwarded to the Department of National Defence by McLeod in March of 1939. This may be true, but it is also true that on 6 March 1939 Bourke submitted a detailed plan of the exact same nature. It is possible that Donald gave McLeod credit for this idea because of previous tension between Donald and Bourke. Or, more simply, Donald simply misspoke.

underpowered to reach and fish this zone.⁶⁸ This meant that most American fishermen could fish three months longer than most of their Canadian competitors, resulting in what Donald called a “severe handicap to the Canadians.”⁶⁹ According to Bourke, Americans had “much better facilities for obtaining larger loans on less security, at smaller interest charges from the Banks” and so could build the boats needed to reach these areas. There was no such system in place for Canadian fishermen. This commercial problem provided Donald, Bourke and McLeod with an opportunity to help the northern FR skippers and in turn bolster the FR.

The plan called for the Department of National Defence (DND) to subsidize the building of large, well-powered, fishing vessels. The government would provide 40% of the funds and “young” but “experienced” skippers of the FR would absorb the remaining cost via a payment plan. The skippers would own the boat, but would be bound to attend 28 days of FR training each year and serve with the boat during an emergency.⁷⁰ The boats: “strongly built” able to “keep to seas in all weather,” with “negligible” upkeep and a “large radius of action” would be suitable as both fishing and patrol vessels.⁷¹ They would be well-powered, with two 100 horsepower engines, and be designed to be converted easily into minesweepers and to accommodate torpedoes, gun emplacements and depth charges.⁷²

⁶⁸ Donald to COPC, 10 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.47. Donald noted that because of the small size of most Canadian boats they could not “carry the requisite stores, ice, etc.” to allow them to get out to Area three.

⁶⁹ Donald to COPC, 10 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.47.

⁷⁰ This regulation is practically the same agreement as with regular members of the FR. The only difference is that normal FR members could quit the Reserve in any time that was not an emergency.

⁷¹ Donald to COPC, p.2, 10 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.47.

⁷² Bourke to RCN Barracks, p. 14, 6 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846. Bourke noted that fishermen would typically only need and use one of these engines while fishing.

Both Bourke and Donald promoted the scheme. Bourke laid out a detailed plan for the NSHQ, showing both the defensive and commercial benefits. He reasoned that if the government was willing to help farmers with loans they never expected to get fully back, they should invest in the fishing industry where fishermen could more easily repay loans. He claimed that building the boats would help the fishing industry in the north, the boat-building industry in the south and overall, national defence at a “small” cost.⁷³ Donald agreed, explaining that the idea would also improve relations between the navy and the fishing industry. Moreover, the scheme would provide the FR with more effective naval vessels. Donald noted that most of the current FR vessels were too small to be used as anything more than “coast watchers,” with very little offensive abilities. The new vessels, however, could pack an offensive punch, if they were fitted with weapons capable of destroying a submarine on the surface or submerged, while at the same time “their unwarlike appearance would give them a fair chance of getting within torpedo range of the raiders.”⁷⁴ With these new vessels, the FR, Donald argued, could be expanded.

The idea received high praise from the fishing industry. One company manager, Colonel Nichols, even offered to raise 25% of the cost for five vessels if the government would supply the balance. FR skippers also saw merit in the plan and several submitted their names for consideration to Donald.⁷⁵ The NSHQ received the concept warmly as well. Unfortunately, like many of Donald’s plans, the Navy put it on the back burner and did not act until after the war began and a clash between commercial and military

⁷³ Bourke to RCN Barracks, p. 14, 6 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

⁷⁴ Donald to NSHQ, p. 5, 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁷⁵ Donald to COPC, 10 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.47.

interests had already emerged. Although this tardiness negated much of the advantages from Donald's forethought, his willingness to go to bat for the skippers was not forgotten by the men of the FR when war broke out and the FR was in flux. Many uncertainties regarding pay, service, charter fees, insurance, rankings, uniforms and more plagued the FR. Donald's word and reputation alone prevented several skippers from losing their patience and abandoning the Navy altogether.

Donald used interactions with the men to better the FR, but this was not his only tool for keeping the FR running smoothly. As before, he relied on other tricks, such as publicity and political connections, to aid the Reserves' recruitment, retention and relevancy. His command of the FR during the Royal Visit of 1939 was perhaps the most noteworthy example. That spring, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth spent a month touring across Canada with the prime minister. The Royal Visit captured the attention of Canadians, and Donald viewed this as a great opportunity to bolster support for the FR. In April 1939, Donald began scheming with Ralph Bremer, the secretary of the Fishing Vessel Owner's Association of British Columbia and the head editor at the *Pacific Coast News: The B.C. Fishermen's Weekly*. Bremer was a key supporter of the FR and, like Donald, wanted to piggyback FR publicity off of the Royal Couple's visit.

The two men set about convincing parade organizers, naval officials, and politicians to give the FR a role during the festivities surrounding the visit. The RCN saw merit in the operation and gave Donald the green light to participate. Meanwhile, Bremer promoted the plan to parade organizers who requested that a fish boat flotilla escort the

monarch's vessel out of Vancouver.⁷⁶ Donald asked his men to take part for the good of the Reserve. He was surprised by their enthusiastic response; men from all over the lower mainland and Vancouver Island came to support the Reserve.⁷⁷ Sixty fishing vessels in all, most of them from the FR, signed up to guard the port and starboard approaches of the monarchs' ship, the *Princess Marguerite*, thereby preventing small craft from interfering with the vessel.⁷⁸ Donald drew up the formations, and changed the route of departure for the fishermen's convoy so that it passed under the Lion's Gate Bridge before meeting up with the King's ship. This allowed well-wishing British Columbians on the bridge to see the procession of fisherman sailing proudly underneath. With fresh coats of paint, ensigns, pendants on their vessels and fireworks overhead, the fishermen showed off their seamanship and loyalty to the King, Queen and Canada.⁷⁹

Donald's idea had struck gold and the FR's intended audience gave high praise to the contribution of the FR. Naval command in Ottawa took note of the Reserve's fine work, thanking Donald for his well-executed command of the harbour patrol. Letters poured in from fishing industry officials and fishing companies thanking Donald for allowing their industry to contribute to such an historic event.⁸⁰ Bremer's paper ran a full story giving other members of the fishing community a chance to see pictures and read

⁷⁶ Donald to Brodeur, p.1, 29 May 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.19. Donald noted on 16 May 1939 that Donald and Bremer met with a Vancouver constable, the harbourmaster, and several fishing company owners. All were in "favour" of allowing the fishermen to participate and the harbourmaster claimed they would be of great assistance. At this time, Donald was also sworn in as a constable.

⁷⁷ Donald to Brodeur, p. 3, 29 May 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.19; Donald noted that the spirit in which the companies and fishermen entered this event was to be commended. Many of the men painted and decorated their vessels, and several came from far distances to be present (one coming as far as from Alert Bay) – all at their own expense.

⁷⁸ Bremer rounded out the flotilla with willing fishing boat owners from the lower mainland of British Columbia, but who were not serving in the FR. The *Princess Marguerite* later became a convoy vessel for the Allies and was torpedoed in 1942 in the Mediterranean Sea.

⁷⁹ Donald to Brodeur, p. 2, 29 May 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.19.

⁸⁰ Fishing Vessel Owners' Association of British Columbia to Donald, 9 June 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.23; The Canadian Fishing Company to Donald, 9 June 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.22.

about their fellow fishermen's participation.⁸¹ The daily press, occupied with other aspects of the monarchs' visit, initially failed to recognize the actions of the FR. However, after Donald, Bell-Irving and Bremer lobbied them, the papers ran the story, giving the FR what Bell-Irving called a "public pat on the back."⁸² The papers also reported that the King had noticed the fishing vessels and praised the fine-looking escort.⁸³ Bell-Irving added that Ian Mackenzie had informed him that he thought the FR was "perfectly wonderful" and that he would "not let the display go unnoticed by his Department."⁸⁴

Donald noted that the contribution of the FR created a spirited enthusiasm among fishermen toward the Navy, which surpassed the success achieved by February's training. The fishermen in the flotilla thanked Donald and Bremer for letting them represent their country and many of those not in the FR asked how they might sign-up. Donald reported to his superiors "from hearsay, observation and actual interviews with company officials, owners and fishermen" that he believed the boost from the combination of February's training and the Royal Visit would allow the FR to be raised to 600 men. He cautioned, however, that the positive "spirit" of the men should be "fostered while occasion permits"

⁸¹ Bremer to Donald, 12 June 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.26. Bremer also wrote to Donald informing him further recognition was deserved and that he had sent letters of thanks and admiration for the FR to Ian Mackenzie, the Naval Secretary in Ottawa, and Captain Brodeur in Esquimalt.

⁸² Bell-Irving to Donald, 2 June 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

⁸³ "Gay Canoes, Little Fishboats, Warships Escort Royal Craft," *Times*, 30 May 1939.

⁸⁴ Bell-Irving to Donald, 2 June 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

and that even if the government would not budget an increase of the FR for 1940, they should allow him to sign the men up anyway as a gesture of good faith.⁸⁵

Breaking the Colour line

A final, and rather unusual pre-war recommendation, originally championed by Donald, involved the proposed inclusion of aboriginals into the FR. The topic is nuanced and merits a further study in its own right, but it also deserves a brief look here as it helps demonstrate Donald's improvisation, his system of taking information from his men, and his outside-the-box thinking.⁸⁶ When the FR was formed, it adhered to the "strict rule" of the RCN that recruits must be "of pure European descent and of the white race."⁸⁷ This policy, known as the "colour line" or "Naval Jim Crow law," was enacted in order to prevent the mixing of whites and nonwhites aboard vessels or on shore in barracks and mess halls.

The regulation was on the books since the birth of the RCN in 1910 and appears to have gone unquestioned until Donald argued to get it overturned for the FR in 1939. Donald recommended including Aboriginals from northern tribes in the FR to offset what he saw as an aggressive Japanese faction living along the coast. The whole situation started when McLeod wrote to Donald to express concerns regarding race relations in the

⁸⁵ Donald to Brodeur, p. 2, 29 May 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.19. Bourke recommended a similar notion in March after training. He thought that the good spirit following training should be capitalized on and recruiting should take place regardless of budget restraints.

⁸⁶ The only secondary sources I have found on this subject come from Robert Sheffield. His M.A. work with Dr. Zimmerman at UVic provides a look into the aboriginals experience with the Canadian armed services during WWII. Yet, his work does not mention any of the discussion coming from within the RCN over including aboriginals in the navy. In fact he states that "The RCN maintained the 'colour line' throughout the first half of the war, apparently with very little debate or opposition" (Robert Scott Sheffield, "'...in the same manner as other people': Government Policy and the Military Service of Canada's First Nations People, 1939-1945," (Master's Thesis, University of Victoria, 1995)).

⁸⁷ Memo from Commander Holms, 7 February 1941, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

north. In conversation with the northern Indian Agent W.E. Collinson, McLeod had learned that members of various Japanese fishing organizations had approached the Aboriginal fishing organization, the Native Brotherhood, in hopes of a merger. Officials of the Native Brotherhood found this unusual, as the Japanese had always treated them “as the dirt under their feet,” and so reported the incident to Collinson. The Indian Agent in turn advised both his superiors and McLeod.⁸⁸

During February, skippers of the FR had informed McLeod and Donald that the Japanese had such intimate knowledge of the northern coastline that they were creating detailed maps of their own, and perhaps sending them back to Japan.⁸⁹ With this new information, McLeod sent several urgent letters to Donald regarding the Japanese attempt to merge with the Native Brotherhood. In May he again raised the alarm, informing Donald that he had it on good authority from a friend of an United States secret service agent that the Japanese were trying to take over the “world’s canned salmon market” and so were causing “all the Salmon Cannery labour trouble” along the West Coast.⁹⁰ Given this suspicious news Donald and McLeod presented a plan to Ottawa in order to offset the “artful moves” of the “wily Japanese.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ McLeod to Donald, 16 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846. Both Donald and Bourke had high regard for J.E. McLeod. In reports they continually cited him as integral to the success of the Reserve. He was trusted by the men of the FR and Donald took his recommendations very seriously.

⁸⁹ Journal of Donald, 12 August 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.42.

⁹⁰ McLeod to Donald, 2 May 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. Problems had abounded in the fishing industry in the first half of the 20th century amongst fishermen and cannery workers. Both parties wanted a fair price for salmon and as Alice Muszynski notes, “in the 1930s fishers became more militant, and there was increased militancy among shoreworkers.” The two began to unite to gain more leverage over fish companies and the government in both Canada and the United States. For more information see: Alice Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10135189>.

⁹¹ McLeod to Donald, 4 April 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846; McLeod to Donald, 9 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

McLeod thought the Japanese may have been using the “natives for some of their propaganda” in order to embarrass or disrupt Canada and the Canadian government. He posited that “if the Japanese are not working from a military angle, they are certainly working from a labour angle” to disrupt the food supply in the impending time of emergency.⁹² McLeod suggested that the RCN use the FR as a means to offset Japanese aggression and at the same time keep the peace between the Canadian government and the Aboriginal peoples. He recommended that including Aboriginals in the FR would help keep the 2400 Aboriginals living in the district as “friends of Canada” rather than as a “detriment to this country in times of trouble.”⁹³

Donald passed these concerns on to Ottawa, adding that even before McLeod’s report, he, McLeod and Commander Brodeur had discussed the issue and considered the inclusion of Aboriginals to be a good idea because of their expert seamanship.⁹⁴ He added that “local authorities” had verified that there was “much good material among the natives...and that there was a certain amount of bad feeling among the natives that the Regulations did not permit of them being included in [the FR].” The reports of Collinson and McLeod led Donald to believe that it was “possible that the Japanese [had] information” regarding the bad feelings held by Aboriginals toward Canada, and that their approach to the Native Brotherhood was an attempt to capitalize on this.⁹⁵ He recommended including Aboriginals in the FR immediately.

⁹² McLeod to Donald, 9 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

⁹³ McLeod to Donald, 2 May 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

⁹⁴ Donald to NSHQ, 28 June 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

⁹⁵ Donald to Brodeur, 30 March 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

McLeod requested that the Aboriginals should not be trained in the incomplete and unimpressive base of Prince Rupert, but should be brought to Esquimalt and shown the “barracks, destroyers and minesweepers” in order to “give [Aboriginal recruits] the desired impression” and then be trained in order to “show these people that we are all one and in the same cause.” The subtext of this “desired impression,” is that the Aboriginals should be shown the power and might of the RCN, perhaps to intimidate them, or perhaps to show them that, as McLeod put earlier, they were being “confided in” and were on the right side by sticking with Canada.⁹⁶ Although Donald argued for the inclusion of Aboriginals based on their merits as fine seamen as well, the circumstances behind his newfound plan of racial inclusion seem to have had a racist agenda of their own.

Donald’s report reached NSHQ a little after Collinson’s report supporting inclusion reached the man responsible for Indian Affairs, T.A. Crerar, the federal Minister of Mines and Resources. In turn, Crerar forwarded Collinson’s letter to the DND, requesting that they look into the inclusion of Aboriginals in the FR. The DND replied that this was impossible, as regulations only allowed for those of “the white race” to be admitted to “all Naval Reserves.” Unhappy with such a curt reply, Crerar wrote a personal letter to Ian Mackenzie, requesting assurances that the aboriginals had “an opportunity of playing their part in the defence system of [the Pacific] coast.” Crerar recognized the racial regulations barring this, but hoped Mackenzie would not “underestimate the ability and resourcefulness of our young Indians” and have the matter “thoroughly investigated” by a naval officer on the Pacific coast.⁹⁷ Mackenzie replied

⁹⁶ McLeod to Donald, 27 June 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.31.

⁹⁷ Crerar to Mackenzie, 11 May 1939, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803. Crerar also mentioned that a number of aboriginals “in high schools in British Columbia, have with very rare exceptions succeeded in keeping abreast of the white pupils in attendance in the same schools.”

that inclusion was impossible and reiterated the old reasoning that the “close quarters” of ships required reservists be “one race.”⁹⁸ Still, he conceded that down the road there may be a “useful function” for the Pacific tribes and, as per Crerar’s request, Mackenzie wrote to Admiral Percy Nelles asking him to have someone look into the matter.

Nelles and NSHQ were now receiving simultaneous pressure from above and below. Subordinates on the Pacific Coast encouraged aboriginal inclusion to promote defence, and superiors in Ottawa wanted information to satisfy the Department of Resources and Mines. Naval headquarters reacted quickly, sending the Director of Naval Intelligence and Plans to Prince Rupert and commissioning a full investigation from Donald.⁹⁹

The Naval Secretary, J.O. Cossette, asked Donald if he still believed that because the men of the FR served in mixed crews on commercial vessels, they would not mind serving aboard mixed crews in the FR and second, how he would deal with Aboriginal officers, who by right of rank, could dine in the petty officer’s mess hall.¹⁰⁰ Donald’s reply began with a long list of reasons why the aboriginals should be included in the FR: their reputation as good citizens and “efficient seamen;” their leadership having the

⁹⁸ Mackenzie to Crerar, 16 May 1939, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803. This argument against the mixing of races in the RCN was the most common. When pro-aboriginal officers argued that the RN included non-whites and so should the RCN, opponents were quick to point out that this was an unfair comparison. First the anti-aboriginal officers argued that the “coloureds” serving in the RN were used as servants of sorts and that aboriginals would not be suited for this type of work. Secondly the anti-aboriginal officers argued that Canada was a small-ship navy and so could not support segregation; the nonwhites in the RN could be given their own accommodations and mess halls on RN ships only because of the large size of RN ships.

⁹⁹ McLeod to Borrie, 6 February 1941, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803. While Donald was compiling a more in-depth report on the inclusion of aboriginals into the RCN, the NSHQ sent another man to give his opinion on how the Japanese actions might affect national security. The man they sent was Commander H.A.C. Lane of the Royal Navy and Director of Naval Intelligence and Plans. Lane flew to Prince Rupert and investigated the Japanese angle of the issue in-depth. Like Donald and McLeod, he recommended that the inclusion of aboriginals into the FR was a good step to offset Japanese aggression.

¹⁰⁰ Cossette to Brodeur, 2 June 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

“greatest loyalty and patriotism to the Empire;” their “dislike” of the Japanese “who they regard as parasites to a greater extent than do the White Fishermen;” their lack of fishermen’s unions and place as a “barren field for ‘Red’ agitators;” their service during World War I; their long history of being “great fighter[s];” their civilized nature, living in houses which are equal to the whites and building boats which are just as good; their skin colour being only “a little darker than a white man in appearance;” their prowess in sport; and finally their knowledge of the Northern Coast being better than most of the whites.

Amid this exhaustive list of positives, he included solutions for possible problems.

Donald assured Cossette that the white members of the FR would have no issue whatsoever serving with aboriginals in the navy, as the two races often worked on the same fish boats. He suggested ways around Cossette’s perceived problem with Indians dining in the same mess hall as white RCN officers, recommending that the Navy simply set up a “special table” in the base gymnasium for aboriginal skippers. Donald also vouched for the aboriginals, informing his superiors that “there would be no trouble about liquor” as most of them were not drinkers and they supported the legislation in the Indian Act which prohibited Aboriginals from drinking.¹⁰¹ Lastly, Donald suggested that they could avoid bad recruits by having the local Chiefs recommend each man for duty before the local Indian Agent and RCMP checked potential recruits. Overall, Donald viewed the inclusion of the Aboriginals as a major boon to the FR.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ In short, from 1887 to 1950, the Indian Act forbade Aboriginals to be in possession of liquor. Indian Act, R.S.C. 1927, c. 98, s. 126 and An Act to amend the Indian Act, S.C. 1936, c. 20, ss. 6-12 as cited in Wendy Moss and Elaine Gardner-O’Toole, *Aboriginal People: History of Discriminatory Laws*, BP-175E. Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, November 1991.

¹⁰² Donald to NSHQ, 28 June 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846. As further proof that Aboriginals should be included in the RCN, Donald noted that northern Aboriginals had beat the Navy in a baseball game in the 1920s and that many Chiefs had been educated in England.

From his report and other correspondence it can be seen that Donald, and other officers on the coast, were sympathetic to the Aboriginals' position. Donald noted that the regulation barring Aboriginals from the FR, when "foreigners" who had resided for only two years in Canada were admitted, was "extremely galling" to this proud and loyal race of people.¹⁰³ McLeod called northern Aboriginals, particularly the Hydah, "loyal and very intelligent" and Captain Elfert, who worked with McLeod in Prince Rupert noted that "the segregation of descendants of a fine race into a floating pale reminiscent of the Middle Ages is out of keeping with the tenets of democracy."¹⁰⁴ Still, other naval officials could not see past the skin colour of any non-white recruit. They claimed that that Aboriginals were inferior sailors, would not be able to handle the grog ration, and were not trustworthy or educated enough to handle classified documents.¹⁰⁵ Yet, Donald argued that officers who had actually met these northern Aboriginals saw their value, or, as Captain Elfert posited later, "the only opinions unfavourable to the recruiting of Indians are those of individuals not directly associated with them."¹⁰⁶

In addition to his report to COPC, Donald reworked an entire training system and schedule anticipating the inclusion of Aboriginals into the Reserve. His tenacity for the subject was rewarded, albeit only partially. NSHQ agreed to expand the FR by 100 more men and twenty more ships, half of these new recruits and boats would be Aboriginal.

¹⁰³ Donald to NSHQ, 28 June 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, 11846.

¹⁰⁴ McLeod to Commander Borrie, 6 February 1941, LAC, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803; Elfert to Commander Borrie, 21 February 1941, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

¹⁰⁵ Commander Beech to NSHQ, 1 March 1941, FOPC – General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

¹⁰⁶ 21 February 1941, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803. Captain Elfert was the X.O. to Commander Borrie in Prince Rupert at this time, but had previously helped Donald organize and train the FR. His defence of the Indians came in 1941 when the idea of expanding the Indians into the FR was again under investigation. Elfert unequivocally supported the admission of aboriginals into the RCN and argued passionately with his superior officers that the "racial exclusiveness" was "unsuitable for a democracy."

However, headquarters, working under a strained budget and concerned more with European affairs, would not be able to make this expansion a reality until the following year. Nonetheless, during his trips up the coast that summer Donald began the initial stages of recruitment among the Aboriginals. Donald's network of information up the coast, his forward thinking, and his dedication to West Coast defence vis-à-vis the FR helped initiate racial reforms in an organization steeped in segregation. Donald made a major contribution in cutting down the colour line.

Concluding a peacetime operation.

Donald did what he could to steer the FR in the right direction during 1939. The initial training was considered a success and gave Donald and his advisors new information to help round out regulations and procedures. After training, Donald kept in touch with his men, making sure they were happy and he acted on their complaints and suggestions. He did his best to balance the reserve's commercial and military interests, and fought to include aboriginals in the FR. His suggestions were purposeful: to improve the FR in order to improve coastal defence.

Unfortunately, many of his recommendations went unheeded or their implementation was bogged down in governmental red tape. Although Donald was optimistic about the Reserve, he also worried that "in spite of the successful start" that the FR would be "spoiled" by competing commercial interests, political infighting, budget cuts, and more.¹⁰⁷ The triumphs and tribulations of the FR during peacetime in 1939 set the stage for the FR during the war. The legitimacy and relevancy gained by Donald for the FR during 1939 quickly evaporated as Canada's defensive focus shifted from the

¹⁰⁷ Donald to Commander Taylor, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39.

Pacific to the Atlantic. Although the FR was difficult to maintain in peacetime, it proved even trickier to keep afloat and funded in the first few years of World War Two. With Canadian convoys on centre stage in the Atlantic, many viewed the FR, in the sleepy back-water of the Pacific, as irrelevant to the war effort. Yet, perceiving the importance of such a Reserve, Donald did what he could to fight this short-sightedness. From 1939 to 1941, Donald and his successors adjusted the role of the FR in order to keep it alive.

Chapter 4: “...a time of great improvisation.”¹

When the deck’s covered with fish scales the gas powered fish boat looks useful but not beautiful. But dress her up with a coat of grey paint, give the commander the rank of “skipper” and she becomes one of the units of the Royal Canadian Navy and is proud of it! From a drab she becomes a lady with a certificate of character.

The Montreal Gazette, 27 May 1940

In late August 1939, Naval Services Headquarters (NSHQ) instructed military commanders on both coasts to quietly begin preparing for war with Germany.² West Coast officials of the Army, Air Force and Navy began partial mobilization. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) called up mechanics and hurried construction of their five new RCAF flying boat stations in Ucluelet, Alliford Bay, Prince Rupert, Bella Bella and Coal Harbour.³ By 26 August the Army had manned coastal fortresses in Vancouver and Esquimalt with artillerymen at the ready. Two days later Admiral Percy Nelles advised Ottawa to move the four Canadian destroyers stationed at Esquimalt, to the Atlantic. The Department of National Defence (DND) agreed; it believed “there was no imminent threat from Japan.”⁴ Two of the destroyers, the *Laurent* and *Fraser*, set sail from Esquimalt two hours before Germany began the invasion of Poland. That same day the Navy called up various reservists, mostly signalmen, to staff the minesweeper *Nootka* and

¹ Donald to Brodeur, 14 February 1946, p. 1, CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum Archives, Donald Fonds, 993.90.1.

² NSHQ memo, 22 August 1939, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. The message added that because of “present political situation, care [was] to be taken to avoid giving any appearance of war preparation.”

³ “Jericho Beach and the West Coast Flying Boat Stations” Chris Weicht, Dalhousie University and Canadian Naval History Conference, *Canada’s Pacific Naval Presence: Purposeful or Peripheral*, ed. Peter T. Haydon and Ann L. Griffiths (Halifax, N.S.: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 1999) 90.

⁴ W.A.B Douglas, Rogert Sarty and Michael Whitby, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943*, Vol. 2, part. 1, (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 31.

to be transported aboard the *Skidegate* to man signal stations at Discovery Island and Race Rocks. Reservists were also sent to examination services at William's Head.⁵ Days later, as the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) began full mobilization, Lieutenant Commander Donald was promoted to Acting Commander and instructed to gather the men of the Fishermen's Reserve (FR). Once fully mobilized, NSHQ increasingly simphoned more ships, men, and resources to the Atlantic. The Pacific theatre had deteriorated from first to second fiddle.

Only a year earlier, Mackenzie King's defence policy had favoured bolstering the Pacific. According to Roger Sarty, until 1939, due to "domestic constraints on military spending and [the British] empire's weakness in the eastern Pacific" King had "no other choice" but to concentrate on West Coast defence.⁶ However, with the start of war in Europe, Atlantic defence took priority. Yet, King still recognized Japan as a major threat. On 5 September the Japanese demanded a withdrawal of all Western forces from China, causing King to lament in his diary, "what will the Japanese not do in the Orient!" He was also alarmed by the power of the Japanese and German navies and expected that soon Canada would be bombed on both coasts and inland.⁷

However, the Canadian Chiefs of Staff assessed only one problem at a time, focusing on the German threat. The Chiefs did not think an attack on western Canada was likely given that Japan had not officially declared war on the allies. Until 1941, they

⁵ Provisional Institution of War Precautions, 1 September 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁶ Roger F. Sarty, *The Maritime Defence of Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996).

⁷ King Diary, 6 September 1939. A former Canadian diploma in Japan, H.L. Keenleyside shared some of King's worry, believing the European war would lead to Japan making a "serious re-examination" of their foreign policy, with a naval expansion and southern push for resources likely. He also noted that the Non-Aggression pact between Russia and Germany caused much consternation in the Japanese cabinet, and that the American-Japanese commercial treaty was due to expire that January. All this, according to Keenleyside, was most grave for Canada. John David Meehan, *The Dominion and the Rising Sun: Canada Encounters Japan, 1929-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 183.

agreed that if a belligerent attacked British Columbia, it would be of a much “smaller scale and lesser intensity” than the anticipated attack on the Atlantic seaboard.⁸ In September 1939, The Joint Services Committee (JSC)⁹ on the West Coast mirrored this sentiment, reporting that they did not foresee much of a German threat to British Columbia, but admitted that there was some potential for the German navy to disrupt trade along the West Coast.¹⁰ To be safe, the JSC suggested that internal security be bolstered and that the FR begin patrolling “certain vulnerable points on the British Columbian Coast” to prevent German espionage and sabotage.¹¹ In all, Canadian military advisors anticipated almost no threat to the West Coast by Germany.

Yet, like King, Canadian military advisors were quite worried about the Japanese threat on the West Coast. In general, from the late 1930s to the start of the Pacific war in 1941, Canadian military advisors agreed that a war with Japan could break out at any moment. Most advisors, especially those stationed on the West Coast, claimed that when war broke out, the Japanese threat to British Columbia would be real, although they disagreed on the scale of attack. The Chiefs of Staff noted that a “serious attack” by the Japanese was “remote” and invasion “highly improbable.” Yet, the planners admitted that “tip-and-run bombardment raids” against Prince Rupert and submarine attacks on “shipping in focal areas” were possible. The Chiefs agreed that this would be a “sound strategy” for the Japanese in order to pin down Canadian and American forces. Even though the Chiefs predicted Japanese attacks designed only for their “nuisance value” the

⁸ 24 February 1941, LAC, Flag Officer of the Pacific (hereafter FOPC), RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11801

⁹ The JSC consisted of representatives of the Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force who collaborated on coastal defence and advised the Chiefs of Staff. There was one committee on the West Coast and one on the East. Hereafter all mention of the JSC refers to the West Coast committee.

¹⁰ JSC Minutes, 12 September 1939, LAC, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. One of the minutes noted that the “there is no possibility of combined attack on this coast.” The word “possibility” is scratched out in pen, and “probability” is written below.

¹¹ JSC Minutes, 12 September 1939, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772

JSC wrote up contingency plans for more serious scenarios.¹² In July 1940, JSC developed contingency plans for a war with Japan, claiming that an outward attack was unlikely but that an internal attack by Japanese residents in British Columbia was plausible. Their report to NSHQ asserted that the loyalty of all Japanese Canadians was suspect; that the Japanese government had villages “directly under their control” along the coast, and that the Japanese population in British Columbia “could very easily make themselves a potent force and threaten the vital industries of British Columbia.”¹³ Thus, they suggested that when war broke out, the government should intern “Japanese subversive elements” and that the RCN, in conjunction with the Militia and the RCAF, make a “show of force” where there were concentrations of Japanese people.¹⁴

The FR was to be part of this “show of force” and was charged by the RCN to deal with internal threats should there be a war with Japan. However, for over two years war remained exclusively in the Atlantic. This put the FR in a difficult position. Without a pressing danger on the West Coast, NSHQ – who was barely keeping their Atlantic convoys supplied – questioned the purpose and size of the FR. Furthermore, NSHQ began having major problems with the FR. Incongruent FR regulations, once praised as a boon to recruitment, became a problem when NSHQ wished to transfer FR members off the West Coast to fill RCN needs elsewhere. Chartering FR vessels caused another headache for NSHQ as fish companies, seeing increased profits in canned salmon and frozen fish, from sales to Britain, lobbied to have their vessels returned to the essential service of fishing. Donald had tried to warn NSHQ of such problems but his warnings –

¹² 24 February 1941, FOPC, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11801.

¹³ JCD Memo on the Matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada, Appendix, p. 4, 12 July 1940, LAC, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. The report noted that Japan was controlling these villages through their consul in Vancouver.

¹⁴ JCD Memo on the Matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada, 12 July 1940, Defence Schemes, West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

and solutions – had gone unheeded. A scramble for a remedy ensued. FR officials, alarmed at the “totally inadequate forces available” for West Coast defence, plagued NSHQ with schemes and pleas for more ships, supplies, and armaments.¹⁵ Before the Japanese entered the war, the FR was in a precarious place, and Donald – along with his successor, Lieutenant Commander James McCulloch – were forced to steer the FR between military, political and commercial icebergs. Before most of the problems between the NSHQ and the FR arose, the Naval Secretary J.O. Cossette had commanded West Coast officers:

that in the present state of the war there is not likely to be any extensive operations on your coast, yet it must be borne in mind that should an enemy arise in the Far East, operations on the B.C. coast would be of great importance. For this reason it is desired to build up the organization there upon a sound and proved basis.¹⁶

Donald and McCulloch took this command seriously. Due to their efforts the FR was maintained and bolstered between 1939 and 1941, in what Donald later called “a time of great improvisation.”¹⁷

“Little Watch Dogs of the Navy”¹⁸

In September 1939, when Hitler’s tanks rolled into Poland, the men of the FR were scattered along the British Columbia coast fishing for salmon. Although Donald contacted a handful of skippers, Donald was forced to leave messages with wives, fish packers, and friends. Before the war Donald had tried to solve the communication problem it by instructing the men to assemble at Prince Rupert or Esquimalt if an emergency arose. However, there was a hitch in this plan: Canada was not officially in a

¹⁵ JCD Memo on the Matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada, 12 July 1940, Defence Schemes, West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

¹⁶ Cossette to COPC, 16 October 1939, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

¹⁷ Donald to Brodeur, 14 February 1946, p. 1, Donald Fonds, 993.90.1.

¹⁸ *The Evening Citizen*, Ottawa, 12 April 1941.

state of war when Donald was trying to contact his men, and even so, many of the fishermen were in remote areas and would have no news of it. Eventually, the fishermen did receive their call-ups, delivered their fish, unloaded their gear and sailed to their home bases.

Although some boat owners were upset to have their fishing season cut short, Donald had more pressing concerns. It had taken the Navy two weeks to contact all the fishermen, outfit their boats and set up a consistent patrol of the southern British Columbia coastline and it took a week longer to form patrols in the Queen Charlottes.¹⁹ Were there war in the Pacific, the FR would not have been able to round up the Japanese vessels as quickly as NSHQ anticipated. Without the FR, there were not enough auxiliary craft in the RCMP and RCN to fulfil such a task – naval destroyers, minesweepers and corvettes were too big for much of the shallow and indented coast. If unchecked, NSHQ worried that small Japanese boats could sail relatively freely in the numerous inlets and coves for several weeks before the RCN could respond effectively. In 1940 the JSC stated that a group of Japanese fishing boats left unchecked, could capture strategic areas and do “considerable damage” to the Canadian war effort.²⁰ In 1939 and 1940 Donald encouraged putting Wireless Telegraphy (W/T) aboard fishing vessels outside the FR, to make them unofficial coast watchers for the FR and to achieve a more efficient mobilization should these vessels be needed to serve in times of peril.²¹

¹⁹ Commanding Officer Pacific Command (hereafter COPC) to NSHQ, 23 September 1939, LAC, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, 11821.

²⁰ JCD Memo on the Matter of the Defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada, Appendix, p. 4, 12 July 1940, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

²¹ Donald’s recommendations were again ignored by NSHQ and the RCN did not attempt to get W/T or R/T sets installed on commercial fishing boats on the Pacific Coast until 1942. At that time rumours of submarine sightings often arrived in Esquimalt days or weeks after the sighting because the fishermen lacked the equipment to report the submarines (NSHQ Memo, 3 November 1942, LAC, FOPC, Defence Measures and Plans, Emergency Action Stations, RG24-D-11-1, 11809).

Yet, the Pacific War was not so imminent in 1939, so the FR's delayed preparations were not detrimental to the war effort. The Commanding Officer Pacific Command (COPC) received word of a handful of armed German merchant vessels off the coast of Chile but thought them unlikely to turn north toward Canada.²² Even if these ships made the arduous journey to Canada, the FR, with its limited offensive capability, could not defend against them so members of the FR were given time to winterize their fishing gear or arrange to rent it out. Still, on 10 September the FR became a wartime reserve: the Canadian Government assumed the fishermen's insurance as a public liability; the Navy issued each man \$0.85 per day for provisions, gave them access to naval fuel stores and began giving skippers marriage allowance.²³ Finally as skippers came in from the fishing grounds, the Navy dry-docked their boats, painted them battleship-grey paint, assigned them new call-signs and as easy as that, these fishing *boats* became naval *ships*.²⁴

The early conversion of these vessels was of the most basic nature. The FR ships were supplied with a W/T set and an Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve operator, two .303 rifles, a pistol, a mounted .303 stripped Lewis machine gun, ammunition, and other gear including semaphore flags, a white ensign, a first aid kit and signalling lamps. In September 1939, however, various items were in short supply and many ships set sail on their first patrols without essential gear, such as binoculars, signalling lamps, or more importantly, W/T sets or their main armament – the mounted Lewis machine gun. In

²² JSC Minutes, 12 September 1939, Defence Schemes West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772. JSC also noted that the danger was even more remote as the United States would track the enemy warships off their coast and alert the Canadians.

²³ COPC to NSHQ, 8 September 1939, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11821.

²⁴ Although the distinction between boat and ship is widely argued – it is generally assumed that a naval commission with a permanent crew can change the same vessel from a boat to a ship. Therefore, in the case of the FR, all the “fishing boats” became “naval ships” when they received their conversions and permanent crews. In any case, when this paper uses boat in reference to the FR vessels, it denotes the pre or post-war commercial use, whereas ship is used to indicate the wartime years of these vessels.

April 1939, the Commanding Officer of the RCN Barracks had called the lack of guns and W/T sets, “a most urgent matter.” He recommended that the RCN purchase weapons from the neutral United States as he viewed it “doubtful” that England would part with weapons at that time.²⁵ After the start of war in September, the commander reminded COPC of the urgency of obtaining weapons from the United States while it was still neutral.²⁶

The DND eventually acted and obtained Lewis machine guns from the United States and elsewhere. The FR was not the first in line to receive these weapons, but over time, the Navy found basic equipment for each vessel. The variety of the FR ships, however, created a wide diversity of supply specifications. This meant that parts and supplies were never universal and naval mechanics and engineers were constantly jerry-rigging equipment and supplies to fit each vessel.²⁷ For instance, some ships had large dories, skiffs, and searchlights and some did not. Some had a maximum speed of 7 knots, some 12 knots. One FR boat was a mere 46 feet long, while, another, was measured at 102 feet.²⁸ Finding places to mount machine guns, sleep six to twelve men, and store a W/T operator aboard each vessel was not always easy. When some FR vessels began carrying minesweeping gear, depth charge launchers and even ASDIC (sonar), this challenge became even greater. Nonetheless, the men also took it upon themselves to

²⁵ Commander Naden to Commander Esquimalt, 11 April 1939, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, 11821.

²⁶ Commander Naden to Commander Esquimalt, September 1939, FOPC, Organization and administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820.

²⁷ Gilbert Norman Tucker noted in his official naval history in 1952 that “there was little uniformity in the machinery installed in these vessels, and in most cases spare parts had to be improvised. Work of this nature was divided between the dockyard and commercial firms” (Gilbert Norman Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1952).

²⁸ As an example, the *Joan W. II* (FY34) was a 72’ wood vessel, with a maximum speed of 9.5 knots, and a 19 foot Dory aboard. It carried the standard armament, but would later receive minesweeping gear. It accommodated two officers – a skipper and probably a coxswain – and nine ratings – of which one would be a motor mechanic, one a cook one a W/T specialist and possibly an electrician. The *Capella* (FY31) in contrast was only 55 feet long, carried five men, had a coal stove in the galley, lacked searchlights and had a top speed of only 7.5 knots.

make life aboard these vessels more bearable. Since most vessels were not meant to be lived aboard year round, the men made unofficial adjustments such as rigging up bunks in the fish holds, building heating vents from the engine, and even creating their own stills to add to the rum ration. Donald, who oversaw much of the work, noted to NSHQ that “our gear is largely improvised, but works like a charm.”²⁹

Regardless of the size or shape of the vessel, Donald, in his newly expanded role as Commander of Auxiliary Vessels (COAV), found a way to use it. As a United Press article reported “the tiny craft [of the FR} do 100...odd jobs that relieve the larger craft for more important work.”³⁰ The FR vessels served as harbour and fire boats, as well as aiding the RCAF in salvaging wrecks and resupplying bases along the coast.³¹ The FR served as examination boats at Yorke Island and in the harbours of Prince Rupert and Esquimalt – keeping track of the shipping traffic, searching vessels and occasionally ordering the nearby coastal fortresses to fire warning shots to get the attention of uncooperative vessels. They often helped with training by towing targets, so that larger warships could test their ASDIC or marksmanship. And finally, they carried out a vast array of patrol services, “slowly pottering around the coast” in search of trouble.³²

Donald organized constant patrols of the Queen Charlottes and the west coast of Vancouver Island, with each ship at sea for twenty to thirty days at a time. There were also alternating patrols in Johnstone Strait and along the inside passage of British Columbia. Over time, as new ships were added to Donald’s command, he expanded the

²⁹ Donald to Murray, 2 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

³⁰ *The Miami Daily News*, 2 December 1939, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2206&dat=19391202&id=6wktAAAIBAJ&sjid=HNgFAAAIBAJ&pg=1416,1182350>.

³¹ In addition to the 5 new RCAF sea bases on the coast, the RCAF began dropping groups of men off in remote or suspicious locations to act as the eyes of the RCAF. These groups of men had a radio, food, binoculars and not much else. They were in some of the most remote areas of British Columbia for weeks at a time.

³² Murray to Donald, 31 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.48.

patrol until most of the coast had been examined and was under regular surveillance. The war gave the RCN an excuse to explore the coast, and the lack of enemy action in local waters, gave the FR plenty of time to thoroughly investigate the coastline. The skippers delivered hundreds of pages of typed reports to their superiors commenting on their patrols. Some of the information was quite useful but much of it was mundane.³³ On a coast without an active belligerent, some improvisation and ingenuity was required in order to make these patrols purposeful.

Donald continually anticipated a war with Japan and instructed his skippers to comment on Japanese activities as well as locations which Japan could use as supply caches or refueling points. Skippers nosed into inlets and coves; used hand leads to search the bottom for submerged objects; and sent armed parties ashore to explore islands, mines, waterfalls, and lakes. In their explorations they made note of good spots for an enemy to resupply, fresh water sources, deep harbours and such evidence of enemy as empty diesel drums, explosives, wreckage, footprints, hidden cabins, human skeletons, and much more. The skippers also noted the location of individual Japanese persons in every port and often asked white settlers about suspicious Japanese activity. For instance, in 1940, Elgin Neish, skipper of the *Van Isle* reported that while in a beer parlour in Chemainus, a waiter informed him that a local Japanese man had been asking about Neish's boat and purpose of the FR. Neish furthered his investigation into the man with the help of the RCMP and informed Donald that the Japanese man was a "local 'big-shot' amongst the Japanese" and "like all Japanese, 'Inquisitive about things that should not interest him.'"³⁴ Neish was not unique in his investigation of the local population: skipper

³³ Most of the patrol reports are rife with some variation of the phrase: "nothing unusual to report."

³⁴ *Van Isle* Patrol Report, 1 November 1940, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS VAN ISLE, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11797.

Inge of the *Signal*, for example noted that a sawmill at the head of Big Bay had four Japanese employees – two Canadian born and two foreign born – and that the Indians, who were “anything but friendly” with the Japanese, could be relied on to keep the RCN informed of their activities.³⁵ Skipper Patterson of the *Allaverdy* urged regular patrols at one of the logging camps near Port Hardy as it was “nearly 100% Japanese.”³⁶

In addition to commenting on the Japanese, FR skippers also religiously pointed out inconsistencies or errors in nautical charts. Skippers noted dangers such as reefs and low-hanging telephone lines that were not listed on charts and corrected reference books that labelled certain routes as safe or impassable.³⁷ The FR also commented on the new Hydrographical maps prepared by Captain Parizeau, complaining that “place names, names of lights, islands and channels sometimes do not agree with those on Admiralty and other earlier charts.”³⁸ Their complaints and corrections were passed onto the Naval Chart Officer, who in turn passed information to Captain Parizeau at the Canadian Hydrographical Office.³⁹ FR commanders praised their efforts, but also reminded them

³⁵ *Signal* Patrol Report, 15 November 1941, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS SIGNAL, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11797.

³⁶ *Allaverdy* Patrol Report, 5 December 1940, LAC, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS ALLAVERDY, RG24-D-11-1, 11793.

³⁷ For example on 31 December 1940 Neish reported an inlet that was uncharted and “marked unnavigatable.” [sic] He reported proceeding eight miles down the inlet until the “inlet narrowed down to eight feet wide and three fathoms of water” (*Van Isle* Patrol Report, 31 December 1940, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS VAN ISLE, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11797).

³⁸ Monthly Report of Proceedings, COAV, 21 March 1940, FOPC, War Diaries General, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11809.

³⁹ COPC memo, 13 December, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS VAN ISLE, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11797. This dedication to charting was probably thanks to Donald convincing Harold R. Tingley to come out of retirement and serve as an instructor in the FR. Tingley, a former Lieutenant Commander, had served in the RCN with distinction from its inception in 1911 until his retirement in 1935. Although a decorated officer, Tingley was also quite infamous as the only RCN officer to command a ship to sink in peacetime. His battle class trawler ran aground and despite proper procedure on his part and timely assistance by the RCN, the *HMCS Thiepvál* was lost. Although he was exonerated, the sinking of his ship left Tingley angry that the charts used by the navy were deficient. Consequently he had a desire to see the whole of British Columbian waters properly charted. In his retirement he fixed compasses, ran a school of navigation and charted rocks and reefs in his spare time. When Tingley became an instructor he was well liked by the men and by administration; Skippers claimed that his pilotage course was the most useful of all the training. Although most skippers had a good handle on standard pilotage, Tingley’s additional emphasis on how to

not to put their crew or vessel in unnecessary danger – suggesting they use their skiffs to explore dangerous or unmarked locations.⁴⁰ The skippers' dedication to proper charting was useful to the Navy and the resulting updated charts made commercial enterprises safer after the war.

COPC also instructed Donald to coordinate efforts with the Department of Fisheries office in British Columbia. Because of the war, Fisheries was short on men and boats and thus could not patrol effectively. In 1939 it was having problems with American vessels illegally fishing in Canadian waters. FR skippers were instructed to investigate foreign fishing boats operating within three miles of the coast, and inform the vessels of their illegal activity.⁴¹ The FR was to report back to Fisheries, who would begin building cases against American poachers. Later, when the Japanese entered the war, FR vessels out of Prince Rupert went a step further and carried fisheries officers aboard during halibut season.⁴²

properly update charts and when to be wary of existing charts was a major boon to the men, the Navy and the country (<http://www.wlu.ca/lcmds/cmh/back%20issues/CMH/volume%209/Issue%203/McDowall%20-%20HMCS%20Thiepv%20-%20The%20Accidental%20Tourist%20Destination.pdf>; Tingley to Naval Secretary, 30 December 1938, LAC, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681).

⁴⁰ Memo from McCulloch, 6 January 1941, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS VAN ISLE, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11797.

⁴¹ An example of this occurred in 14 May 1942, when a halibut boat, the "Evelyn C" out of Anacortes, refused to stop at the hail of the *Spray*. Skipper Ian Macleod commanded his men to fire five rounds of tracer bullets from the Lewis gun over the bow of the boat, causing her to stop. Macleod then boarded the *Evelyn C* with an armed entourage, inspected the vessel, warned the captain and reported to COAV who forwarded his report to fisheries. (*Signal Patrol Report*, 14 May 1942, FOPC, Reports of proceedings - HMCS SIGNAL, RG24-D-11-1, 11797). American vessels were permitted to enter Canadian waters in times of severe weather, and this was often their excuse to be in Canadian waters. Fortunately for NSHQ, the skippers of the FR were in tune with weather in the area and knew when the American captains were lying, noting it in their reports.

⁴² Memo from V.G. Brodeur, 12 April 1940, Donald Fonds, Esq. 993.92.55; Memo from Motherwell, 15 September 1943, LAC, FOPC, General Information, Department of Fisheries, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11806; The Canadian Government's Fisheries boats in British Columbia were transferred to the Navy when Japan entered the war. Thus, the RCN often allowed fisheries officers to ride along with FR patrols, especially in the north where Americans often poached halibut in Canadian waters. FR skippers were happy to oblige when the Fisheries officers were after American vessels, but the fisheries officers noted they were less than accommodating to the officer if he was after a Canadian fisherman.

The patrol reports of the FR were ultimately quite useful to NSHQ, but this did not happen immediately. In the beginning, naval officials from COPC and NSHQ – who were not familiar with the fishermen’s unconventional actions – were astounded by the reports Donald sent. Naval officials were baffled by skippers who explained a 24-hour hang up on a sandbar in a single sentence, who thought nothing of slaughtering sea lions for target practice, who detonated six boxes of explosives found at a deserted mine, or the commanding officer of the *Talapus* who failed to report immediately a ship, without lights, that resembled an aircraft carrier or cruiser running eastwardly. In time, FR officials learned to “read between the lines” of the fishermen’s patrols, trusting the skippers’ judgment and turning a blind eye to harmless shenanigans.⁴³ As from the beginning of the FR, compromise ruled the day: naval officers informed skippers when their actions had gone too far, or when their reports left too much out, and skippers began adhering more to the way of the navy – or at least started writing reports that reflected a change in actions that may not have been congruent with reality.⁴⁴

Slippery Problems

While the men of the FR dutifully patrolled the coast and learned to keep in step with Naval ways, Donald was fighting NSHQ’s attempts to dismantle it. The FR’s “successful start” in the first half of 1939 was soon forgotten by NSHQ, fishermen, commercial interests, and politicians.⁴⁵ NSHQ ignored or tabled Donald’s warnings, and his suggestions to keep the FR running smoothly were caught up in its bureaucracy. Still,

⁴³ Douglas, *No Higher Purpose*, 55.

⁴⁴ Despite this, in November 1939 and again in February 1940, NSHQ and COPC reminded the FR commanders that the skippers’ reports needed to be improved for historical reasons. Also on October 21 1941, COPC wrote to the Commander at Prince Rupert complaining that the FR out of Prince Rupert needed to improve their patrol reports. He attached a patrol report from the *San Tomas* to use as an example for his men. Right up until the disbandment of the FR in 1944, officials were fine tuning the patrol report process in the FR (21 October 1941, FOPC, War Diaries General, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11809).

⁴⁵ Donald to Commander Taylor, Donald Fonds, 993.92.39.

throughout the ordeal, Donald invested himself in the success of the FR. One skipper, D.W. Peck, claimed that the FR leader “understood what [the FR] was up against” and thus was more accommodating to the fishermen than others. Many officers of the RCN did not seem to share Donald’s affinity for the Reserve, and some had, what Peck called, a “towering disdain” toward the FR, “not in the least tempered by their own incompetence in dealing with its problems.”⁴⁶

Whether incompetent or not, officials in the NSHQ certainly did have problems with the FR in the first stages of its wartime existence especially the deviances between the FR handbook and the RCN handbook. One such anomaly was the Navy’s promise that members of the FR would not be transferred off the West Coast, or even off their fishing boats, in a time of war.⁴⁷ Before the war broke out, NSHQ recognized that “any form of Reserve Force that cannot be drafted everywhere or serve anywhere in war is a potential menace to future drafting requirements.”⁴⁸ NSHQ tried to drop the regulation in the summer before the war, but the backlash was severe – with the men of the FR threatening to quit – so NSHQ was forced to back down.⁴⁹ After the war began, Captain Murray, Director of Naval Reserves, lamented to Donald that he believed it a “great mistake” to start a Reserve with such a “local use.”⁵⁰

With minor exceptions, NSHQ was unable to change the transfer regulations of the FR but did adjust other unconventional regulations related to rank and admission

⁴⁶ Donald Peck, “The Gumboot Navy,” *Raincoast Chronicles*, no. 7 (1977) 9-12.

⁴⁷ Rowland Bourke to CNS, 5 March 1938, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁴⁸ Cossette to FR Officials, 19 July 1939, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

⁴⁹ J.E. McLeod, paymaster in Prince Rupert for the FR, also threatened to quit the service if the regulation was not kept on the books.

⁵⁰ Murray to Donald, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.51. Murray did note, however, that he was not “in touch with the situation” at the time of recruitment and trusted Donald’s judgement.

requirements.⁵¹ Donald admitted to NSHQ that initially age, medical and nationality requirements were meant to be “exceedingly lax” in order to get the FR started.⁵² He agreed that some things should be changed and did not complain when NSHQ dropped the age limit from 55 to 45, made medical standards more stringent, or when NSHQ cut some “foreigners” who had “socialistic leanings.”⁵³ However, Donald fought against changing the rank of FR skippers. NSHQ, distressed that members of the FR were not technically qualified as Warrant officers, changed their rank from skippers to skipper-coxswains – an entirely new RCN rank. NSHQ suggested that FR skippers be initially labelled coxswains, and upon proving their seamanship, receive the rank skipper-coxswains.⁵⁴ Although the pay did not change for former skippers in 1939, this slight was a “very sore point” with the men.⁵⁵ Donald argued that the men of the FR often held

⁵¹ An exception to this involved a special section of the FR that came about in late 1942 and involved several hundred new FR members. In response to a Japanese submarine torpedoing two ships in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and shelling Estevan point, the JSC instituted a plan to protect the coast against a Japanese invasion. Men were brought into the FR to work in conjunction with the army as commando units. The thought was that they would serve in small, fast amphibious landing craft, able to speed anywhere on the coast and deal with enemy landings. This program had a much lower age requirement than the original FR and men had to agree to waive their right to avoid transfer. Many of these recruits were transferred to England and served in the D-day assaults. Another exception involved five skippers who will be discussed below. They were to be cut from the FR and in order to return, they had to agree to waive the FR regulation of no transfer.

⁵² Donald to R.E.S. Bidwell, 12 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, 5681.

⁵³ Cossette to COPC, 10 January 1940, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11821; “Brief of the Complaints of the Officers and Men of the FR,” 30 June 1944, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11821; Popp, *Gumboot Navy*, 16. Whether NSHQ cut foreigners from the FR is a disputed point. NSHQ claimed to have cut certain men of the FR –including some foreigners – only after they deferred active service several times, whereas the men in the FR claimed that they were ejected from the FR for their socialistic leanings or foreign birth. Correspondence regarding men of foreign birth in the FR indicates that the latter is probably true – although the former is true in a general sense – members of the FR who chose to defer and fish were dropped from the FR.

⁵⁴ NOIC Prince Rupert to COPC, 24 November 1939, FOPC, Organization and Administration FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11820. NSHQ also suggested two different uniforms for this rank, which was not popular with the men of the FR or their officers. Commander Borrie, the NOIC in Prince Rupert, argued against the two different uniforms because it would cause “jealousy.”

⁵⁵ “Brief of the Complaints of the Officers and Men of the FR,” 30 June 1944, Organization and Administration, FR, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11821. Tucker in his official history claims that the pay scale changed because of the rank. He is correct in part. The original FR skippers at the time of the rank change did not lose pay with the addition of Coxswain and Skipper-Coxswain, however when new skippers joined the FR, they came in as Coxswains – at a reduced pay – until they could prove themselves capable and then

commercial tickets and certainly had more sea time than most of their “superiors” in the Royal Canadian Naval Reserves (RCNR). McCulloch, who took over command of the FR from Donald in 1940, insisted that:

The men who operate these boats develop a form of ‘sixth sense’ which enables them to take boats into coves and inlets that under similar conditions the most experienced navigators and even [most] men with coasting certificates would not dream of entering except under the very best of conditions of visibility or weather or in a war-time emergency.⁵⁶

Regardless of the these officers’ complaints and accolades, NSHQ ultimately approved the lower ranking system and denied FR skipper-coxswains certain privileges afforded to full skippers because the men of the FR did not hold the proper navigation tickets.

Problems with Donald’s unconventional regulations extended beyond his arguments with NSHQ and into the public’s relationship with the FR. A politically-connected grocery store owner in Prince Rupert was upset over the system of victualing Donald had setup for the FR. FR skippers and cooks did not pull from naval stores but bought their own food.⁵⁷ The owner thought Donald was running a monopoly by encouraging the men of the FR to only buy supplies from a competing grocery store. He demanded Donald’s resignation, and Donald was nearly transferred because of the

they too gained Skipper-Coxswains status and the pay that went along with it (Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 318-319).

⁵⁶ C.O. “Givenchy” to Staff Accountant Officer, “Naden”, 28 March 1941 (as cited in Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 318).

⁵⁷ The 85 cents allotted to each man for each day to eat was a sore point in the FR since the beginning of its creation. The Director of Naval Reserves, C.R. Taylor addressed these complaints in 30 June 1939, stating “85 cent per day is higher rate of victualling than any force in [the] Empire gets.” Yet, these complaints over an insufficient stipend for food intensified as the war went on. In 1942 the United States Army, under attack in the Aleutians, outfitted a large base in Prince Rupert. The increased personnel in Prince Rupert made long lines in town common and food prices high. Skippers complained that it was impossible to feed a crew on 85 cents a day. Many skippers began fishing and hunting while on patrol to subsidize the stipend. Bill Idiens, son of FR skipper and later sub-lieutenant Leonard Idiens MBE, remembers his father refusing to eat deer meat after the war because he grew so tired of eating it every day while on patrol in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Bill Idiens, interview by author, 27 December 2013, Victoria).

complaints.⁵⁸ Due to the lack of cohesion in the regulations complaints also surfaced against the FR from another anonymous source forwarded to NSHQ by Ian Mackenzie. The anonymous complainer – possibly Rowland Bourke – accused the NSHQ of mismanagement and insinuated that due to Donald’s leadership the FR had “no value.”⁵⁹

The problems with locals were relatively minor compared to the issues Donald faced regarding chartering. Immediately following training in 1939 representatives of the fishermen had met with Donald, Bourke, Brodeur and other naval officers to discuss how chartering would change in a time of emergency. The two factions could not agree on a fair charter fee, calling it a “most complicated problem.” They argued over whether it should be based on the boat’s length, the size of the engine, or its earning capabilities. The fishermen’s representatives voted to wait until war broke out to settle the issue of charter fees; conversely, Donald and the other naval officers wanted to determine regulations then in order to “avoid confusion” later.⁶⁰ In the end the committee made the

⁵⁸ Nickerson to Olaf Hanson, 6 October 1939, Donald Fonds. Luckily, Donald had friends in high places, and his old friend, Captain Murray remarked cheekily that he would take care of Donald’s “political admirer” and that Donald would not be transferred off the coast (Murray to Donald, 31 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.48).

⁵⁹ Mackenzie to Nelles, 26 October 1939, FOPC, Guns Seine type vessels, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11802. Henry Bell-Irving was one of the “anonymous” complainers. Later in this chapter his accusations will be explored. There is a good chance the other complainer was Bourke as he had extensive knowledge of the FR and was jealous of Donald’s command.

⁶⁰ 1 March 1939, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846. The other members of the committee, on the naval side, included J.E. McLeod, FR paymaster from FR; C.R. Taylor, then director of Naval Personnel, later a Rear-Admiral; Commodore R.I. Agnew, then Commander in Charge of Barracks, HMCS Naden (Esquimalt); and Lieutenant-Commander F.R. Hart, the security intelligence officer who NSHQ sent to Prince Rupert to investigate the claims regarding the Japanese attempt to influence aboriginals later that Spring. Representing the fishermen, and according to Donald the ethnic backgrounds of the FR, were, Skipper Prince (Newfoundlander), Skipper Ritchie (Scotch), Skipper Ferrario (Italian) and Skipper Larsen (Norwegian). Although Donald was pleased that the Navy had representation from all backgrounds, there was no representative from Slavic background.

interim decision that in a time of emergency, the RCN would set up a board to appraise all FR boats and to assess charter fees based on the value of each boat at that time.⁶¹

When war broke out, FR boats were converted and sent on patrol without the RCN paying the owners any charter fee. Other vessels taken in by the RCN were immediately assessed and paid monthly chartering fees, but because of the indecision of the 1 March committee the FR went without. After a month of service, Donald – frustrated that his men were not being paid and concerned about future recruitment – wrote his friend, and director of Naval Reserves, Captain Murray, for some answers. Murray confided that he was under the impression that charter fees had already been fixed and was unaware of the need to deal with it until “some time after the war began.”⁶² He informed Donald that when he became aware of the problem he had followed the FR regulations and set-up a committee to assess the charter fees. Finding members for the committee had caused NSHQ a “considerable headache” and, like the fishermen and naval officers six months earlier, they could not decide on a system to assess individual charter fees. According to Murray, this impasse caused serious “heart burning” for NSHQ. Murray assured Donald that it would be dealt with shortly and true to his word, a day later NSHQ commanded Donald to pull vessels off patrol duties to be surveyed.⁶³

Despite their progress with charter fees, the process stalled after the vessels were surveyed. By January 1940, the fishermen had served for over three months without a

⁶¹ FR Amendments, Donald Fonds 993.92.59. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the men of the FR had some leverage with this regulation (Amendment 63) which stated that “any boat owner who is dissatisfied with the scale of remuneration than laid down will have the option of retiring from the Reserve.”

⁶² Murray to Donald, 31 October 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.48. Murray noted that his realization regarding the regulation only came after a printed version of the FR regulations finally showed up at NSHQ.

⁶³ Lloyd’s register of Surveying to Brodeur, 1 November 1939, FOPC Vessels Taken up for Service, vol. 11803. It seems that the surveyor from Lloyd’s surveying realized the tight spot the RCN and fishermen were in. He offered to do a quicker assessment and told COPC that he did not need to dry dock the vessels but that he would take the men’s word and inspect the boat briefly while afloat and that “would enable me to make a reasonable valuation in each case.”

proper charter fee. Donald wrote to Murray again, citing that the men were angry that they, as “loyal citizens,” should not be “held up for [their] money, when people who own tugs, yachts and various unsafe craft (as they put it), have their charters fixed already.” When NSHQ offered a \$50 interim fee, some boat owners refused in indignation.⁶⁴ Joining the FR meant that many of the men had cut their lucrative fishing seasons short, while others had sold businesses or laid-up gear and boats to join. Those who had sacrificed the most viewed the interim fee as an insult as it did not adequately compensate for their losses.⁶⁵ Donald supported them and urged Murray to give them careful consideration as, “all Commanding Officers agreed that they have carried out most useful work” under trying conditions. Donald noted that the men were threatening to quit and could legally do so under the FR regulations.⁶⁶ He warned Murray that if NSHQ was not careful, recruiting in British Columbia would be stymied. He assured Murray he was not an “alarmist” as all the officers agreed that “if the FR are not treated properly, few recruits may be expected for the RCNR.”⁶⁷

Murray promptly responded that NSHQ had been doing its “damndest” to get the issues surrounding charter fees rectified but was having an “awful job trying to untangle the legal points involved.” The main legal complication involved the relationship between boat owners and the RCN. Many boat owners were members of the FR which meant that by signing-up and receiving their annual retainer, they granted the RCN some

⁶⁴ Stuart to Cossette, 1 March 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Most vessels had received over \$200 in charter fees during the month of training.

⁶⁵ Donald noted that many men of the FR could not make it into the FR as Skippers with their own boats (as the FR could not make room for their boats) so they joined up as Able Seamen, served on a different boat, and sold, rented or simply dry docked their own boats. In 1944 Skippers wrote a letter of complaint listing this as an indication that the men of the FR, who did not have to be serving, gave up their livelihoods to serve their country and should be treated with more respect. Naval officials curtly noted that that was the essence of a volunteer service.

⁶⁶ See footnote 62 for an explanation of Amendment 63.

⁶⁷ Donald to Murray, 25 January 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.50.

legal rights to their boats – and their service in times of emergency. FR regulations stipulated that if a boat was taken into service then the crew came with it. This policy ultimately helped bolster recruitment. However, if the boat owner was a fishing company (an entity which did not receive a yearly retainer) the naval regulations did not apply and the navy had no legal right to force the boat into the Reserve. If the boat was not taken in, the crew was not taken in, and the Navy lost out on the retainers paid to that crew.

Despite this, most of the FR members who owned boats were either patriotic or thought they were legally bound to serve, and so submitted when called upon. Yet, because the men were part of an essential industry, they could legally gain deferments from service and continue fishing, as some fishermen did. Murray, knowing the men were already angry, did not want them catching wind of the precarious legal situation and so told Donald, “for God’s sake don’t tell the fishermen.”⁶⁸

Murray informed Donald that he had raised the interim payment from \$50 to \$150 to help alleviate the concerns of the fishermen. He confided that the original board set up under the Department of Transport got “terribly sticky and terribly legal” with the absentee boat owner chartering situation and claimed it was “unable to touch it.” Murray dissolved the board and designated a new board, under the chairmanship of the COPC and with two representatives: one from the Department of Transport and one from the fishing industry. Murray promised that the new board was close to determining the charter fees, but had recently got “sidetracked.” He told Donald to “assure” the skippers

⁶⁸ Murray to Donald, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.57. Regardless of some of the downfalls of the linked crew, Donald argued to keep crews intact, citing that it was "unfair to expect a boat owner to take the responsibility of having a completely unknown man in his boat in a professional capacity, where he may cause damage to the vessels, and where men are living in close proximity, he may be a nuisance socially."

that they were “using every endeavour to see that they get justice and as quickly as possible.”⁶⁹

Unfortunately, this same letter also verified Donald’s fear that the fishing industry was increasing pressure on Ottawa to such a level that NSHQ might have to return the halibut boats to the industry.⁷⁰ Earlier, Donald had included the industry pressure in a long list of problems likely to sink the FR. He concluded that he was under unfair scrutiny and did not understand why NSHQ was so dissatisfied with the FR.⁷¹ Murray told Donald that this complaint was “unfounded” as the NSHQ was “entirely satisfied with the work [the FR] has been doing and with the work we know it capable of doing.” He claimed that NSHQ recognized that the FR was “instituted with an eye to the Far Eastern War” and admitted that that war could break out “any day now.” He admitted that having the FR as a force in the Pacific was a “very soothing thought” to NSHQ should “our neighbours across the Pacific get rambunctious.” However, Murray levelled with Donald, telling him that the FR regulations – which made transfer impossible – severely lessened NSHQ’s interest in the reserve. NSHQ was in a tough financial and political spot and, until war broke out in the Pacific, Donald’s reserve was not a priority as it was neither feeding nor defending Britain.⁷²

The idea of returning FR ships to the fishing industry gained traction and, as Germany further isolated Britain with unrestricted submarine warfare, the need for food seemed to take precedence over a patrol of the Queen Charlottes. The DND appointed a

⁶⁹ Murray to Donald, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.57. Murray noted that the original Board used to examine charter fees “took themselves too seriously.”

⁷⁰ Murray to Donald, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.48. This was not the first time Donald had heard that there was discontent in the fishing industry, as Murray had warned him of that in October and NSHQ in October 1939 had recommended that the FR vessels be converted back to fish boats to assuage complaints.

⁷¹ Donald to Murray, 25 January 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.50.

⁷² Murray to Donald, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.57.

joint committee, made up mostly of fish company owners to assess the production needs of the fishing industry. Known as the Wartime Fisheries Advisory Board, it found that not enough halibut was being caught and “unanimously agreed” that in order to meet Britain’s demands, the halibut vessels must be released to the industry.⁷³ Therefore, while Donald fought to obtain charter fees for his men, bolster the armaments of the vessels and convince NSHQ he needed more ships to more effectively patrol the coast, the government cut his force by a quarter.

In March 1940, when the order came that the FR vessels were to be pulled off the Queen Charlotte patrol and returned to the fishing industry, the backlash was severe.⁷⁴ Fishermen, West Coast Naval officers and even fisheries officers agreed that the recommendation of the Fisheries Board was ludicrous. The general consensus was that the order was put forward for private commercial gain and not for the best interest of Canada. The FR skippers were probably the most vocal in their opposition and informed the Naval Officer in Charge of Prince Rupert, Commander Borrie, that there was absolutely no foundation for the board’s claim that the FR vessels were needed in the industry. Borrie passed this onto NSHQ and claimed that he had information indicating that commercial interests had set this plan in motion “through misrepresentation of facts” and urged “strong action” be taken by NSHQ to cancel the orders. He also noted that the men to be taken out of the FR had never been consulted and, as they owned their own

⁷³ Fisheries Memo, 20 February 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. The decision was made on February 9, 1940.

⁷⁴ Stuart to Cossette, 1 March 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. Stuart, who later commanded Corvettes for the RN, was the Executive Officer to Commander Borrie in Prince Rupert at the time. He claimed that he had heard “confidential rumors” and information from NSHQ that the FR was going to be shut down. He wanted to know if the order was going to go through regarding the return of the halibut boats, because he thought they should let the men of the FR know as soon as possible. He urged Cossette to take action as many of the FR skippers had already rented out their gear for the upcoming fishing season and if NSHQ delayed much longer they would not be able to prepare for the halibut season and the “lid will be off.”

boats, “resent[ed] strongly the commercial interference.”⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Donald wrote to Murray that his “chief moan” was that fishing companies were withholding company boats and interfering with the private owners’ decisions to lend their boats to the FR.⁷⁶ Moreover Donald wrote to another friend in NSHQ, Director of Operations, R.E.S. Bidwell, that he agreed with the fishermen that the same amount of fish would be caught without the FR boats “but that each company want[ed] to beat the other like fishermen the world over (amateur or otherwise).”⁷⁷ Lieutenant Bell-Irving agreed and called on his 27 years of experience in the salmon industry to substantiate his opinion that fishery officers need only increase the fishing time to catch the fish.⁷⁸ COPC joined the chorus against the decision, claiming that “demobilization would cause discontent” amongst the fishermen and disrupt vital West Coast patrols.⁷⁹

Reeling from the backlash, NSHQ informed DND of the uproar, who in turn ordered an investigation. On 16 March 1940 DND flew Major Motherwell from the Department of Fisheries and Donald to Prince Rupert to discover how the halibut boats would best serve “national interests” while at the same time assuring that boat owners received “fair treatment.”⁸⁰ Motherwell and Donald met with boat owners and their report mirrored many of the points already made by west coast officials and the men of the FR.

⁷⁵ NOIC Prince Rupert to COPC, 13 March 1940, FOPC Vessels Taken up for Service, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

⁷⁶ Donald to Murray, 2 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

⁷⁷ Donald to Bidwell, 12 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. The fishermen to be taken out of the FR were not serving on company boats, but the fishermen, although private owners of their boats, delivered to certain companies – making the companies more money. A year later Donald wrote his friend H.N. Lay that the companies’ “moans” were “all a matter of jealousy between the fish companies who thought if you took one boat from one Company, then you ought to take one from a rival firm.” And that “there are more boats in the water than can fish economical [so] In my opinion, in these times of National peril, we should take as many boats as we want, but be careful a fair percentage is taken from each Company” (Donald to Lay, 12 August, 1941, Donald Fonds, 993.90.8).

⁷⁸ Bell-Irving to COPC, p.3, 5 March 1940, LAC, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851. Bell-Irving also posited that the complaints made by the owners of the fishing companies regarding the need of more boats were “erroneous.”

⁷⁹ COPC to NSHQ, 15 March 1940, FOPC, Vessels Taken up for Service, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

⁸⁰ “Ottawa” to COPC, 16 March 1940, FOPC, Vessels Taken up for Service, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803.

They recommended that the national interest would best be served if the boats were kept in the FR as they could find no “real reason” why releasing these boats would increase the catch of halibut. They pointed out that the Advisory Board’s reasoning – to feed Britain – was a sham as almost all halibut was sold to the United States because of high rail rates and the lack of shipping.⁸¹ Moreover, they argued that by keeping the halibut boats in the FR, current fishermen could catch more fish and thus make an extra \$100 to \$200 a month. They then argued that the FR, who served under “arduous conditions” and without proper charter fees, should “merit the utmost consideration.” Motherwell and Donald advised that treating the men fairly would improve recruitment and that a “satisfied and disciplined nucleus of men in this industry may be a valuable asset in post war problems.” The report observed that the men would not have time to outfit their boats for the fishing season and that, as private owners, should be consulted as to the fate of their boats.⁸²

Upon reading the report, DND overturned the Wartime Fisheries Advisory Board’s decision to take halibut boats out of the FR. Queen Charlotte patrols were maintained and Donald managed to help keep the FR together. Shortly thereafter, NSHQ was able to establish charter fees. Some problems continued but the backlash over the chartering and fishing issue brought the precarious situation on the West Coast to the forefront of NSHQ and DND. The problems with the fishing industry and the push by Donald and Bell-Irving to increase the FR as an offensive unit, as we will see below, combined in a perfect storm with world events – such as the fall of France and Japan’s

⁸¹ Canned salmon was mostly sent to Britain.

⁸² COAV to COPC, 26 March 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. The post-war problems that Motherwell and Donald referred to probably related to the recent upswing of communistic unions in the fishing industry. Motherwell and Donald asserted that the Canadian Government could use a group of reliable men in the fishing industry as a bulwark against these disruptive elements in the industry.

summer offensive in 1940 – to increase the size and power of the FR. Ultimately, DND combined forces with the Department of Fisheries in order to build six brand new 85 foot patrol vessels for the FR.⁸³

“...with nothing but a machine gun to defend themselves”

Amid the problems of chartering, cutbacks and regulation changes, Donald continued to press NSHQ for more patrol boats and better outfitting on existing ships. The standard patrols were beneficial on multiple levels, but Donald wanted the FR to be expanded into a more offensive-minded weapon. Donald and other officers submitted several proposals asking NSHQ for better armaments. With only a machine gun, the FR vessels had little offensive capabilities and the absence of armaments was reflected in FR procedure. If an FR vessel encountered an enemy warship or submarine it was to “report the enemy and to fall back within the range of the heavier armament of the Fortress.”⁸⁴ Unfortunately, most FR patrols were in remote areas, far away from any coastal guns. Furthermore, most of the FR vessels’ running speeds were usually less than half of the top speed of an enemy warship or submarine.⁸⁵ An enemy ship could capture or sink the FR vessel with relative ease before the skipper could make it to safety. At Donald’s request the RCN provided the FR vessels with smokescreens to give them extra time to report the enemy’s position, but the lack of proper armaments still concerned officials and the men on the ships. One FR member protested that a FR vessel could not even

⁸³ The six vessels were completed just prior to December 1941. The vessel names, Moolock, Leelo, Kuitan, Talapaus, Nenamook, and Ehkoli, were taken from Chinook Jargon for Elk, Wolf, Horse, Coyote, Otter and Whale.

⁸⁴ Patrolling Arrangements in Sea Approaches to Fortress and Defended Areas, Defence Schemes, West Coast, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11772.

⁸⁵ The fastest FR vessel, and biggest, was the HMCS *Fifer*. A requisitioned yacht, her top speed was 14 knots. The fastest fishing vessel in the FR were the six 85-foot vessels built in 1941, with a top speed of 12 knots. Most vessels had a top speed between eight and twelve knots. In contrast the I-26 submarine that later shelled Estevan Point on Vancouver Island, had a surface speed of 23.5 knots and a submerged speed of 8 knots. The Hatsuharu class destroyer, active in the Aleutian campaign, had a top speed of 34 knots.

“fight off an irate fisherman!”⁸⁶ FR officials concurred and called for depth charges and an improved surface gun to be added to the FR vessels to give them a “fair chance” against enemy warships and submarines.⁸⁷

Over time, the Navy agreed to certain requests. They added depth charges to most vessels, minesweeping gear to some, and – in 1941 – ASDIC to one ship. After Japan entered the war and an attack from the Pacific became more likely, other ships received improved deck guns.⁸⁸ Yet, most of the improvements to FR vessels seemed to come after Lieutenant Commander Bell-Irving involved the British Admiralty in his quest to improve the FR’s offensive capabilities. Bell-Irving served in the RNVR during World War I, commanding auxiliary vessels, including torpedo fishboats, with self-identified “great success.”⁸⁹ In 1939, after receiving a commission in the RCNVR, he devised a plan in conjunction with Donald and COPC Brodeur, to use the fishing vessels of the FR as “Q ships” (small offensive fish boats used by Great Britain in the First World War) or what Bell-Irving now labelled “Torpedo Patrol Fish Boats.”⁹⁰ He submitted plans to camouflage the FR vessel *Santa Maria* as a harmless fishing boat with its white naval ensign removed and commercial colours reapplied. Although the vessel would “show nothing combative,” RCN engineers would conceal torpedo tubes, net-throwers to entrap

⁸⁶ Popp, *The Gumboot Navy*, 34.

⁸⁷ COPC to NSHQ, 17 January 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851. The depth charges were meant to force the submarine from the depths, and a deck gun was recommended to keep the submarines deck guns at bay when it surfaced.

⁸⁸ Donald to Murray, 2 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681; Superintendent Naval Armament Depot, Esquimalt, to Naval Superintendent, Esquimalt, 22 June 1942, FOPC, War Diaries General, vol. 11810. The *Ekholi* received ASDIC, supplied by the RN who was looking to purchase some FR vessels and were curious if they could be fitted with ASDIC. The deck guns were either the 40mm/ 39 (2-Pdr) Mk.II, called a “pom-pom” by Donald, or an Oerliken 20mm Anti-aircraft gun. Both guns were mounted aft, to the chagrin of more offensive minded officers.

⁸⁹ Bell-Irving commanded such vessels from 1914 to 1918 on both the British Columbia coast and along the Belgian coast.

⁹⁰ One FR skipper reminisced about Bell-Irving that he “carried on” as if he were still in World War I, and that “he was hoping to take the FR to Britain and personally attack Germany” (Popp, *Gumboot Navy*, 21). Bell-Irving entered the RCNVR as a lieutenant-commander in 1939.

submarines, minesweeping gear, smoke screens, a 3 pounder deck-gun and depth charges. The Navy would keep the capabilities of the fishing vessels a total secret, outfitting them “in one of the many cracks and corners of the B.C. Coast.” The Q ships would be “so small and harmless looking” that enemy vessels would not bother firing on them at a distance but instead pass them by or close on the small craft to investigate. This would give the Q ships, working in tandem, an opportunity to attack the enemy. Bell-Irving suggested that these Q ships could be outfitted not just for the RCN, but sold to the RN who could use them in the Mediterranean or Caribbean against the Germans. He claimed that 20 to 25 vessels could be obtained immediately for conversion and volunteers easily drawn from the ranks of the FR.⁹¹

The plan was endorsed by COPC and forwarded to NSHQ in early 1940; Commander Brodeur noted that it was an “excellent plan for providing a form of defence at low cost, and comparatively short notice for this coast.”⁹² Donald also endorsed it and recommended that five boats be requisitioned from the fishing industry for conversion. NSHQ, however, tore the idea apart point by point. It did not think the ships could remain inconspicuous or make a suitable offensive weapon and thought it unwise to take more boats out of the fishing industry. It warned that camouflaging fishing boats was dangerous to civilian fishermen, as it gave the enemy reason to “blowout of the water” any regular fishing boat they met.⁹³ And despite the relatively low cost of the conversion,

⁹¹ Bell-Irving, 17 January 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851; Bell-Irving to COPC, 5 March 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851. Bell-Irving claimed to have accomplished this feat in World War I, when he and four other small RN auxiliary craft armed only with 3 pounders and depth charges, surprised a German submarine and forced it on to a beach where it was destroyed.

⁹² COPC to NSHQ, 17 January 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851.

⁹³ NSHQ to COPC, 1 February 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851.

NSHQ claimed that the “operational value” was not worth the cost.⁹⁴ They concluded “the hopes of success in such a craft are so remote, and the probability of destruction so great, that the Government of Canada would not be justified in allowing the personnel to accept the risk involved.”⁹⁵

Donald and Bell-Irving were furious and wrote lengthy counterarguments. Bell-Irving claimed that NSHQ did not properly understand the situation on the West Coast and argued that it misunderstood the offensive capabilities of smaller vessels. He offered his experience in the First World War as proof that auxiliary craft could prove effective against submarines and argued that the so-called risks that the men of the FR would face on Q ships were paltry compared to the “unfair” danger they accepted at that time in the FR, “flying the White Ensign...with nothing but a machine gun to defend themselves.” He asked that NSHQ reconsider its dismissal of the idea and at least allow one Q ship to be outfitted in order to “prove (or disprove) the economic and efficiency of the scheme.”⁹⁶

Donald argued along similar lines as Bell-Irving; he assured his superiors that the vessels would certainly be inconspicuous, appearing as simple fishing craft. Moreover, he claimed that NSHQ was mistaken in the technical details, and that FR vessels could easily use a 3 pounder and depth charges effectively. He noted that twenty-one unused 18-inch torpedoes in storage at Esquimalt could be equipped on Q ships without detracting from the war effort. He also recommended any concerns about the slow speed of the Q ships, could be offset by having each ship carry wooden speedboats known as a

⁹⁴ Commander Mainguy to Department of Defence, 29 January 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851.

⁹⁵ NSHQ to COPC, 1 February 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851.

⁹⁶ Bell-Irving to COPC, 5 March 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851.

Chris Craft on deck. Skippers who spotted a periscope could launch these speedboats, with speeds of 30-50 knots, armed with depth charges to hunt the submarine.⁹⁷ Donald, like Bell-Irving, could not understand why NSHQ complained about the risk to Canadians aboard Q ships, as the intended volunteers were currently “taking greater risks daily” patrolling the coast as well as before entering the war in their “civilian vocations.” He concluded that “for the next ten months during which this Coast will be practically devoid of defence, that any economical scheme is worth trying.”⁹⁸

Commander Brodeur, who had originally supported the scheme, refused to send the rebuttals to NSHQ. Frustrated, Donald circumvented Brodeur and sent word directly to Ottawa via his old friend Captain Murray. Donald had written to Murray once before in late January 1940, to plug Bell-Irving’s plan. At that time, Murray was receptive to the idea but stated that NSHQ had no budget for West Coast improvements until “the indications of war on the Pacific Coast” were “much greater.”⁹⁹ When Donald wrote again in July, Murray seemed rather cool to the idea. Donald apologized to Murray for pushing the issue and going against procedure, but claimed that he felt “up against it” in trying to get defensive initiatives implemented. He claimed that “things were warming up on this Coast and it would seem that something drastic ought to be done and quickly.” Donald pleaded with Murray to reconsider the Q ships and help him convince NSHQ.¹⁰⁰ As good friends, Murray and Donald often discussed naval events unofficially in personal letters. However, in this case, Murray was less candid and instructed his secretary to write Donald a short letter which addressed other aspects of Donald’s letter, but ignored

⁹⁷ COAV to COPC, 2 August 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

⁹⁸ COAV to COPC, 15 March 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

⁹⁹ Murray to Donald, p.1, 2 February 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.51.

¹⁰⁰ Donald to Murray, 2 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681.

the Q ship idea except for a brief note that he did not think the “function” of the FR was as a “submarine chaser.”¹⁰¹

Bell-Irving went even further in circumventing chain of command by writing directly to a friend in the Admiralty. Weeks later when Whitehall contacted Nelles about purchasing Q ships from Canada, Nelles was furious. Bell-Irving had not only ignored the chain of command, but he had sent internal information to a foreign country – albeit an allied one. Nelles told the Acting Deputy Minister in Ottawa that Bell-Irving’s hard-headedness in sending private letters to Britain had put the RCN in an awkward spot. With France falling and Canada becoming Britain’s most prominent ally, Nelles noted that this was a “poor time” to deny Britain’s request for Q ships, but lamented that the building and transporting these ships to the Mediterranean was hardly worth the trouble involved.¹⁰²

This was not the first time that Bell-Irving had attempted to use his political connections to get what was denied to him. In October 1939, Nelles had received word from Ian Mackenzie, that a “mutual friend” and naval officer was levelling accusations against NSHQ and FR leadership. The friend posited that because of incompetence and “procrustean application of service technicalities” the NSHQ was squandering the men of the FR. Mackenzie cited the anonymous complainer as saying he would go “crazy” if he had to watch the waste of resources and argued that the FR should be put under his command and taken out of Esquimalt at once, as “Germans and Austrians and God

¹⁰¹ Naval Services to Donald, 8 July 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. When Brodeur was transferred from the West Coast to the East Coast as Canada’s attaché to Washington, Donald tried again to promote the Q ship to the new COPC, Commander Beech, but was also turned down (COAV to COPC, 2 August 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681).

¹⁰² Memo from Nelles, 19 June 1940, Emergency Conversion of B.C. Fish Carriers into Offensive Patrol Vessels, R112-615-6-E, vol. 3851. Nelles noted that the ships would be pounded heavily in the open seas of the Atlantic on their way to Britain.

knows what” were present on the base. Although Mackenzie did not mention Bell-Irving directly in the main body, Nelles noted in the margin that the situation

was discussed by me with Mr. Mackenzie...we agreed that Bell-Irving was not quite responsible or altogether in a position to put forward sane recommendations.”¹⁰³

Despite Ottawa’s displeasure with Bell-Irving’s actions, it was now impossible to avoid the Admiralty’s request. NSHQ commanded COPC to provide a list of suitable ships on the West Coast and to begin testing such equipment as depth charges, ASDIC, deck guns and a variety of minesweeping gear on FR vessels.

The RCN would never build the Q ships, but because of new pressure from the Admiralty, West Coast naval officers, and the fishing industry, NSHQ finally decided to act on Donald’s pre-war plan and build six new 85 foot patrol vessels – outfitted with depth-charges, minesweeping gear and a proper deck gun. The RN, seeing the new construction, remained interested in Bell-Irving’s plan and the capabilities of fishing vessels as submarine finders in the Mediterranean and Caribbean.¹⁰⁴ In the end, the RCN – and particularly the FR – ultimately benefitted from Bell-Irving’s tenacity, as the RN supplied the FR vessel *Ekholi* with ASDIC equipment free of charge. In return, the RCN eventually sold fishing

¹⁰³ Mackenzie to Nelles, 26 October 1939, FOPC Guns Seine Type Vessels, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11802.

¹⁰⁴ COPC to NSHQ, 15 August 1940, FRWCO, R112-614-4-E, vol. 5681. This report cited both Jamaica and Trinidad as possible locations for the converted fishing vessels. A version of the Q boat without the torpedoes or depth charges was tried by Commander McCulloch in 1942. After hearing reports of Japanese submarines surfacing near fishing boats, he disguised a FR vessel in attempt to draw submarines out. Painting it in commercial colours the HMCS Allaverdy was sent out to float amongst the British Columbia seiners. However, the plan never worked; Canadian fishermen did not recognize the strange vessels’ colour or name and chased it in attempt to discover its identity. McCulloch abandoned the scheme after only two weeks.

boats to the RN, not outfitted ones like the Q ships, but rather requisitioned Japanese Canadian boats taken over by Canada after Japan's entry into the war.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Shortly after the Q ship incident, Donald was transferred from the West Coast to serve on one of Canada's newly acquired American destroyers.¹⁰⁶ Donald was replaced by James McCulloch who, like Donald, was well liked by the men because of his "open door" policy and down-to-earth nature.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with his predecessor, McCulloch fought to keep the FR properly outfitted and ready for a war with Japan. He also continued to champion many of Donald's pre- and post-war recommendations to improve the FR. Because of the efforts of Donald, McCulloch and other West Coast officers, NSHQ agreed in late 1940 to begin building six new 85-foot patrol vessels that would be converted to halibut boats after the war.¹⁰⁸ McCulloch also oversaw the FR as it grew to 600 men – Donald's original goal. After lobbying NSHQ, McCulloch was allowed to recruit further and was so successful he was forced to convert the old quarantine station outside of Victoria (William Head) into a training facility. Finally, as Canada cut economic ties with Japan in the summer of 1941, NSHQ called upon McCulloch to help finalize a plan to round up Japanese vessels along the coast. It had took two long years of persistence on behalf of the FR leadership, but by 7 December 1941, the FR was a better outfitted and more efficient reserve than it had been in September 1939.

¹⁰⁵ Japanese Vessel Disposal Committee Progress Report, p.24, December 1942, LAC, MG27 – Bill V – Vol. 19. Twenty vessels were sold to a program called the British Admiralty Technical Mission (BATM) in Ottawa. In general BATM investigated new technologies for Canada. Yet the purpose of these twenty vessels from seized Japanese vessels in British Columbia is unclear.

¹⁰⁶ Donald commanded the *HMCS Annapolis* before moving to the East Coast for a variety of jobs including Base Commander at Gaspé, Quebec and commanding the HMCS Ottawa in convoy duty (Donald to Brodeur, 14 February 1946, 993.90.1).

¹⁰⁷ Donald Peck, "The Gumboot Navy," *Raincoast Chronicles*, no. 7 (1977) 9-12.

¹⁰⁸ The author knows at least three of these vessels are still active on the British Columbia Coast. One is used as a packer and one is used as a charter vessel for tourism.

Despite these successes, however, many of Donald's visions for the FR were never realized. The FR vessels, although much improved, and better outfitted than the original boats would never pack the offensive punch desired by Donald. Neither was Donald's desire to include aboriginals in the FR ever realized. McCulloch seemed to dislike including Aboriginals in the FR, as did the new COPC, Commander William Beech, and both fought against the idea. At the recommendation of Beech, the RCN postponed the inclusion of Aboriginals in 1940 for another year. Just when NSHQ was ready to call the first Aboriginal crew out to the FR, the war with Japan started. With the Japanese fishermen shore-bound, the DND thought it unwise to take Aboriginal fishermen out of an already depleted fishing industry and so postponed their inclusion. In 1942, when Aboriginals were again considered for service, an unfortunate miscommunication involving a sick Indian Agent's delayed report, put off the inclusion indefinitely.¹⁰⁹ Although Donald and McLeod's forward thinking – albeit Japanophobic – idea to include Aboriginals in the FR was approved in 1939, it would never be realized.¹¹⁰

After he was transferred from the West Coast Donald still kept in touch with his friends in Ottawa for news of what he called his “flock” or “creation.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ NSHQ gave the order to start an all-Aboriginal vessel of the FR. They asked Crerar, the minister of Mines and Resources, to submit the names of suitable and willing aboriginals for such a reserve. Crerar in turn asked one of his Indian Agents on the West Coast to find such candidates. The Indian Agent was, unfortunately, bed-ridden for a month and did not receive the instructions. By the time the Indian Agent started looking, NSHQ had, for some reason, changed its mind and no longer wanted an all-Aboriginal unit. (Mckay to NSHQ, 13 April 1942, FOPC General Information, West Coast Indians, RG24-D-11-1, vol. 11803).

¹¹⁰ It was not until 1943 that the colour bar was removed by an Order-in-Council, yet there is little evidence to verify if any non-whites were recruited for the remainder of the war (Robert Scott Sheffield, “...in the same manner as other people”: government policy and the military service of Canada's First Nations People, 1939-1945,” (Master's Thesis, University of Victoria, 1995)).

¹¹¹ Donald to Lay, 12 August 1941, Donald Fonds, 993.90.8; Donald to Captain Reed, 12 May 1939, Donald Fonds, 993.92.16.

In the summer of 1941 when Canada severed commercial relations with Japan after the Japanese military expanded southward, Donald confided to his friend, Captain H.N. Lay, Director of Naval Operations, that he was afraid that “all those Japs about loose” in British Columbia could easily hurt Canada by setting the “bush on fire.” Even from afar Donald tried to bolster the FR, telling Lay that he thought the FR was “the only thing to round up our Japanese friends.”¹¹²

On 8 December 1941, FR vessels finally fulfilled the purpose for which Bourke, Donald and McCulloch had worked so hard to prepare the reserve. The men of the FR set sail to seize boats belonging to “enemy aliens or doubtful persons” – namely those belonging to men of Japanese origin. As instructed by NSHQ, the FR vessels approached suspect craft with full machine gun coverage. They searched the Japanese crews for knives and guns, then, while the suspects were under armed guard, they searched their boats. During the ordeal, the men of the FR were commanded to warn suspected persons that failing to comply was at their own “peril.” The former fishermen of the FR could easily empathize that the loss of one’s fishing boat meant the loss of one’s livelihood, yet they still confiscated the Japanese fish boats. Fishermen of Japanese origin were barred from fishing and their boats were sold off to the highest bidder.¹¹³

The FR had finally conducted the infamous round-up of Japanese vessels that was, unfortunately, the FR’s *raison d’être* and now, most remembered act. The forethought of the Canadian government to organize these men for such a purpose as far back as 1937 and the willingness of the members of the FR to sign on to such an idea because of commercial jealousy and racism is often considered an anomaly in Canadian

¹¹² Donald to Lay, 12 August 1941, Donald Fonds, 993.90.8.

¹¹³ Memo, “Examination of All Vessels in the Event of Hostilities Directly Affecting B.C. Coast,” 11 September 1941, HMCS NADEN, Esquimalt, Proposed Organization, Special Section RCNR, FR, R112-358-1-E, vol. 11846.

history. In reality, however, the treatment of Japanese fishermen was one of many events which illustrate a history of racism and intolerance that is often overlooked as it runs contrary to the Canadian national narrative of inclusion. By studying the realities of the FR, we are able to see a more complicated version of Canadian history.

This exploration of the organization of the FR certainly uncovered areas of racism and ineptitude amongst the Canadian population. Yet this paper also demonstrates that the FR is more complicated and nuanced than historians have heretofore assumed. The simplistic, short and incomplete histories written on this organization not only deal the men of the FR an injustice, but also an injustice to Japanese Canadians and Aboriginals. It is problematic when historians label the FR in a one-dimensional manner as their story is much more than just a “comical little fleet,” a group of drunken fishermen playing sailors, a stop-gap navy, a brave group of men or even a racist arm of the RCN used to mistreat the Japanese. Only by examining the FR more fully and in context can this gap in history be fully closed, and the FR and wartime Canada better understood.

This paper set out to provide a fuller history of the FR through the examination of the formation of the FR and its role prior to the Pacific war. By exploring the actions of FR officers such as Bourke and Donald, successes and distresses in the Reserve have been uncovered – providing a basis for future research. Without this foundation, we may be tempted, in hindsight and with limited knowledge, to judge the creation of the FR as useless, wasteful, racist or inept. Yet, the nuances of the Reserve demonstrate that however misguided the motives of the FR, this group was certainly brave, patriotic, and dedicated to the defence of Canada. Many of its officers were innovative, compassionate, loyal and in some ways, even forward-thinking and culturally sensitive for their time. The base commander in Prince Rupert certainly concurred with this assessment, stating:

It is almost impossible to realize the splendid work that is being carried out by the Officers and men of the Fishermen's Reserve. Few realize the hardships which they undergo and the work that they do under the most trying circumstance. On many occasions they are at sea when vessels many times their size run for shelter. The importance of their work, and the way it is carried out, come more and more to the fore as time progresses.¹¹⁴

Commander Borrie's assessment is sound and his prediction accurate. In the years following 1941, the FR went through a huge reorganization and became more and more useful to the RCN. After 1941 it rounded up thousands of "enemy" vessels, patrolled tirelessly, sighting submarine and mines along the way, rescued shipwrecked crewmen, helped save torpedoed ships from sinking, aided the police in catching a murderer, and many even volunteered as a commando squad, that would be used in the invasion of Normandy. The reserve grew to over 900 members and over 40 vessels, with several men earning medals and distinctions and one rating receiving the MBE for outstanding gallantry during a rescue.¹¹⁵ No one in the FR died in British Columbian waters and only one vessel, the *Surf*, was lost to sea. With the inception and origins explored in this paper, the next step is to uncover the actions of the FR in the Pacific War. As future research builds on this paper and explores the FR after 1941, we will begin to gain a fuller history and understanding of the complexities, successes and failures surrounding this short-lived naval reserve.

¹¹⁴ Commander Borrie to COAV, 1940, Donald Fonds, 993.92.6.

¹¹⁵ Leonard Idiens won the MBE for his heroic rescue of two men off an oil barge in 1943 during a storm. At the time he was a Coxswain aboard the HMCS Kuitan. <http://www.rcnvr.com/I%20-%20RCN%20-%20WWII.php>

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