

# Pivot to the Pacific

Operation Downfall and its Lasting Effects on the Royal Canadian Navy

# Pivot au Pacifique

Operation Downfall et ses Effets Persistants au Marine royale canadienne

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## Introduction

In 1943, while the Allies remained focused on defeating Germany, the United States (US) started formal planning for an invasion of Japan. The US wanted to execute the invasion, named Operation Downfall, using mostly American forces, yet the Commonwealth nations, including Canada, attempted to negotiate their way into participation. For Canada, participating in the operation would, among other things, foster the technological and doctrinal developments that the government desired for the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). The RCN was a reputable force in the latter half of the war, but it was still a navy designed for convoy-escort and anti-submarine warfare—preparation for Operation Downfall would help the RCN develop and transform into a more versatile fleet.

To date, RCN operations in the Pacific have received little scholarly attention, but they merit closer scrutiny for two reasons. The first pertains to a paucity of literature examining the RCN's involvement in the war external to the Battle of the Atlantic and supporting the ground campaign in Northwest Europe. The RCN is commonly known for its impressive comeback story, growing from “just thirteen ships”, many of which were on the road to antiquity by 1939, to hundreds of vessels at war's end.<sup>1</sup> By 1944, the RCN was responsible for virtually all Allied shipping in the North Atlantic, as well as its own external assets. But given the scale of the Second World War, it is worthwhile to examine where else the RCN extended, or planned to extend, its reach. The navy's most logical first choice following the North Atlantic was the Pacific Theatre, especially given the security concerns on the Canadian West Coast and the number of United States Navy (USN) bases strewn about the islands and atolls of the Pacific. At first, defence of coastal waters had to take precedence in the Atlantic, given the immediate threat of the German *Kriegsmarine*, and the vulnerability of strategically important cities along the Saint Lawrence River to U-boats, so the West Coast

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989): 66.

was a lesser priority. The Japanese signature of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy on 27 September 1940 meant defence of the West Coast would require consideration, but it was only after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 that Ottawa considered defence beyond long-range guns and small coastal patrols—Canada needed the RCN in the Pacific.<sup>2</sup>

The second reason for investigating RCN efforts in the Pacific lies in the Allied plans for dealing with Japan once the Allies knocked the European Axis powers out of the war. At the Arcadia Conference (December 1941 - January 1942), British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt agreed to adopt a ‘Germany first’ strategy, even if the US wanted to deal with Japan quickly.<sup>3</sup> The Second World War ended unexpectedly soon after the US dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 4 and 6 August 1945 respectively, which meant that Operation Downfall was no longer necessary. The destructive capability of the nuclear bomb seized the world’s attention, and justifiably so.<sup>4</sup> The literal earth-shaking potential of this new weapon, in conjunction with wavering Allied desires to fight a sustained campaign in the Pacific, quickly sent Operation Downfall into obscurity, and consequently, the plan has since fallen into a historiographical shadow.

This thesis investigates the RCN’s involvement in the planning and preparation for Operation Downfall, bringing to light Canada’s intentions for bolstering its pigeonholed navy as well as Ottawa’s desire to play a greater role in the Pacific Theatre. This thesis will be broken down into four chapters, each discussing a crucial element of Canada’s plan for the RCN, plus a conclusion that will assess how the RCN’s Operation Downfall preparations affected the navy in the long-term. The first chapter explains Canada’s efforts to ensure that

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<sup>2</sup> Stetson Conn and Brian Fairchild, *United States Army in World War II: The Western Hemisphere, The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1960), 388.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

the politics were in place for the RCN to participate in the operation. Canadian collaboration with its allies, namely the British and Americans, will be examined here, noting the effort that Canada spent to ensure that the RCN's participation was not overlooked in operational planning. Ensuring that both the Canadian public and frequently divided politicians were collectively on board with the RCN's participation in the operation will also be included in this chapter.

The second chapter investigates how Canada established roles for the RCN in Operation Downfall, encompassing all facets of the RCN's inclusion in the plan. The RCN's planned involvement was as a contingent of the Royal Navy (RN)'s British Pacific Fleet (BPF) within the USN, so discussing the grouping of forces will be scrutinised. And because Canada was no stranger to working or training alongside other forces, this chapter will investigate how much Ottawa balanced the involvement between the air, land, and sea.<sup>5</sup> Another important point for consideration in chapter 2 is the RCN's work in conjunction with land and air forces, as Operation Downfall was to entail an amphibious invasion and land campaign in addition to the fighting at sea.

The third chapter details the plans to build the RCN's Pacific force. It also explains the RCN's cooperation with the other components of the invasion force through familiarisation, standardisation, and training exercises. Given the ballooning size of the RCN's Atlantic fleet in the later years of the war, the Pacific contingent was to absorb vessels from the Atlantic. With the focus on convoy-escort and anti-submarine warfare in the Atlantic, some ships destined for the Pacific had to be repurposed for surface warfare, among other roles. The Canadian government also wished to continue the RCN's growth with the construction of new ships, or through the acquisition of other nations' ships, and this will also be examined.

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<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Army Pacific Force (CAPF) participating in the campaign planned to attach to the US Army and use American gear. Andrew L. Brown, "The Canadian Army's Observer Program in the Asia-Pacific Region, 1944-45," *Canadian Military History*, 28 no.1 (2019): 30.

The fourth chapter will serve two purposes. First, it will detail how dropping the nuclear bombs affected the plans for Operation Downfall. Allied confidence in the invasion plan was dwindling by the summer of 1945, to the point that in June, the British signalled their support for the bombings.<sup>6</sup> Once the Americans bombed Japan and the war ended, Operation Downfall was aptly cancelled. As to not squander the RCN's valuable procurement plans during the war, Ottawa decided to continue the procurement of ships after 1945. Second, the final chapter will summarise how the RCN used the procurement of these ships to advance Canada's force projection capabilities—even if the invasion never happened, the Canadian efforts were not wasted and arguably set the precedent for RCN development into and beyond the 1950s.

The research question for this project is: how did Canadian participation in planning for the invasion of Japan affect the RCN? This thesis argues that the RCN used Operation Downfall to expand the navy's long-term capacity and versatility. That is, the RCN went from a feeble navy in 1939 to a reputable, general purpose force capable of projecting sea power alone or in conjunction with other navies in a variety of combative roles shortly after war's end.

## **Historiography**

The Second World War's home front has been a popular subject among Canadian historians, recognizing that Canada underwent major societal and political developments during the war. One topic of overlap with this thesis is the debate on Canadian conscription. C.P. Stacey indicates the Canadian government's desire to raise a substantial national force while maintaining public support. In *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945*, he speaks to Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's

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<sup>6</sup> Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, 57.

persistent desire for “economical and efficient use of manpower”, and his concern for divergences in the Canadian public’s attitudes regarding the war effort.<sup>7</sup> If the population aired significant grievances regarding conscription, the government could find it difficult to commit Canada to another theatre of war. When it came time to start planning for Operation Downfall, King’s relationship with the Canadian public was tenuous, so he had to tread carefully when contemplating a greater role for Canada in the war against Japan. Jack Granatstein is one of the best historians concerning Canadian conscription. He expands on Stacey’s observations of King’s waning popularity with Canadians in both *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians in the Second World War 1939-1945* and *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada*. Involvement in the Pacific would largely increase the RCN’s need for manpower, especially once the navy’s contribution was determined in the fall of 1944. The navy was calling for the recruitment of 13,755 men from July 1942–March 1943, which was only slightly larger than the main contingent that the navy would send to Operation Downfall.<sup>8</sup> In November 1944, King sacked the Minister of National Defence (MND), James Ralston, because the two had differing views on conscription—Ralston was a proponent whereas King and Ralston’s replacement, General (retired) Andrew McNaughton, were opponents.<sup>9</sup> Even if much of the public opposed King’s views on conscription, his sacking of the popular Ralston sent some Canadians into an anti-government fury. McNaughton’s inauguration brought about newspaper coverage of a similar anti-government, or at least anti-King, sentiment, exacerbating King’s troubles.<sup>10</sup> But with voluntary recruiting dropping off, if King wanted to raise new forces, he might have had to drag men from their homes and into uniforms—something he was unwilling to do. The Canadian government was no less

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<sup>7</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 397.

<sup>8</sup> J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1985), 191.

<sup>9</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

unsure. The distance between pro and anti-war politicians proved a serious political, and legislative, headache.<sup>11</sup> King also had to be cognizant of his public support, the wavering of which mainly stemmed from conscription for overseas service. However, even if Canada was often divided on the size and scope of its war effort, there was wide approval for carrying on with shipbuilding, as it provided jobs for Canadians at a time of need.<sup>12</sup> King's concerns for avoiding public opposition to involvement in Japan were valid, but the ability to demonstrate force in, and procure new ships for, the Pacific Theatre was a valuable opportunity for the RCN.

Unfortunately, the historiography concerning Canada's naval aspirations for the Pacific Theatre largely stops with the Canadian home front. Indeed, the historiography regarding Operation Downfall's planning is diminutive, and is overshadowed by the invasion that came to fruition, Operation Overlord.<sup>13</sup> There is, however, at least some scholarship on RCN involvement in the Pacific, even if it is external to Operation Downfall, demonstrating that there was collaboration between Canada and the US on joint coastal defence and that the Allies discussed the Pacific Theatre. This literature provides the pretext in this thesis for elaboration on the planning of Operation Downfall itself, especially regarding the procurement phase. For example, W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby shed light on the Canadian and American agreement that the North American West Coast remained a security concern in *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943*, although they also show that the Atlantic took precedence. Even after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the need for RCN ships on Canada's West Coast was overshadowed by the need in the Atlantic.<sup>14</sup> The authors

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<sup>11</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 149.

<sup>13</sup> Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Normandy, France in June 1944, commonly known as 'D-Day'.

<sup>14</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 1* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 331.



show that while Canada was legislatively autonomous, its economic ties with Britain remained essential for the nation's prosperity, so the RCN had to continue focussing on the Atlantic. Nevertheless, Douglas *et al* demonstrate, Canada still built up the RCN's forces in the Pacific, however marginally. By January 1942, the RCN had more than twenty ships ranging from armed merchantmen to small patrol vessels along the West Coast, although there was still minimal involvement in the Pacific ocean.<sup>15</sup> Douglas *et al* continue examination of the RCN's Pacific development in *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945*, as the follow-up to *No Higher Purpose*. This book contains a chapter that provides an overview of the RCN's contemplation of a greater role in the Pacific, although it does not examine the long-term effects of the RCN's preparations. The authors also show that even King recognized the necessity for larger ships on the West Coast. Though his original justification for procuring new destroyers was primarily for coastal defence, they would help in Canadian operations in the Pacific when their time came.<sup>16</sup> The RCN continued with its plans to fortify naval capability in the Pacific, even if its role as convoy-escort in the Atlantic still took precedence until Germany's surrender on 7 May 1945.

While the majority of the RCN's contingent never made it into combat with the BPF, there is some historiography on the one ship that did: the light cruiser HMCS *Uganda*. Bill Rawling's article "Paved with Good Intentions" discusses HMCS *Uganda*, and how the contention around conscription affected operational effectiveness. The *Uganda* made it to the BPF by the spring of 1945 and seemed to integrate itself well with the fleet, indicating that there was a solid prospect for Canada to use the Pacific to further fortify the navy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>16</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Volume II, Part 2* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2007), 149.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Rawling, "Paved with Good Intentions: HMCS *Uganda*, the Pacific War, and the Volunteer Issue," *Canadian Military History* 4 no.2 (1995), 32.

Unfortunately, the *Uganda*'s involvement in Pacific operations did not exclude it from King's mandate that Canadian servicemen had to explicitly volunteer to serve in the theatre. The majority of the ship's crew refused to continue to serve in the Pacific after the defeat of Germany, and the ship's deployment ended.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, the RCN continued to raise its force for the Pacific, having cruisers and carriers on the way by the war's closure.

Gilbert Tucker details some of the little that historiography has to offer regarding the RCN's proposed involvement in Operation Downfall in *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War*. He shows that Allied plans for the Pacific Theatre were still undetermined by the first Quebec Conference in August 1943. The Allied focus was on perfecting Operation Overlord, so conceptualization for the invasion of Japan had to continue through hushed American planning. As a result, Canada had to subdue its enthusiasm for raising a Pacific fleet, mainly because Allied navy roles in the operation needed clarification for Canada to have any idea about what ships to build.<sup>19</sup> Operation Overlord and the final Allied push in Europe in 1944-45 went well, so by the turn of 1945 the Allies were able to start shifting their focus toward the Japanese question. Gilbert demonstrates that Japan remained a high concern for the US, so they continually refined their plans for the Pacific even with the European Theatre's priority. The Battle for Okinawa, from 1 April-22 June 1945, gave the US, and the Allies, a solid stepping-stone for reaching the Japanese islands.<sup>20</sup> Planning for Operation Downfall was taking shape well before Okinawa, but it was only during the battle on 25 May that the US Joint Chiefs of Staff gave the official announcement for the "complex operation" to invade Japan.<sup>21</sup> Planning for the first phase of Operation Downfall, Operation Coronet, was "almost

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> The RCN's HMCS *Uganda* was already present in the theatre here, as will be further detailed in Chapter 3. "Royal Canadian Navy Pacific Operations: 1941-1945" (map), in Douglas *et al*, *No Higher Purpose*, Endsheet.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Gailey, *War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbour to Tokyo Bay* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2011), 691.

complete” by July 1945, which meant the Allies could direct further effort into procurement and detailed planning.<sup>22</sup> However, aside from Gilbert and Stacy’s sections on Allied preparations for Operation Downfall, scholars have yet to investigate how planning actually affected the RCN.

A similar paucity of literature leaves unanswered questions about the direct aftereffects of the nuclear bomb for the RCN in the Pacific. To this end, historians have not directly examined the planning of Operation Downfall’s lasting effect on the navy. This thesis will shed some light on the matter through connecting the RCN’s Operation Downfall preparations and the immediate post-war navy, as well as implications beyond the Second World War. In saying this, looking beyond the war to Canadian involvement in the Korean War (1950-1953) will demonstrate how preparing for Operation Downfall affected the RCN in the long-term. After all, the RCN participated in the Korean War with predominantly Second World War-era ships.

Finally, this thesis adds to historiography by surveying the post-war period, mainly looking at the RCN’s involvement in the Korean War (1950-1953) and how its possession of larger ships dramatically increased Canada’s force projection capability. David Zimmerman considers this in *Maritime Command Pacific: the Royal Canadian Navy’s West Coast Fleet in the Early Cold War*, where he elaborates on the state of the RCN before and during the war.<sup>23</sup>

## **Methodology**

The near absence of literature regarding the RCN’s involvement in the planned invasion of Japan means this thesis will have to bridge the gap with primary sources. These provide greater context for Canadian involvement in the planning for Operation Downfall, as well as detail that the extant literature glosses over. Additionally, primary sources expose

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 697.

<sup>23</sup> David Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 78.

public and military sentiment on the RCN's participation in the Pacific—public sentiment a key facet that cannot be overlooked, especially in discussing King's attempts to maintain Canadian support for the operation. However, one must be wary of the inherent possibility for inaccuracy in primary sources. The 'Mandela Effect' of perpetuating faulty information as factual occurs in situations where individuals involved might allow their personal biases to seep into the writing, so primary information will be cross-referenced with other primary sources or secondary literature where possible.

The primary sources used can be divided into two main categories: governmental documentation and personal testimony. Transcripts of government files from the Second World War regarding Canadian collaboration with the US and Britain provide important insight. One notable repository of documentation is the Canadian War Cabinet Committee (WCC) meetings, saved on microfilm and digitised through H ritage Canadienne. The meeting transcripts are spread across eight reels, some spanning nearly 2,000 pages, and include once-secret proposed specifications for RCN ships and their armaments, which will underscore Canada's desires to revitalise and broaden the fleet's capability.

There is no shortage of personal testimony from Canadians during the Second World War, and there is also significant news coverage on government plans and intentions that made it to the public. King kept extensive journals throughout his tenure as prime minister, and all are accessible through Library and Archives Canada's website. The journals shed light on King's dealings with his defence ministers and members of parliament, but additionally provide his personal accounts of Canadian dealings with Allies.

Ultimately, the RCN's involvement in the Pacific Theatre during the Second World War is important due to its ramifications on the post-war navy. Elaborating on the RCN's planned participation in Operation Downfall will not only bridge the gap in historiography

but will also highlight the substantial Canadian effort that went into planning for the invasion of Japan.

## Chapter One: Ironing Out the Politics

Canada's need for a Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) presence in the Pacific Ocean preceded the Japanese entrance to the Second World War in December 1941. Japan's assertive foreign policy in the 1930s was bound to lead to a quarrel for Pacific hegemony with the United States. In the event of an American versus Japanese war in the Pacific, Canada would have to ensure the safety of the West Coast.<sup>24</sup> Still, despite the pre-war situation, the RCN's presence in the Pacific remained diminutive throughout most of the Second World War. Even with the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) threatening the American-held islands in the central and northern Pacific, Canadian naval strategists did not consider an attack on the Canadian West Coast a serious risk.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the Allies held fast on their 'Germany first' strategy, not even formally discussing a large operation in the Pacific Theatre until 1943. Once the outline of the Allied invasion of Japan, codenamed Operation Downfall, started taking shape in 1943, the United States Navy (USN) dominated the planned naval effort. In light of this, if the Canadian government wished to use Operation Downfall to expand the navy's capacity and versatility, it was going to have to push to secure the RCN's place in the invasion.<sup>26</sup>

The requirement to iron out the politics of RCN participation in Operation Downfall can be broken down into three distinct efforts. The first was obtaining Allied support for Canadian and RCN involvement in the operation. King had to prove on the RCN's behalf to the United Kingdom and the United States that the navy was rebuilding its reputation, which

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<sup>24</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 1* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 331.

<sup>25</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, 7 December 1941, Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/search.aspx>. Referred to hereafter as 'King diary'.

<sup>26</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Volume II, Part 2* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2007), 511.

was tarnished by ostensibly poor performance up to 1942.<sup>27</sup> The second effort was negotiating exactly what Canadian politicians themselves wanted. When Ottawa started putting more consideration into Canadian involvement in Operation Downfall in January 1944, it was clear that the support of politicians varied. Even with Canadian interests as a Pacific nation, some politicians believed that the country had done enough in the war already and could bow out of Operation Downfall without the Allies thinking Canada was welching on their wartime obligations. The third effort was ensuring the support of the Canadian public. King knew that the only people substantially worried about a Japanese invasion were in British Columbia (B.C.), so convincing the wider Canadian public to support a new campaign in the Pacific was necessary.<sup>28</sup> Only an all-volunteer force would suffice, as conscription for a Pacific Fleet would make for political suicide.

### **Convincing Churchill and Roosevelt**

The first step in establishing a place for the RCN in Operation Downfall was convincing the Allies to involve Canada. Not only did King have to push for RCN participation in the operation but he also had to assure the Allies that the fleet would be capable of surface warfare, a substantial shift from the focus on convoy escort. While Canada had deep defence relations with the United Kingdom, solidifying relations with the United States was paramount—their global presence was unprecedented, and the two nations' shared borders and coasts necessitated a need for *simpatico*. Collaboration, or at least discussion, between Canada and the United States on the strategic defence of the West Coast had already started in 1940. Through the 17 August 1940 Ogdensburg Agreement, King and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the Permanent Joint Board of Defence (PJBD) to

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<sup>27</sup> J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989), 67.

<sup>28</sup> King diary, 5 January 1944.

deliberate on shared defence interests.<sup>29</sup> The agreement also guaranteed American defence of Canadian assets in the Pacific and along the West Coast in the event of a Japanese invasion, which was crucial when the RCN was funnelling the majority of its ships and sailors into the North Atlantic. The RCN had a small detachment of ships in the Pacific by January 1942, but so long as Germany was in the war, its emphasis had to remain in the east.

The RCN had allowed itself to get typecast into a convoy escort role primarily through its corvette presence in the North Atlantic. The RCN eventually performed well in this role, but this was a double-edged sword: while the RCN eventually gained recognition for its competency, this was in a role that was commonly considered subsidiary for a 'real' navy.<sup>30</sup> The RCN wished to branch out with a more versatile fleet before war's end, but Canada was producing corvettes not just for the RCN but for the alliance as a whole.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the majority of Canadian shipbuilding capacity could not be redirected toward larger ships better suited to surface warfare, thus reinforcing the RCN's role of convoy escort.<sup>32</sup> To worsen the situation, RCN-escorted convoys to and from Britain saw vastly increasing losses by late 1942, forcing the RCN to accept an imposed relief and training period over the turn of 1943.<sup>33</sup>

The summer of 1942 did see an opportunity to demonstrate the RCN's capability external to the North Atlantic, in the Pacific Ocean, when the navy's Pacific contingent consisted mainly of two merchantmen-turned-cruisers, three convoy escort corvettes, and a handful of other smaller vessels.<sup>34</sup> The USN had little difficulty reclaiming the island of

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<sup>29</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 32

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> The USN was set to relieve some of the convoy escort pressure from the RCN following the American entrance to the war in December 1941, but the USN did not have a solid plan for producing convoy escort vessels until August 1942. The RCN saw a brief relief, refit, and training period from Fall 1942 - Spring 1943, but was inevitably called back to the North Atlantic. Roger Sarty, "Navy of Necessity: Canadian Naval Forces 1867-2014," *Northern Mariner* 24 no.3/4 (Jul-Oct 2015), 45-46.

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 62.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 158.

<sup>34</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 86.



Midway from the Japanese in June 1942 but had struggled to push the Japanese forces back at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. Since the RCN specialised in convoy escort, the USN sought its assistance to defend their attacking force, and the RCN happily obliged.<sup>35</sup> It was fortuitous that the RCN had ships ready to assist the USN in the retaking of Dutch Harbor. Despite the dismissals of his cabinet ministers, King's worries of Japanese raids on the West Coast were strengthened by both the Japanese occupation of the Aleutians and the seeming inability for the Americans to counter them.<sup>36</sup>

American and Canadian collaboration in the Pacific was also strengthened through the assault on Kiska Island, also in the Aleutians. Kiska Island had been taken by the Japanese in June 1942, and it was not until August 1943 that the Americans sought to take it back. The RCN showed eagerness to assist the American attacking force with all Pacific units readily available, even though capacity in the west was still limited, and attached them to the USN's task group for the operation.<sup>37</sup> The Kiska operation was anti-climactic; the Japanese had left the island prior to the task force's arrival and a miscommunication between American and Canadian forces operating in foggy conditions resulted in a friendly fire incident that killed several soldiers from each side, but it was a watershed moment for American and Canadian collaboration.<sup>38</sup> The American request for RCN assistance in the Aleutians meant further Allied recognition that Canada's naval capability was improving, even if King still had to advocate for Canada, let alone the RCN, at upcoming Allied discussions about the Pacific.

The opportunity for King to introduce plans for the navy to the Allies arose at the Quebec Conferences. Hosted by Canada in August 1943, the First Quebec Conference saw delegations from the United Kingdom and the United States meet to consolidate strategy.

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<sup>35</sup> Sarty, "Navy of Necessity," 48.

<sup>36</sup> King diary, 31 May 1942.

<sup>37</sup> RCN Commanding Officer Pacific Coast, Commodore Beech, was given just four days to redirect RCN vessels to Kodiak by 20 August. Beech had the dedicated vessels en route in a matter of hours. Douglas *et al*, *No Higher Purpose*, 359.

<sup>38</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments*, 391.

Among the conference's myriad proceedings was discussion of the Japanese question, including preliminary talks on an invasion of Japan.<sup>39</sup> The majority of the deliberation was between Churchill and Roosevelt, but Canada's hosting of the conference allowed King to wedge in the occasional Canadian perspective through Churchill—the willingness to host also showed the major Allies that King was eager for Canada to continue to involve itself in the war effort.<sup>40</sup> Even if Japan was on the mind of most present, the majority of the talk remained on Europe and the German question. The Americans and British briefly discussed how to deal with Japan following the end of hostilities with Germany, but a formalised plan and the RCN's involvement in any operation would have to wait until Allied intentions were more clearly determined.<sup>41</sup> Even if there was no definitive answer for King regarding the RCN in the Pacific from the First Quebec Conference, he had made it abundantly clear to Churchill and Roosevelt that Canada wanted to participate in Operation Downfall and its planning.

It was the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944 where Churchill and Roosevelt formally discussed the role of Canada in Operation Downfall.<sup>42</sup> King proposed Canadian, including RCN, participation in the invasion of Japan to Churchill, which he agreed to and Roosevelt followed suit shortly after.<sup>43</sup> Thus, 14 September 1944 marked the day that the RCN was allowed to participate in Operation Downfall—and now that Canada had ensured its involvement in the operation, it could focus on preparing the navy for fighting in the Pacific.

## **Placating the Government**

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<sup>39</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> King diary, 23 July 1943.

<sup>41</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Canada at War: Conscription, Diplomacy, and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 202.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

The Allies saw the value of RCN participation in Operation Downfall since the navy, and Canada as a whole, had been relatively helpful in their prior wartime contributions. Despite this, Canadian parliamentarians proved more difficult to persuade. War-weariness in Ottawa grew from sustaining Canada's wartime contributions, and Liberal-Conservative relations were strained. Canadian politicians had been torn on Canada's war effort from the very outset, as there was initially little to no direct threat to Canadian territory. This was further exacerbated by politicians' focus on maintaining public favour—even if Pacific participation would facilitate long-term development of the RCN, the benefit to the Liberal post-war agenda was dubious.

Politicians supported raising convoy escorts since they defended Canadian shipping, plus German vessels in the Saint Lawrence River and along the East Coast remained a concern. But perspectives on the Pacific were quite the contrary; the disastrous defence of Hong Kong in late 1941 left even King wary of losing Canadian lives over Allied interests in the area.<sup>44</sup> King saw the Japanese presence near the Aleutian and Hawaiian islands as a very real risk to the Canadian West, but dismissal of the concerns by Europe-focused Chiefs of Staff was enough to placate some politicians.<sup>45</sup> It was a wakeup call for many when a Japanese submarine shelled Estevan Point, B.C. on 21 July 1942 and stimulated fear of an invasion.<sup>46</sup> This was short-lived though, as the lack of other hostile activity in Canadian territory ensured that this fear returned to dormancy by the Second Quebec Conference.<sup>47</sup> As fear of the Japanese was only infrequently agitated, and usually only for Canadians along the West Coast, politicians east of British Columbia struggled to rationalise Canada or the RCN increasing involvement in the Pacific. Still, contrary to the opinion of the majority, King's

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<sup>44</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> The Chiefs of Staff Committee emphasised in an 11 December 1941 memorandum to the Ministers of National Defence that the RCN and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) elements in the Canadian West, in conjunction with the American presence, would be satisfactory in repelling any Japanese aggression. Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments*, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas *et al*, *A Blue Water Navy*, 507.

<sup>47</sup> J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1985), 200.

perception was that Canadian participation in Operation Downfall was an “obligation to share” among the Allies.<sup>48</sup>

King’s problem was that if participation in Operation Downfall jeopardised public favour of the government, then the political opposition would assuredly oppose it. King’s opposition would love for him to bungle Canadian involvement in the Pacific. There were two main risks with collaborating in the Pacific. The first was that the notion of working with the United States remained novel. The Ogdensburg Agreement had already surprised some Canadians because it implied the incapacity for the United Kingdom to safeguard Canada. Also, people also viewed the United States as a nation of shrewd loanmen.<sup>49</sup> The government worried, therefore, that the public might not support deepening military ties.

The American commitment to financially support Canada through the Hyde Park Declaration of 20 April 1941 bolstered the supposed American role of loanman, but, despite the surprise over Ogdensburg, was accepted by Canadians for ensuring economic security following dwindling deals with London.<sup>50</sup> The declaration also made it clear, had it not already been, to Canada’s politicians that King was planning with Canada’s best interests in mind. Ottawa could at least rest assured that the Prime Minister was resolute in his ‘Canada first’ initiatives. By extension, King needed to maintain the government’s trust that involvement in Operation Downfall would benefit Canada and the navy.

The second issue on the mind of every Canadian politician was the question of finding enough volunteers for operations in the Pacific. The subject of conscription had been touchy for Canada since the First World War; it was not a universally popular decision then, and the government would certainly do everything in its power to raise adequate forces for Operation Downfall without resorting to conscription. King had promised even before the Second World War began that Canada would see no conscription in any future conflict, and his political

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<sup>48</sup> King diary, 5 January 1944.

<sup>49</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Granatstein, *Canada at War*, 156.

opposition knew this was an angle that could be worked against the Liberals.<sup>51</sup> Conservative Party leader Arthur Meighen and Minister of National Defence James Ralston were strong advocates for conscription, and argued that it would allow Canada to raise standardised, well-trained forces fit to fill Canada's wartime forces.<sup>52</sup> The plebiscite conducted on 27 April 1942 revealed that English-speaking Canadians tended toward supporting overseas manpower demands, indicating that many Canadians, politicians, and soldiers generally favoured conscription.<sup>53</sup> To the satisfaction of English-speaking Canadians, Bill 80 was passed shortly after the plebiscite. The bill allowed the Canadian government to employ conscripted soldiers if absolutely necessary.<sup>54</sup> Not everybody liked the bill, especially in Quebec, and even if it passed King was determined to avoid antagonising the anti-conscriptionists in Quebec and elsewhere by opting for sending draftees overseas.

Even with the general support of conscription, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services (MNDNS) Angus Macdonald continued to advocate for the use of conscripts for home defence only, though this opinion was met with spirited criticism from the Conservatives.<sup>55</sup> King, of course, was adamant not to use conscripts overseas, including in the Pacific. Ottawa sent National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) conscripts to the Aleutians on the notion that the area was still part of North America and therefore not 'overseas', but once the islands were reclaimed in mid-1943 the troops were quickly repatriated.<sup>56</sup> As far as King was concerned, if Canada wanted to raise an RCN fighting force for Operation Downfall, it would have to be done with volunteers only. Even if the

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<sup>51</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 133.

<sup>52</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 48.

<sup>53</sup> Of Canadian military members, some 228,000 within Canada and 84,000 overseas were able to cast a ballot. The foreign plebiscite returning officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Minns, noted that not all deployed members could be reached to vote due to their dispersions within British units. C.P. Stacey, "Taking of Conscription Plebiscite for Canadian Forces Overseas," *CMHQ Report* (18 May 1942), 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 179-180.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas *et al*, *No Higher Purpose*, 432.

<sup>56</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments*, 411.

Conservatives continually pressed to send NRMA troops overseas, King and his government believed doing so would detract from the nation's "voluntary character".<sup>57</sup>

This being said, the RCN saw an abundance of volunteers throughout the war. From September 1939 to January 1943, the RCN expanded to ninety-four seafaring warships and more than 45,000 officers and ratings, both of which had roughly doubled again by January 1945.<sup>58</sup> With the numbers the navy boasted, King would be able to get by on his volunteers alone, which also secured him support from his governing party. King's determination paid off, and in September 1944 the War Cabinet Committee (WCC), agreed to raise a tentative budget of \$2.2 billion for the 1945-1946 fiscal year, a substantial portion of which would go toward the war against Japan.<sup>59</sup>

### **Assuring the Public**

With the Allies and the Canadian government in favour of RCN involvement in Operation Downfall, the last political issue for King to iron out was with the Canadian public. Even with the high number of volunteers in the RCN by the Second Quebec Conference, ensuring that the public supported participation in the invasion of Japan was crucial. One of King's worries was that the public would be too weary to fulfil his volunteering requirements come the time of the invasion. Additionally, King had to ensure that Canadians themselves supported participation in the Pacific, especially since the Japanese threat to Canada was low.

The animosity toward conscription extended beyond Ottawa, and the risk of its resurgence gnawed on the Canadian public. In the First World War, conscription had inadvertently pitted pro-war English Canadians against anti-war French Canadians, and the

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<sup>57</sup> King diary, 28 October 1943.

<sup>58</sup> In September 1939 the RCN had 3,500 personnel with six seafaring ships, by January 1943 it had 48,693 personnel and 100 seafaring ships, and by January 1945 it had 87,141 personnel and 250 seafaring ships. Sarty, "Navy of Necessity," 47.

<sup>59</sup> "Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, September 22, 1944" 22 September 1944 *War Cabinet Committee, 1938-1945*, Reel C-4876.

rift was still somewhat present in the 1940s.<sup>60</sup> Still, before the Japanese joined the war, King was able to sway French Canadians to serve in Europe such that they could defend the “traditions of French culture” from German bastardization in the summer of 1941.<sup>61</sup> In encouraging the French Canadians to contribute to the war effort, King continued cultivating wide public support for the war effort. But while he had bouts of general support from the public, it was clear that war weariness was starting to set in by mid-war. Part of the anti-government sentiment pulsating throughout the population stemmed from a supposed lack of governmental leadership and coherence—by 1943 people were so exhausted with the war effort that they needed to see the Canadian military led by well-established authority figures capable of maintaining both domestic and in-theatre efforts.<sup>62</sup> This exhaustion hinted that the public was not yet ready to support an additional theatre in the Pacific. Things did not improve after the Allied invasion of France, when unexpectedly high casualties in the infantry led to a manpower crisis for the army.

In November 1944, shortly after the Second Quebec Conference, King sacked Ralston as defence minister in one of his more audacious political moves of the war.<sup>63</sup> He did so due to Ralston’s insistence on sending conscripts overseas to replenish units that had been bled white and replaced him with General Andrew McNaughton.<sup>64</sup> King believed that McNaughton’s relationship with Canadians, and his opposition to conscription, would fortify Canadian support in the continuation of fighting, but his inauguration had no effect. Even if Ralston was pro-conscription, many Canadians were fond of his continuous endeavours to improve upon the Canadian war effort.<sup>65</sup> Ironically, much of the public thought that the

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<sup>60</sup> Granatstein, *Canada at War*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> “French Canada Has to Defend Great Culture,” in *The Hamilton Spectator* 23 June 1941, retrieved from *Democracy and the War: Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War*.  
[https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/canadawar\\_e.html](https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/canadawar_e.html)

<sup>62</sup> “The People Speak,” in *The Globe and Mail* 11 August 1943, retrieved from *Democracy at War: Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War*.

<sup>63</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 221-222.

<sup>64</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 229-230.

<sup>65</sup> “Cabinet Crisis” in *The Hamilton Spectator* 2 November 1944, retrieved from *Democracy at War: Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War*.

instalment of McNaughton as defence minister was foolish due to his staunch refusal to utilise NRMA troops for anything more than home defence.<sup>66</sup>

4 April 1945 saw King's attempts to sustain Canadian support for the war effort, when he declared that any members committed to the Pacific Theatre would have to volunteer, and would receive a month's leave in Canada prior to shipping out.<sup>67</sup> The British thought that this was foolish since British ability to raise substantial manpower for the Pacific was dubious, but personnel was something the RCN surprisingly had in plenty.<sup>68</sup> The manpower abundance of the RCN by 1945 indicated that there would be little issue in supplying Japan-bound ships with volunteer officers and ratings.

## **Conclusion**

In ironing out the politics, King was able to ensure that Canadian sentiment would not be a limiting factor on the RCN's participation in Operation Downfall. The nation still had to figure out the navy's role within the invasion and assemble a fleet for it, but King's emphasis on the maintenance of backing at all levels was sound decision making. The RCN had seen an astounding growth from its pitiful numbers at the start of the war and had earned the credentials from convoy escort in the North Atlantic to provide the Allies with a reasonable degree of security that it would perform well against the IJN.

Positive interaction with the Allies was the crux of ensuring a place for the RCN in Operation Downfall, since it was only through their approval that a Canadian fleet could be attached to the operation's force. Churchill and Roosevelt were impressed with the navy's improvement since the start of the war, so the door was opened to King for continued discussion. The RCN's experience in cooperation with other navies also meant the Allies were more likely to consider the possibility of it branching out into surface warfare. Making

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire*, 242.

<sup>68</sup> Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments*, 483.



joint defence and trade agreements with the United States not only further facilitated the presence of the RCN in the invasion of Japan, but also acted as a way for the neighbouring nations to solidify their relations—doing such would prove immensely helpful in the post war diplomatic scene, as well as offering Canada equipment on loan if necessary. Even if the pressure Germany applied on the United Kingdom meant its focus had to be narrowed to the European Theatre, Churchill commended King for carrying himself with Canada's best interests in mind. King definitely did not support any unnecessary Canadian bloodshed but allowing the RCN to participate in Operation Downfall meant Canada would continue the fulfilment of its duties to the Americans and the Commonwealth, as well as allowing Canadian access to Japan's post-war economy.<sup>69</sup>

The endeavours in satiating the desires of the Canadian government and public while promoting the RCN's involvement in Operation Downfall went somewhat hand-in-hand, but both provide insights on the Canadian political situation during the war. Even at a time when Canada's resources, and occasionally its will to fight, were dwindling, Conservatives and Liberals allowed themselves to quibble formalities while wasting precious time. Even if disagreements continued to persist, as expected, the presence of Japanese forces in the Aleutians and off the Canadian West Coast helped remind politicians that there were, in fact, lives at stake. Also notable was the mixed reception of politicians to King's policy making with the Allies. Yet, the Hyde Park Declaration saw remarkable support from the political left and right, effectively nurturing the sentiment of working for a better Canada through collaboration with the US. The polarity of the Canadian government meant it was difficult to come to a widely accepted conclusion on the RCN's role in the Pacific Theatre, but King was able to get enough approval to move forward with Canada's participation in operational planning.

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<sup>69</sup> Andrew L. Brown, "The Canadian Army's Observer Program in the Asia-Pacific Region, 1944-45" *Canadian Military History* 28 no.1 (2019), 9.

In broad strokes, the Canadian public was rife with war-weariness from the continual fighting against the Germans, but they still had enough spirit to support fighting the Japanese. The disparity between English and French Canadians could have been a point of worry, but King was able to sustain enough French support for the war by demonstrating his opposition to sending conscripts overseas. Canadians were growing increasingly tired of King's waffling in the face of disagreement, plus Ralston's sacking helped to fuel some anti-government sentiment, but King was able to assure anti-conscriptionists that any calls for involvement in the Pacific, naval or otherwise, would be met with volunteers.

## Chapter Two: Establishing the Navy's Roles

Even before it was assured that Canada, and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), could participate in the Allied invasion of Japan, the Canadian government set out to draft a plan for the navy's involvement in the Pacific. The campaign against Germany in Northwest Europe was well underway by the time the Allies commenced more rigorous discussion on the invasion of Japan at the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944, and it was here that Britain and the US agreed that Canada could participate. The navy sought to use the invasion, Operation Downfall, to expand its capacity and versatility by growing into something more than a convoy escort force. But to do so, Ottawa needed to ascertain what the navy would do in the Pacific. Winning the favour of the Allies and ultimately guaranteeing a place for the RCN in Operation Downfall was only part of the effort; Canada still had to establish the navy's roles.

Once the navy's involvement was confirmed, it was clear that there would be both domestic and international endeavours to determine where the RCN would fall in the order of battle. Within Canada, determining how the RCN should fit into the operation was an effort in designing a fitting naval component that would also facilitate the navy's development. To the displeasure of Canadian naval planners, who wanted the navy to broaden its capability since the war's outset, most of the RCN's wartime involvement focused on convoy escort. Since the campaign against Japan would involve substantially more surface warfare and naval aviation, the navy was eager to produce ships suited to these roles.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the RCN had to determine how its role in the invasion measured up against the other Canadian services, the Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Obviously, Canada had limited money, supply, and manpower to allot to Operation Downfall, so the magnitude of the navy's involvement had to be balanced with its land and air counterparts. Ottawa also needed

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<sup>70</sup> Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 81.

to determine where the RCN would integrate with the Allied forces. Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King found himself at an impasse in deciding between working with the United States Navy (USN) or the British Royal Navy (RN). Canadian tradition clung to the Commonwealth, but the RCN had grown closer to the USN through joint operations like the invasion of Kiska Island in August 1943.<sup>71</sup> Not only did a decision have to be made about which navy would be more beneficial to work with, collaboration with that navy also needed to be discussed with its command. The fundamental discussions on the RCN's participation in Operation Downfall with the Allies and with the other Canadian services happened concurrently.

### **Initial Planning for the Pacific**

Canadian participation in Operation Downfall was formalised on 13 September 1944 during the Second Quebec Conference, but Ottawa had started to work on raising more suitable ships for the Pacific Theatre by mid-1943 and had been considering doing so for years prior.<sup>72</sup> The Japanese and the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) were a vastly different adversary than the Europe-based Axis powers that Canada was accustomed to fighting, which Canada had got its first taste of at the failed defence of Hong Kong in December 1941.<sup>73</sup> The IJN's tactics saw a heavy emphasis on aircraft carriers and battleships, and less use of submarines, which differed from the hit-and-run tactics of German U-boats—direct surface attack was the Japanese *modus operandi* at sea.<sup>74</sup> The difference in naval warfare was a

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<sup>71</sup> The differences in size, plus close collaboration, between the RCN and USN led for the “general attitude” to present among American sailors that the RCN was a subsidiary to the USN. Sailors’ sentiment aside, the two navies worked well with or alongside one another. Jack Granatstein, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989), 82.

<sup>72</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1952), 78.

<sup>73</sup> The armed merchant cruiser *HMCS Prince Robert* escorted a brigade of Canadian soldiers to Hong Kong just days before the Japanese assault commenced on 8 December. W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 1* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2002), 337.

<sup>74</sup> Mark Stille, *The Imperial Japanese Navy in the Pacific War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014): 24-26.

golden opportunity for the RCN if Canada wanted to end the war with a more versatile force. Since Canadian shipbuilding had been geared toward anti-submarine warfare, the navy would have to refit its ships or acquire new ones for operations in the Pacific.

Ottawa needed to be careful about the degree of commitment before official plans for the Pacific were made, especially since so much money was already pouring into Europe, and RCN operations in the Atlantic.<sup>75</sup> The plan to invade German-occupied France in June 1944, Operation Overlord, dominated Allied strategic planning so as to uphold the ‘Germany first’ strategy agreed upon when the United States entered the war.<sup>76</sup> The RCN even succeeded in trialling ships in the Atlantic that differed from the corvette typecast. Canada had been producing *River*-class frigates – essentially larger, twin-screwed corvettes – since the spring of 1941 and, while they were still designed for convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare, their increased size and firepower over the smaller *Flower*-class corvettes allowed the navy to get sailors acquainted with larger ships.<sup>77</sup> The British were also happy to provide Canada with the odd ship as a means of staffing vessels amidst a manpower shortage. At the turn of 1944, War Committee of the Cabinet (WCC) secretary Arnold Heeney announced that the RN would provide four new ships for Canada: two *Fiji*-class cruisers and two destroyers.<sup>78</sup> The British were surprised with the donation of such new ships to the RCN, and production delays meant one of the original ships, HMS *Superb*, was replaced with the *Uganda*.<sup>79</sup> Canada’s *Tribal*-class destroyers, which operated in collaboration with RN ships of the same type in the

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<sup>75</sup> “Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, August 31, 1944,” 31 August 1944, p.10, *Heritage Canadiana online*, [https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_mikan\\_133181](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_mikan_133181), Reel C-4876.

<sup>76</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 85.

<sup>77</sup> Douglas *et al*, *No Higher Purpose*, 310.

<sup>78</sup> The RCN ended up getting one *Fiji*, HMCS *Uganda*, which went on to operations in the Pacific in 1945, and one *Minotaur*-class cruiser, HMCS *Ontario*, which was headed toward the Pacific Theatre but did not arrive by war’s end. Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, January 5, 1944, 5 January 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>79</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Volume II, Part 2* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2007), 520.

Atlantic Ocean and English Channel, performed with “gratifying results” in the spring of 1944, even if the navy suffered a blow with the loss of HMCS *Athabaskan* on 29 April.<sup>80</sup>

Operation Overlord commenced on 6 June 1944 and continued to draw the attention of the Allies, but the WCC was still determined to consider the Pacific during the European maelstrom. Canadian delegates conferred with the British Chiefs of Staff mid-month to discuss the nation’s potential offerings. All three services had drafted their proposals for the war against Japan and presented it to King for consideration, but he still supported the notion of sharing the nation’s plans with the British.<sup>81</sup> The RCN desired to send a flotilla of frigates to the Indian Ocean while concurrently supplying fleet units for the main effort in the Pacific. On the question of working with the RN or USN, it made more logistical sense for the RCN to continue working with the British Commonwealth in Southeast Asia, but integrating into the USN in the Northern and Central Pacific alongside the RN would better align with the British desires to maintain the Commonwealth's united image.<sup>82</sup> Given the incentive to work with both allies, Ottawa had to consider the possibility of the RCN working with either navy until a formal plan had been organised.

By the end of August 1944, the RCN had the least involvement in, and least-solidified plan of, the three services’ intentions for the Pacific. As part of its observer program, the Canadian Army had been attaching officers to American and Commonwealth forces in the Southwest Pacific Area to learn how the Japanese operated.<sup>83</sup> Pending final approval, the army was prepared to send a complete division to the Pacific Theatre.<sup>84</sup> The RCAF had, for sake of planning, tentatively approved fifty-eight squadrons to be split between European stabilisation and the fight against the Japanese, and the WCC was contemplating attaching

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<sup>80</sup> Operational Report of Chiefs of Staff Committee to Cabinet War Committee for April - 1944, 16 May 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>81</sup> Memorandum to the Canadian War Cabinet Committee, June 14, 1944, 14 June 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew L. Brown, “The Canadian Army’s Observer Program in the Asia-Pacific Region, 1944-45” *Canadian Military History* 28 no.1 (2019), 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 10.

another three squadrons and a wing headquarters to the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) component based in Australia.<sup>85</sup> The *Fiji*-class cruiser, HMCS *Uganda*, that was scheduled to join with the British Pacific Fleet (BPF), was not to sail under Canadian colours until October, and would not be battle-ready until sometime in 1945.<sup>86</sup>

Once the Second Quebec Conference was underway in September 1944, the RCN obtained clearer direction on where and how it could participate. Contrary to King's preference that Canadians would fight in the Northern and Central Pacific, the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services (MNDNS), Angus Macdonald, stated that the RCN would be ready and willing to fight the Japanese wherever they lay.<sup>87</sup> The Chief of Naval Staff (CNS), Vice-Admiral Nelles, announced that the RN and USN would be working closely with one another in the operation, which mitigated the need for the RCN to take sides on which navy would be preferable to work with.<sup>88</sup> Nelles also emphasised that the Pacific Theatre would, in fact, be the perfect opportunity for the navy to prove its new destroyers, cruisers, and escort carriers, among other ships, in an unfamiliar area of operations. The RCN now had a planning figure of some 30,000 sailors afloat for the stabilisation of Europe and Operation Downfall.<sup>89</sup>

### **Determining the RCN's Attachment in the Allied Fleet**

Admittedly, the American antipathy toward the RCN's involvement in Operation Downfall did not mainly stem from what ships were needed for the force. The operation was very much an American-led affair and the USN had no shortage of naval capability, nor did it want to share any of the "front seats" with the Commonwealth.<sup>90</sup> The difficulty lay, instead,

<sup>85</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, August 31, 1944, 31 August 1944, p.11, Reel C-4876.

<sup>86</sup> Bill Rawling, "Paved with Good Intentions: HMCS *Uganda*, the Pacific War, and the Volunteer Issue," *Canadian Military History* 4 no.2 (1995), 23.

<sup>87</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, (13 September 1941). Referred to hereafter as 'King diary'.

<sup>88</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, September 13, 1944, 13 September 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> King diary, 20 September 1944, 1.

in determining the RCN's place in the organisational structure of the invasion. Since planning for Operation Downfall had been deemed subsidiary until after Operation Overlord began, there was for a time no real way of knowing exactly where or what the RCN could contribute outside of conjecture. Canada was a nation of the British Commonwealth, but its government sought to deviate from the ostensible obligation to assist the British in the name of Commonwealth duty.<sup>91</sup>

At the outset of the Second Quebec Conference, the RN and USN still had components that planned to work externally to one another. The British would occupy mainly those areas in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia partly in a bid to reclaim colonial assets, while the Americans would be the main force taking on the Japanese in the Central and possibly Northern Pacific. Logistically speaking, it made the most sense for the RCN to continue work with the RN as it had been doing in Europe, but King was vehemently against Canadian efforts being squandered on re-claiming colonies.<sup>92</sup> When the Allies committed to the operation at the Second Quebec Conference and planning began to escalate, it became clear that the Commonwealth navies would do well to work within the Royal Navy.<sup>93</sup> But during the conference the RN secured a spot within the USN's proposed organisation, and the British were more than willing to let the RCN attach onto the British contingent within the USN's fleet if United States President Franklin Roosevelt was in agreement.<sup>94</sup> Alas, Canada's decision as to where the RCN would serve was made for it; King worked well to advocate for Canadian involvement in Operation Downfall and the British assisted in finding spots for the nation. Even if the RCN was permitted to contribute to the operation's fleet, the scale and type of involvement that the navy would contribute was still to be determined.

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<sup>91</sup> King diary, 5 January 1944, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, August 31, 1944, 31 August 1944, p.12, Reel C-4876.

<sup>93</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, September 14, 1944, 14 September 1944, p.12, Reel C-4876.

<sup>94</sup> King diary, 14 September 1944.



### **Coordinating Contributions with the Canadian Services**

Once the Allies decided that Canada could participate in the war against Japan, Ottawa wasted no time conferring with the services and the Allies. Almost immediately, there was a meeting between members of the WCC and British officials, including British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his Chiefs of Staff, on 14 September 1944. Among the points of discussion was a lengthy discourse on the Canadian and British involvement in the war against Japan following the end of hostilities in Europe. British Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, confirmed that the RCAF should develop fifty-eight squadrons of aircraft for the invasion, and noted British proposals for another forty squadrons of very long range (VLR) bombers.<sup>95</sup> King felt like the RCAF's proposed commitment was disproportionate to the CA and RCN—even if the theatre would have substantially less army involvement than that of the air force or navy, the prime minister emphasised the need for a more balanced involvement between the three services.<sup>96</sup>

The RCN's role within Operation Downfall had not been defined during the Second Quebec Conference, but King expected the RCN to at least provide something to the effect of a couple of cruisers, a couple of destroyers, and an aircraft carrier, all possibly serving anywhere between the Aleutians and the Philippines.<sup>97</sup> The RCN's proposed involvement lagged behind the CA and RCAF's. On 20 September, shortly after the conference's closure, the RCAF announced that it had whittled its commitment from a week prior of fifty-eight squadrons down to thirty-two, twenty-five of which would be directed toward the Pacific, and the Canadian Army's participation did not differ much from its pre-conference plan.<sup>98</sup> Clarification of the navy's role was settled on the same day though, even if the amount the RCN was to contribute was still uncertain. The MNDNS stated that the navy's primary role in

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<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, September 14, 1944, 14 September 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> King Diary, 14 September 1944.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, September 20, 1944, 20 September 1944, Reel C-4876.

Operation Downfall would be “escort work and anti-aircraft (AA) duties”, although stronger ships might find themselves engaged in frontline combat.<sup>99</sup> Just two days later, on 22 September, Macdonald presented the first proposal for RCN force structure in the Pacific Theatre. It was massive; he called for 20,258 men aboard some 110 ships, with another 30,000 sailors ashore for support.<sup>100</sup>

King was somewhat irritated with the speed at which Operation Downfall’s planning was going, as well as becoming increasingly frustrated with the American antipathy toward Canadian involvement in the operation, deeming it token and unnecessary—part of his reasoning behind committing an appreciable force was to maintain Canada’s respect among the Allies, so he wanted the US to appreciate the navy’s contribution.<sup>101</sup> He re-emphasised to the MNDNS and Minister of National Defence for Air (MNDA) that they needed to be prudent not to waste money within their planning.<sup>102</sup> On 5 October, King further suggested that both the RCAF and RCN reduce their Pacific contribution proposals such that they could be more proportionate with the Canadian Army’s plan.<sup>103</sup> Macdonald argued that the navy’s involvement would work a lot better with 13,000 men than the 10,000 that the WCC proposed, but the committee insisted on working with the latter.<sup>104</sup> By Macdonald’s estimation, the RCN would still be able to operate one carrier and two cruisers; but the smaller manpower figure would necessitate a reduction of frigate, destroyer, and minesweeper counts, and also the removal of corvettes and the AA cruisers.<sup>105</sup> The navy’s

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> The first iteration of the proposal saw the RCN Pacific contingent consist of two cruisers, two light carriers, twenty-five destroyers, fifty-four frigates, twelve *Castle*-class corvettes (designed as improvement on the *Flower*-class), twelve minesweepers, and three armed merchant cruiser-turned-anti-aircraft vessels. Minutes of the War Cabinet Committee, September 22, 1944, 22 September 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>101</sup> Douglas *et al*, *A Blue Water Navy*, 512.

<sup>102</sup> King diary, 28 September 1944.

<sup>103</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 61.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes of the War Cabinet Committee, October 5, 1944, 5 October 1944, p.7-8, Reel C-4876.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.8.

parameters were becoming more refined, so, barring any major hitches, Macdonald would be able to get a proposal to King by year's end.

A revamped proposal went to the WCC on 11 October, suggesting 15,000 men as the complement of roughly seventy ships from cruiser to corvette.<sup>106</sup> The committee had several issues with Macdonald's proposal. He wanted six ships and 1,726 sailors for the Indian Ocean, even after King's express disapproval of Canadian involvement outside the Central Pacific, though this was easily remedied by cutting Southeast Asia out of the proposal. Macdonald also exceeded the manpower limitation that the WCC had established, with 13,412 sailors even after the Indian Ocean component was removed. Macdonald deemed the number necessary, even if the committee was hesitant to sign off on anything more than 10,000.<sup>107</sup> Despite usual disagreement, King agreed that the number would suffice—anything less than 13,000 would be arguably ineffective, even as a token force.<sup>108</sup> The committee tentatively endorsed the involvement for sake of planning, but there needed to be a detailed cost analysis before any final approval could be given.

11 December 1944 was the day of decision, as Canada's Department of Finance had made its first review of the Canadian involvement in post-hostility Europe and the Pacific. The army's contribution stayed consistent – one division and its ancillaries, 30,000 men total – and the air force settled on a commitment of twenty-two squadrons.<sup>109</sup> The navy, however, saw substantial change. As per the suggestion to do so at the 11 February WCC meeting, the RCN's involvement in the occupation of Europe was removed in favour of directing more focus toward the Pacific. The RCN was still in talks with the Allies about finalising the list of ships to deploy, but the manpower allocation of 13,412 sailors and an estimated fleet was approved, along with a budget of \$325 million to raise and maintain the force for the

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<sup>106</sup> Minutes of the War Cabinet Committee, October 11, 1944, 11 October 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> King diary, 11 October 1944.

<sup>109</sup> Minutes of the War Cabinet Committee, December 11, 1944, 11 December 1944, Reel C-4876.

1945-1946 fiscal year.<sup>110</sup> Three long months of deliberation after the Second Quebec Conference, and the RCN finally had a resolute plan for its manpower contribution to Operation Downfall.<sup>111</sup> The RCN had a working goal of two light fleet carriers, two cruisers, eleven destroyers and an anti-aircraft (AA) ship, plus four destroyers, six frigates, and twenty improved corvettes in reserve.

## **Conclusion**

Canada went into 1945 with a clear-cut plan in place for the navy's involvement in the war against the Japanese. Quite the effort had gone into establishing the roles for the RCN in the operation, both within Canada and in discussion with the Allies. Ottawa was proactive in its planning for the navy's contribution to Operation Downfall, since the country could not justifiably start raising a fleet without knowing what would be required in the theatre. The planners instead used the possibility of an invasion of Japan to substantiate their wishes to improve the navy's versatility and capacity, detailing the possibility to build ships designed for purposes other than the navy's typecast convoy escort. The RCN had been using larger ships in the Atlantic in the last years of the war, but the main effort was still protecting shipping. Increasing the navy's presence in the Pacific was also on the Canadian public's mind for some time, and even if the RCN's concentration was on the Battle of the Atlantic, the nation used the threat of direct hostilities with Japan to trickle ships into the Pacific.

Canada's situation of determining where it fell in the order of battle was fortuitous, since the British found themselves in a similar situation: both had to convince the Americans that their auxiliary involvement in the operation would prove beneficial as opposed to just introducing inconvenience. In saying that the RCN would work in conjunction with the RN

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> King diary, 11 December 1944.

organizationally, Churchill could talk with Roosevelt on behalf of the Canadians. Lo and behold, both nations were permitted to attach to the USN in the Pacific.

Once Canada received approval to participate in Operation Downfall, the navy obtained more clarity on the parameters of its involvement. The prospect of immensely reduced anti-submarine warfare was confirmed, and the emphasis was put instead on large ships and aircraft, to serve as escort ships and anti-aircraft platforms. Partly thanks to the reduction of commitment from the Canadian Army and RCAF, the RCN was able to propose a more proportionate Pacific contingent. Operation Downfall would bring with it new combat against a new enemy with new, or at least unfamiliar, styles of warfare, so the RCN would be able to vastly improve its versatility. The navy's foundation was laid for the invasion; all the approvals were in place and the nation knew what it would provide. All that was left to do was raise the fleet and integrate it into the invasion force.

### Chapter Three: Raising the Fleet

By engaging with the British and Americans, Canada was able to determine the involvement of its three services in the Allied invasion of Japan, Operation Downfall, by the end of 1944. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) would work within the British Royal Navy (RN) component of the larger American fleet. The Canadians, and the British, struggled to convince the United States (US) that the force would benefit from token Commonwealth involvement, but the RCN was able to work with a pledge of two light aircraft carriers, two cruisers, eleven destroyers and an anti-aircraft (AA) ship, plus four destroyers, six frigates, twenty improved corvettes in reserve.<sup>112</sup> This was good news for the RCN, since it met the intention to use Operation Downfall to expand the navy's capacity and versatility. The navy, which had been trying to branch from convoy escort corvettes where feasible in the Atlantic, now had solid justification to produce larger ships designed for surface warfare.<sup>113</sup>

With the desired force established, Canada set about raising the RCN's Pacific fleet. This project broke down into three distinct efforts. The first was completing the necessary shipbuilding and converting some vessels. Canada continuously produced smaller ships throughout the war, and its allies were generous in loaning or donating ships, but the nation's shipbuilding industry was unfamiliar with producing larger warships.<sup>114</sup> The second effort was maintenance and integration. Once the ships were obtained from allies or built, they needed to make their way to the Pacific theatre of operations. It was also imperative that

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<sup>112</sup> Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 477.

<sup>113</sup> The RCN had been trialling destroyers with RN contingents along the English Channel and French coast by the end of 1943. Jack Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989), 85.

<sup>114</sup> "Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, 5 January, 1944," 5 January 1944, *Heritage Canadiana online*, [https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_mikan\\_133181](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_mikan_133181), Reel C-4876. NOTE: The War Committee of the Cabinet (WCC) changed its name to the "Cabinet War Committee" sometime between 14–21 February 1945. When Prime Minister King was absent, the WCC met under the alias of "Special Cabinet Committee". The committee will continue to be referred to as the "WCC" in the main text, even if the title of specific documents changes.

crews were sufficiently trained for Pacific combat since the anticipated intensive surface warfare would vastly differ from the anti-submarine and convoy escort roles of the Atlantic. The third effort pertained to the only RCN ship that successfully integrated into Allied combat operations before the war ended: HMCS *Uganda*. Since the *Uganda* actually made it into the theatre of operations, it represents the concrete progress of Canadian efforts to raise a force for the Pacific, and it suggests how the rest of the RCN component would have integrated into the theatre.

### **Shipbuilding and Converting**

The RCN found itself in an interesting situation regarding ships and their complements for Operation Downfall. The navy had few large Canada-built ships in the Atlantic, since most Canadian shipbuilding had to be directed toward corvettes and frigates for convoy escort. Furthermore, any sailors that served in the Atlantic or European Theatres needed to demobilise before mobilising for service in the Pacific. The navy did, however, have plentiful manpower. At its height in 1945, the RCN had a total of 93,000 officers and ratings; even after hostilities with Germany ended, the navy would retain 35-49,000 sailors so meeting the manpower requirement of 13,412 sailors for the Pacific would be feasible.<sup>115</sup>

The RCN had fortune on its side when it came to external procurement. The British were suffering a manpower shortage in the RN but were having no issues with shipbuilding. On numerous occasions, the Admiralty extended offers to Canada to either lend out British ships to be staffed with RCN sailors, or to sell them outright. This is how the RCN procured HMCS *Uganda* and HMCS *Ontario*. In February 1945, the Admiralty extended a similar offer to Ottawa, offering up two *Colossus*-class light fleet carriers, along with eight

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<sup>115</sup> Memorandum for War Cabinet Committee: Re-allocation, repatriation, demobilization (release), and re-establishment of Armed Forces, on termination of European Hostilities, 10 April 1945, Reel 4876.

*Crescent*-class destroyers.<sup>116</sup> The RN would lend these ships to the RCN on the condition that they could deviate from the Canadian mandate for RCN ships to serve strictly within the Northern and Central Pacific – the Admiralty wished for them to move to the Indian Ocean if needed – to which Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King staunchly objected.<sup>117</sup> Because naval aviation was certain to play a crucial role in the war against the Japanese, it was in Canada's best interests to have more aerial and AA capability. The WCC negotiated for the carriers and destroyers to be provided to the RCN on the condition that they could be bought later and would not see service outside of the Canadian zones of operation.<sup>118</sup> To allow the RCAF to continue with its efforts, the British further agreed to supply the aircraft for the carriers and equipment needed to maintain them. Meanwhile, HMS *Puncher*, an escort carrier staffed with RCN sailors in the Atlantic, was to withdraw from operations by June 1945 so that its crew could be redirected toward the Pacific.<sup>119</sup> The RN-donated light cruisers and fleet carriers were already prepared for the long sailing and surface warfare foreseen in the fight against Japan, so Canada just needed to focus on staffing them with trained sailors.

The question of what Canada was to do with its destroyers requires more elaboration. As indicated, the destroyers would make up the RCN's most numerical commitment by ship type for Operation Downfall. The *River*-class destroyers that the RCN had been using in the Atlantic were well-worn by the turn of 1945. By wartime standards, they were old at a minimum age of ten years since launch, and they had been in service throughout the entire war.<sup>120</sup> To compound the age problem, they had inadequate fuel capacity for the long periods

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<sup>116</sup> Documents list the ships as *Warrior* and *Magnificent*, yet *Magnificent* was a *Majestic*-class ship. The *Majestic* was a larger version of the *Colossus* fit to handle more aircraft. Jane's Information Group, *Jane's Fighting Ships of World War II*, Foreword by Anthony Preston (London: Random House Group, 1989), 31 & 89.

<sup>117</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, February 14, 1945, 14 February 1945, Reel C-4876.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Memorandum to the War Committee of the Cabinet: Admiralty Offer of Light Fleet Carriers and Crescent Class Destroyers, 14 February 1945, Reel C-4877.

<sup>120</sup> All the *River*-class destroyers, less two, saw some wartime service with the RN before being commissioned as RCN ships. Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, February 21, 1945, 21 February 1945, Reel C-4876.



of sailing that Pacific operations entailed, and their old age indicated that they would need continuous repair. The destroyers would be fit for service in the South Pacific due to the proximity of Allied naval stations, but King was adamant on no Canadian ships being used south of the Central Pacific.<sup>121</sup> The Minister of National Defence for Naval Services (MNDNS) Angus McDonald dictated that the RCN's larger ships would need at minimum eight destroyers for an effective screen.<sup>122</sup> The *V* and *Tribal*-class destroyers, additional gifts from the RN that were partially phased into the RCN by 1945, were well-armed and new. Though the *Tribals* were not as well-suited for surface warfare as they were for AA, they would work well in conjunction with the rest of the fleet.<sup>123</sup> The same could be said for the more surface warfare-capable *Crescent*-class destroyers, but these would not be made available to the RCN until the latter half of 1945. Alas, the RCN would have to work toward using these new Admiralty-donated destroyers. Fiscally, however, this was an advantage to Canada as the *V*s and first batch of *Tribals* would be built and provided to the navy at no cost—if the nation wanted to keep the ships after the war, it could then buy them from the British.<sup>124</sup>

Essentially, it was fortuitous that the RCN had as much support as it did toward raising a fleet for Operation Downfall. The navy's desire to grow beyond small convoy escort vessels reflected in its willing acceptance of British ships whenever the Admiralty offered them up, whether for short-term lease or for purchase. Planners in Ottawa were delighted that the continued support from the British meant that Canada had a relatively consistent cycle of acquiring new ships, which would be instrumental in a theatre of operations where modern

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<sup>121</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, (21 February 1945). Referred to hereafter as 'King diary'.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, February 21, 1945, 21 February 1945, Reel C-4876.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> To King, it was an oversight and "terrible waste of money" that the *River*-class destroyers would be unsuitable for the continuation of combat in the Pacific. The ships would stay in the Atlantic for use as trainers. King diary, 21 February 1945.

ships were imperative.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the British supplying the RCN with ships allowed the navy to direct more of its efforts into preparing its men for the Pacific.

### **Maintenance and Integration**

Even with clear direction on where the RCN's Pacific ships would come from, preparing them for, integrating them into, and maintaining them within the Pacific required planning. Canada needed to ensure that its vessels would have adequate access to repair and resupply in the Pacific Ocean, especially since the ships would be so far from the Canadian coast. The Allied 11 October 1944 plans accepted RCN ships for the fighting force but made no commitment to providing any maintenance or supply plans for them. Since Canadian financial analysis for Operation Downfall did not include these factors, and the nation's war spending was already immensely high, Canada could be incapable of providing the routine supply and maintenance; instead, the RCN agreed to commit sailors to the British supply train in exchange for use of it.<sup>126</sup> These sailors would have to come out of the allotment of 13,412 sailors for use in the Pacific Theatre, as King had repeatedly made it clear that the Canadian government needed to stick to its plan as closely as possible.<sup>127</sup> Realistically, the RCN planned to have enough men in reserve and ashore that if there were any new manpower requirements, there would not be a problem in calling for more sailors in the Pacific, albeit with some delay to the frontline.

Concerning repairs, shipyards in British Columbia were well-aware of the impending campaign—the Canadian West Coast had been building ships as large as frigates as early as the fall of 1943.<sup>128</sup> As the RCN's plan for the Pacific became more concrete, and more public, the shipyards had more of a sense of what would be required of them. Not only would the

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<sup>125</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Planning Sub-Committee of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 15 March 1945, Reel C-4877.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> King diary, 11 October 1945.

<sup>128</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 512.

shipyards be used to repair RCN ships, but they would also be called upon to repair RN ships as necessary. Shipbuilding in Halifax would continue to construct the four *Tribal*-class destroyers that Canada was to make on its own.<sup>129</sup> The Pacific Ocean was the furthest that British ships could get from the British Isles, so the Admiralty requested access to Canadian facilities along the coast of British Columbia.<sup>130</sup> The WCC approved the request forthwith. By March 1945, it was clear that the shipyards in British Columbia would be almost completely occupied with the predicted repair requirements for Operation Downfall.<sup>131</sup> This was a shared burden, though, as the Pacific Ocean would become a united, Allied undertaking—any merchant ships that Canada launched during the operation would go into a collective Allied pool for the operation's duration. These commercial ships would bolster the fleet train needed to keep the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) sailing and fighting.<sup>132</sup>

The RCN sailors that elected to serve in the Pacific Theatre were to be retrained as necessary and integrated into Canadian ships destined for the Pacific. By April 1945, hostilities in Europe were ending, so Canada had to start shifting and demobilising service members as efficiently as possible. Demobilisation of the RCN's Atlantic force went relatively smoothly, and the WCC wished for the navy to maintain 40,000–50,000 sailors for the year following victory in Europe.<sup>133</sup> Any additional training for the Pacific force could be done as soon as sailors returned to duty from leave, with some training having already started as early as the start of 1945—crews could be trained on the Canadian West and East coasts, the Atlantic, and also in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>134</sup> The RCN benefited from training with the American and British navies in the Atlantic Ocean, so training with them for the

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 510.

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, December 11, 1944, 11 December 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>131</sup> Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, March 21, 1945, 21 March 1945, Reel C-4876.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Memorandum for War Cabinet Committee: Re-allocation, repatriation, demobilization (release), and re-establishment of Armed Forces, on termination of European Hostilities, 10 April 1945, Reel C-4877.

<sup>134</sup> Bill Rawling, "Paved with Good Intentions: HMCS Uganda, the Pacific War, and the Volunteer Issue," *Canadian Military History* 4 no.2 (1995), 23.

Pacific Theatre would be easy to facilitate.<sup>135</sup> Canada worked out numerous deals with the US during the course of the war for equipment loans and collaborative training, like the agreement to provide the RCN with eighty long-range radar systems.<sup>136</sup> This deal was particularly lucrative; since the US did not wish to provide civilian vessels with these advanced radar systems the RCN received prioritised access over American merchants.<sup>137</sup> The RCN would also be allowed to attach its sailors to RN shore instalments and ships in the Atlantic, so that training and familiarisation could be done on operations and outside of a classroom.<sup>138</sup>

The RCN was blessed to receive continual assistance from the Canadian shipbuilding industry, and the British, for raising a Pacific component that could be well-maintained and operated. The Admiralty showed its willingness to provide ships and equipment for Canada, so that the RCN could focus on its manpower contribution for the theatre. British Columbia's shipyards were prepared to deal with the increase of warship repairs and were still committed to building smaller ships for operations in the Pacific. Since the RCN had been working so closely with the RN, it would have no problems emulating the British training and integration practises for Operation Downfall.

### **The Notorious *Uganda***

Because the war ended in August 1945, three months before Operation Downfall was set to begin in November, the RCN's integration of ships into the theatre barely began. Only one Canadian fighting ship made it into the BPF for combative operations: HMCS *Uganda*.<sup>139</sup>

One of the two light cruisers that the RCN received from the Admiralty during the war, the

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<sup>135</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 252-253.

<sup>136</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, December 13, 1944, 13 December 1944, Reel C-4876.

<sup>137</sup> Minutes of the War Committee of the Cabinet, March 14, 1945, 14 March 1945, Reel C-4876.

<sup>138</sup> Bill Rawling, "A Lonely Ambassador: HMCS *Uganda* and the War in the Pacific," *Northern Mariner* 8 no.1 (January 1998), 41-42.

<sup>139</sup> W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, and Michael Whitby, with Robert Caldwell, William Johnston, and William Rawling, *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Volume II, Part 2* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 2007), 556.

*Uganda* was commissioned into the RCN on Trafalgar Day, 21 October 1944, and set toward the Mediterranean in January 1945 after a brief familiarisation cruise near England. Select RCN crews had received some acquaintance with the large cruisers before this, though, with officers and ratings serving aboard RN cruisers.<sup>140</sup> The *Uganda* prepared for combat in February and ventured toward the Pacific the same month.<sup>141</sup> The other light cruiser that Canada received from the British, HMS *Minotaur*, which became HMCS *Ontario*, was commissioned into the RCN in April 1945 but never made it to the BPF before the end of hostilities.<sup>142</sup>

The *Uganda* joined the BPF in April 1945 and integrated into a cruiser squadron where it immediately began participating in Operation Iceberg, the attack on Okinawa, with raids on the Japanese air bases at *Kyushu*. The *Uganda* proved a valuable addition to the relatively small BPF force, named Task Force (TF) 57 by the Americans, as there were only four other cruisers in the contingent.<sup>143</sup> The ship and her crew proved effective in the AA role and also worked as a long-range observer.<sup>144</sup> TF 57 got closer to the action on the islands in May, where the *Uganda* assisted in bombarding the shores of the Sakishima Islands until the end of the month.<sup>145</sup> The fleet shifted south at the turn of June, using Manus Island of New Guinea as a staging area for Operation Inmate, the occupation of Truk Atoll.<sup>146</sup>

HMCS *Uganda*, and TF 57, excelled in the AA screen, shore bombardment, and occupation support roles, but political disaster struck the *Uganda* in the summer of 1945 when the Canadian government enforced the mandate that all Canadians in the Pacific

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<sup>140</sup> Douglas *et al.*, *A Blue Water Navy*, 522.

<sup>141</sup> Donald E. Graves, *The Naval Service of Canada 1910-2010*, “Stepping Forward and Upward: The Royal Canadian Navy and Overseas Operations (1939-1945),”

<https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/naval-service-1910-2010/stepping.html>

<sup>142</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> Edwin Hoyt, *How They Won the War in the Pacific: Nimitz and his Admirals* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2012), 771.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>145</sup> Harry Gailey, *War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2001), 662.

<sup>146</sup> “Royal Canadian Navy Pacific Operations: 1941-1945” (map), in Douglas *et al.*, *No Higher Purpose*, Endsheets.

Theatre would have to elect to serve there. Even if the *Uganda* was already in theatre, her crew was to be no exception to the legislation, and on 28 July some eighty percent of the ship's crew refused to re-volunteer for service.<sup>147</sup> Embarrassingly, the ship had to return to British Columbia and leave Canada with no presence in the theatre. Even if the crew had elected to continue service in the Pacific, the ship would have had to return from the theatre to allow for a mandatory month of leave.<sup>148</sup> A similar situation occurred aboard HMCS *Ontario*, which was en route to the theatre—388 of the ship's complement of 900 refused to re-volunteer for continued service against the Japanese.<sup>149</sup> The RCN's involvement in the Pacific Theatre had been crippled by the politics set in place to facilitate its presence there.

## Conclusion

Raising the RCN Pacific fleet and integrating it into the BPF was a mixed success. The navy benefited from close ties with the British, as the admiralty continuously showed generosity in providing ships either on loan or as gifts. This played into the Canadian desire to expand the navy's versatility and capacity by obtaining larger ships, while not jeopardising the need for Canada to continue making corvettes and frigates for convoy escort. The British wanted the RCN to continue working alongside the RN to buttress the unity of the Commonwealth and had no issue providing parts for the donated ships. Canada was also assisted by the British in the maintenance of the ships once they got to the Pacific Theatre, since the RN would have its own supply train in place. In collaboration, Canada made British Columbia's shipyards available to both RCN and RN ships for repairs. Collaborative training between the two navies meant the RCN would be familiar with British shipboard procedures and doctrine in the Pacific Theatre. The value of this was demonstrated when TF 57 began operations, as the Commonwealth ships performed their duties with aplomb. Since TF 57 had

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<sup>147</sup> Graves, "Stepping Forward and Upward".

<sup>148</sup> Douglas *et al.*, *A Blue Water Navy*, 536.

<sup>149</sup> Rawling, "Paved with Good Intentions," 29.

worked as an AA screen in part of its involvement, the RCN was ready to do well in implementing the AA-centric *Tribal*-class destroyers into the Pacific despite their weaker ship-to-ship capabilities. Not only would this provide the RCN destroyers with a useful role in Operation Downfall, but operational experience with a carrier fleet would work toward Canada's operation of its own carrier fleet after the war. The RCN's involvement in the Pacific Theatre came to an abrupt halt before Operation Downfall kicked off, due to the governmental insistence on volunteerism, but the navy still got a taste of combat against the Japanese. Even though the war ended Operation Downfall came to fruition, Ottawa continued with ship procurement to allow for a more versatile and capable post-war navy.

## Chapter Four: Legacies of Operation Downfall

Before the war against Japan ended, Allied planners knew that air and sea support would be essential in the Allied plans for invading Japan.<sup>150</sup> The Canadian government planned accordingly and established that the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) would work within the British Pacific Fleet (BPF) in the theatre, contributing two light fleet carriers, two light cruisers, an anti-aircraft (AA) cruiser, eleven destroyers, thirty-six frigates, and eight corvettes, plus a reserve of six destroyers, twenty frigates, and four improved corvettes.<sup>151</sup> The war ended 2 September 1945, however, shortly after the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Only one ship, the cruiser HMCS *Uganda*, actually integrated into the BPF, where it assisted with the invasion of Okinawa and other smaller operations before having to return to Canada.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, after the war ended, the RCN continued with the procurement that it had started for Operation Downfall.<sup>153</sup> Canada needed to continue building and maintaining the ships slated for use in Operation Downfall to benefit the post-war navy's capacity and versatility, as planned from the outset.

The legacies of Operation Downfall manifested within two key aspects of the post-war navy. The first was the continuation of procurement after the atomic bombs fell. With global hostilities ending, the Allied powers prepared to demobilise their massive armed forces, but the RCN was determined to maintain a respectable fleet. The fine fleet that Canada had raised for Operation Downfall would be wasted if at least part of it was not kept for the post-war navy. The second aspect was the RCN's involvement in the Korean War. This major conflict gave the RCN an opportunity to demonstrate its sustained capacity and versatility using Second World War-era ships.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Dennis Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 53.

<sup>151</sup> Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Vol 2, Activities on Shore during the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1952), 477.

<sup>152</sup> Waldo Heinrichs and Marc Gallicchio, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 366.

<sup>153</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada Vol 2*, 510.

<sup>154</sup> Edward C. Meyers, *Thunder in the Morning Calm: The Royal Canadian Navy in Korea, 1950-1955* (St Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1992), 24.



## Post-war Procurement

Since Ottawa had put so much effort into fortifying the RCN in preparation for Operation Downfall, demobilising the navy brought significant challenges. With the fighting against Japan over, Ottawa wanted the RCN to establish equal fleets on the East and West Canadian coasts.<sup>155</sup> But these were not to be large organisations. The RCN's manpower shrunk by more than eighty percent by the spring of 1946, down to 15,624 sailors from a wartime peak of some 90,000, shrinking further to 10,000 by 1948.<sup>156</sup> Despite this, the RCN was determined to hold onto its larger wartime ships even if that meant using them as training vessels. After HMCS *Uganda* returned to Esquimalt and was refitted, it became a “sea-going school room,” used for operational training in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>157</sup> After just over a year of training exercises, however, the expenses the *Uganda* incurred and the lack of serious threats in the post-war years pushed the ship into reserve—it laid inert, but not condemned, from August 1947 until 1952 when it was brought back into service as HMCS *Quebec*.<sup>158</sup> HMCS *Ontario*, the RCN's other cruiser, made it to Esquimalt by November 1945 and was also kept after the war. The *Ontario* remained operational, but its complement lacked the discipline and proficiency seen in wartime sailors.<sup>159</sup>

As with the wartime navy, most of the RCN's larger ships were destroyers. The *River*-class line was well-worn by war's end – so much so that it had even been deemed unsuitable for service in the BPF – and the last ship of the class was scrapped by the end of 1947.<sup>160</sup> Eight *Crescent*-class destroyers were slated to be given to the RCN along with two

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<sup>155</sup> Isabel Campbell, *The Naval Service of Canada 1910-2010*, “A Brave New World (1945-1960),” <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/services/history/naval-service-1910-2010/brave-new-world.html>

<sup>156</sup> David Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific: the Royal Canadian Navy's West Coast Fleet in the Early Cold War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 15-16.

<sup>157</sup> Stephen Conrad Geneja, *The Cruiser Uganda: One War - Many Conflicts* (Corbyville: Tyendinaga Publishers, 1994), 235.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-237.

<sup>159</sup> Meyers, *Thunder in the Morning Calm*, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Vol 2*, 522.

*Colossus*-class light fleet carriers during the war, but Canada only ever received two destroyers by 1945. The *Tribal*-class destroyers were the pride of the RCN's destroyer force. The navy had three British-built destroyers of the class by war's end, and four more would be made in the next two years and integrated into the Atlantic and Pacific fleets by mid-1948.<sup>161</sup> The deepest cuts made by the RCN toward and after the end of the war were of the smaller ships, frigates and corvettes. Just six of the nation's frigates were retained by the navy past 1947, with the rest, and all the corvettes, being scrapped or sold off.<sup>162</sup>

The two British light fleet carriers that had served under Canadian complements, HMS *Nabob* and *Puncher*, had only ever operated in the Atlantic, and were returned to the British after the war, but the use of carriers proved to be important enough for Ottawa to continue pursuing their procurement.<sup>163</sup> Canada finally got its own carriers after the war, albeit incrementally. Originating from the February 1945 agreement with the Admiralty to acquire two light fleet carriers and eight destroyers, the first peacetime Canadian carrier was the *Colossus*-class HMCS *Warrior*, which was commissioned and integrated into the fleet in 1946.<sup>164</sup> The lack of serious threats in the late 1940s, however, meant it was unsustainable for the RCN to be as large as Canada desired. This necessitated reducing overhead costs and the vast manpower requirements required for operating larger ships, so the RCN would have to settle for possessing one carrier.<sup>165</sup> Consequently, HMCS *Magnificent*, a more-modern carrier than the *Warrior*, replaced the latter in 1948.

Essentially, even if the RCN's operational capacity was reduced to a fraction of its wartime numbers, the continuation of wartime procurement programs allowed the navy to maintain a balanced fleet. The navy rid itself of nearly all the smaller ships that had been built quickly for convoy escort during the war and used the small 10,000-man force to operate a

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<sup>161</sup> Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 28.

<sup>162</sup> Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Vol 2*, 510-515.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>164</sup> Campbell, "A Brave New World (1945-1960)."

<sup>165</sup> Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 14.

light fleet carrier, two cruisers, and a handful of destroyers. The design and size of these ships meant they were suitable for multiple roles, so the navy was able to maintain its versatility. The larger ships had been given to the RCN by the Admiralty primarily for use in the Pacific, so planning for Operation Downfall had indeed facilitated the navy's development of its peacetime force. Later, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 allowed the RCN to demonstrate that keeping the larger wartime vessels for the peacetime navy was sound planning.

### **The Post-war Navy**

When the Korean War broke out, the RCN was still in good shape with its Second World War-era ships. There had been minor disciplinary issues with sailors, mainly taking place in the form of a streak of insubordination in 1949, and a lack of training relative to that of wartime, but by the turn of 1950 these problems were largely sorted out.<sup>166</sup> When in June 1950 Canada decided that it was time to assist the Republic of Korea (ROK), the navy was prepared, unlike in 1939, for the transition to combat operations.<sup>167</sup> The *Tribals* had been sailing in the Atlantic and the Pacific, and Pacific Destroyer Command had formed with the two Pacific *Tribals*, HMCS *Athabaskan* and *Cayuga*, along with two *Crescents*, HMCS *Crescent* and *Crusader*, and the *V*-class HMCS *Sioux*. These destroyers were now available to Canada in the Pacific, though at various states of readiness, and the *Tribals* and HMCS *Sioux* set sail for Pearl Harbor on 5 July.<sup>168</sup> This first Task Group (TG), TG 214.4, seamlessly integrated into the United Nations (UN) fleet in Southeast Asia, and on 15 August 1950, HMCS *Cayuga* experienced the RCN's first combat since the Second World War.<sup>169</sup> The destroyers proved versatile platforms, working well for harassing North Korean ships and

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>167</sup> Thor Thorgrimsson and E.C. Russell, *Canadian Naval Operations in Korean Waters: 1950-1955* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965), 2.

<sup>168</sup> Meyers, *Thunder in the Morning Calm*, 30-32.

<sup>169</sup> Thorgrimsson and Russell, *Canadian Naval Operations in Korean Waters*, 13.

assisting in shore bombardments. Part of TG 214.4 performed both roles at the Battle of Inchon in September 1950, one of the largest battles of the war.<sup>170</sup>

Elsewhere, increased Cold War training requirements brought some Second World War-era ships out of inactivity, as well. HMCS *Uganda* became the *Quebec* on 14 January 1952 and was reintroduced to the Atlantic fleet as a training vessel after more than four years in the dockyard. While the Korean War was ongoing in the Pacific, the Atlantic Ocean served as a training ground for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, including Canadian contingents. The *Quebec*, among other Canadian ships, participated in training exercises like Mainbrace (14-25 September 1952) and Mariner (16 September-4 October 1953) in the North Atlantic in preparation for combat in the Pacific and combined arms offensives like amphibious landings.<sup>171</sup> While Canadian ships were performing well, however, the fleet's limited capacity, even with new ships, meant there had to be cuts in either operations or training. Ottawa determined that the latter would be reduced to continue supporting the UN fleet near Korea.<sup>172</sup> The RCN's two cruisers, with their massive size compared to the destroyers, saw better use as versatile crew trainers.<sup>173</sup> Canada's Operation Downfall-era carriers, HMCS *Warrior* and *Magnificent*, saw no combat in the Korean War. Since the RCN only had one carrier at a time, the risk of losing it was deemed too great so in the 1950s they saw use in UN and NATO training exercises in the Atlantic alongside the two cruisers.<sup>174</sup> Not only were carriers capital ships and therefore immensely important in the RCN's composition, but their use was also a veritable improvement in Canada's force projection capability. Aircraft carriers act as mobile airstrips but also command and control hubs for the fleet around them, so in having a carrier the RCN had the capability of

<sup>170</sup> Campbell, "A Brave New World (1945-1960)."

<sup>171</sup> Geneja, *The Cruiser Uganda*, 237-238.

<sup>172</sup> Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 78.

<sup>173</sup> The *Crescent*, *Tribal*, and *V*-class destroyers ranged from 1,710-1,927 tons with wartime complements of 230-250; the *Ontario* and *Quebec* each displaced 8,000 tonnes and had complements of ~960 and 900, respectively. Jane's Information Group, *Jane's Fighting Ships of World War II*, Foreword by Anthony Preston (London: Random House Group, 1989), 90-91.

<sup>174</sup> Zimmerman, *Maritime Command Pacific*, 83.

conducting fully-fledged, independent operations. Although it was not detailed in the planning of Operation Downfall, Canada's 'signature' carrier, HMCS *Bonaventure* (1957-1970), was a *Majestic*-class just like the *Magnificent*.

The RCN started getting new destroyers, frigates, and minesweepers before the end of the Korean War, some of which were improved versions of Second World War-era ships, and some of which were of new design.<sup>175</sup> More importantly, the RCN finally started moving away from ships that were originally procured for Operation Downfall. Still, the RCN's eight destroyers in the Korean War, which would have made up part of the BPF's crucial destroyer screen for Operation Downfall, made twenty-one deployments to the Korean theatre between July 1950 and September 1955, and were immensely helpful in bolstering the UN's naval presence against the North Koreans.<sup>176</sup> This continued use of Second World War-era equipment allowed the RCN to waste less time on refamiliarisation and spend more time on honing seamanship.

Fundamentally, the Korean War demonstrated that the RCN was continuing to use assets obtained for Operation Downfall to expand the navy's capacity and versatility beyond small-ship escort roles. Canada's destroyers were adaptable and modern enough to be sent to Korea once hostilities commenced; once there, their sound performance meant that the destroyers would comprise the nation's naval involvement for the war. By limiting the RCN's contributions to one type of ship, Canada's larger carrier and cruisers could be used for allied training exercises in the Atlantic. In doing so, the RCN divided the Pacific and Atlantic oceans into spheres of operations, in both of which the navy proved its versatility.

## Conclusion

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Thorgrimsson and Russell, *Canadian Naval Operations in Korean Waters*, 141.

The RCN's endeavours following the Second World War confirmed that the navy had used the preparations for Operation Downfall to expand the navy's capacity and versatility. Canadian follow-through on wartime procurement plans ensured that the navy's post-war budget would not be depleted on completely new acquisition processes and facilitated the development of a coherent destroyer-heavy fleet with some larger and smaller vessels. The nation's continued relations with the wartime Allies ensured that Canadian sailors had access to training, and some ships from the war were refurbished as crew trainers. When war broke out in the Southeast Pacific in 1950, the RCN was trained, disciplined, and ready to fight, albeit with a fairly small fighting force, and worked tirelessly to assist the UN's fleet in combat against the North Koreans. The use of 1940s ships would continue well beyond the 1950s, but it was during the Korean War that the navy benefited the most from its Operation Downfall procurement program.

## Conclusion

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was in a severely poor condition in 1939. And while it did not quite reach its desired state by war's end in 1945, it was a versatile, world-class force by the end of hostilities. Even if the RCN had quickly become categorised as a convoy escort navy – commonly thought of as a secondary job for a 'real' navy – Operation Downfall enabled the navy to procure ships that were larger than corvettes or frigates and break from its singular role. These lasting impressions pushed the navy into a capable fleet for decades following the Second World War.

First, Ottawa needed to iron out the politics needed to facilitate the RCN's involvement in the invasion. Convincing Britain and the United States proved a difficult task, especially since Canada's Allies had seen some questionable performance up to early 1943. As the RCN's reputation improved, however, the possibility of contributing to Operation Downfall became increasingly viable. By the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944, the senior Allies confirmed that Canada and its navy were allowed to contribute. Convincing Canadians that the nation would benefit from another couple of years of fighting in a relatively unfamiliar theatre was a different story, though. The Canadian government was aware of the ever-increasing war-weariness that the nation was experiencing and keeping the fighting going after Victory in Europe (VE) would exacerbate the strain. Canadian politicians favoured raising a force for Operation Downfall so long as additional expenditures were limited, and no conscripts were used in the operation. The Canadian public ultimately accepted the navy's involvement in the operation due to the service's abundance of sailors.

Once the politics had been ironed out, Ottawa set out establishing the navy's roles within the operation. Even if Canada had been allowed a spot in Operation Downfall, the insistence of the United States on the operation being predominantly American meant spots for Canada and the rest of the Commonwealth were limited. Since Canada wanted to expand

the navy's capacity and versatility, planners aspired to commit ships larger than the frigates and corvettes used in the Atlantic Ocean. Canada had been slowly procuring larger ships on lease from the British, and destroyer trials with Royal Navy (RN) squadrons in the Eastern Atlantic went very well. The American dominance of the planning, and RCN traditional collaboration with the RN, meant that Canada's navy would serve within the RN's organisation within the larger American force during the operation. There was also a requirement for deliberation between the three Canadian services on how to balance the nation's involvement. This primarily took place over the fall of 1944, and the services agreed that the proposed numbers for the air force would be reduced to allow for more naval personnel. By the spring of 1945, the RCN was working with a proposed commitment of 13,412 sailors for a force of two light fleet carriers, two light cruisers, one anti-aircraft (AA) cruiser, eleven destroyers, thirty-six frigates, and eight corvettes—a muscular force by Canadian standards.

With the navy's involvement determined by April 1945, Canada had to raise its fleet before the operation's planned start in November of the same year. The British were generous with their gifts to the RCN; the manpower shortage that the British were suffering had no correlation to the shipbuilding, and the Admiralty would rather have seen British ships complemented with Canadian sailors than gathering dust. Consequently, the RCN was supplied with escort carriers, cruisers, and destroyers, as well as smaller vessels. Canada raised some *Tribal*-class destroyers, but British generosity meant most of the nation's shipbuilding could maintain focus on fortifying the Atlantic convoys with frigates and corvettes. The situation between the British and Canadians was similar for equipment and maintenance. The British would provide the RCN with everything from spare parts to aircraft for the carriers; Canada just needed to train the men for the larger ships and provide their smaller ships in full. Only one Canadian ship, the light cruiser HMCS *Uganda*, ever made it



to the Pacific Theatre. Nevertheless, the *Uganda* was a testament to how the rest of the RCN could perform within American naval command, and the ship performed well with Allied ships in the numerous roles that it fulfilled. It ended leaving Pacific operations unexpectedly due to the constraints on conscription for Canadians in the theatre. Even if she was already situated in the fleet, the ship's crew still had to elect to continue service in the war against Japan—most of the crew refused in July 1945, and the RCN's only representative left the theatre just months before the war ended.

Although most of the RCN never made it to the Pacific Theatre, and the war ended before Operation Downfall could take place, the ramifications of Canada's efforts to raise a naval contingent lasted beyond Victory in Japan (VJ) Day. Canada continued with its wartime procurement after 2 September 1945, and by 1948 the RCN had an aircraft carrier and two light cruisers and had replaced the antiquated destroyers from the start of the war with newer ones. The navy rid itself of virtually all its wartime frigates and corvettes to allow for more concentration on the larger ships. While the RCN's budget and manpower were slashed, the navy still maintained an emphasis on both training and operations in a variety of roles. The Korean War (1950-1955) saw the RCN commit eight of its destroyers to the conflict and their involvement was greatly appreciated by those assisting the Republic of Korea. Most importantly, the majority of the ships used after the war were obtained because of the original goal of participation in the war against Japan. Operation Downfall effectively set the RCN in motion for decades following the Second World War.

## Appendix A: RCN ships (&gt;1,500 tons) likely to have been assigned to Operation Downfall

| Name                 | Ship Type                            | Displacement | RN Commission                | RCN Commission    | Decommission                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Warrior</i>       | <i>Colossus</i> -class carrier       | 13,350 tons  | 20 May 1944                  | 24 January 1946   | 23 March 1948                         |
| <i>Magnificent</i>   | <i>Majestic</i> -class carrier       | 14,000 tons  | 16 November 1944             | 21 March 1948     | 14 June 1957                          |
| <i>Uganda</i>        | <i>Fiji</i> -class light cruiser     | 8,000 tons   | 7 August 1941                | 21 October 1944   | 13 June 1956 (as HMCS <i>Quebec</i> ) |
| <i>Ontario</i>       | <i>Minotaur</i> -class light cruiser | 8,000 tons   | 29 July 1943                 | 26 April 1945     | 15 October 1958                       |
| <i>Prince Robert</i> | <i>Prince</i> -class AA cruiser      | 5,736 tons   | Previously British freighter | 7 June 1943       | 10 December 1945                      |
| <i>Crescent</i>      | <i>C</i> -class destroyer            | 1,710 tons   | 20 July 1944                 | 10 September 1945 | 1 April 1970                          |
| <i>Crusader</i>      | <i>C</i> -class destroyer            | 1,710 tons   | 5 October 1944               | 26 November 1945  | 15 January 1960                       |
| <i>Athabaskan</i>    | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,990 tons   | Built in Canada              | 20 January 1948   | 21 April 1966                         |
| <i>Cayuga</i>        | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,990 tons   | Built in Canada              | 19 October 1947   | 27 February 1964                      |
| <i>Haida</i>         | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,927 tons   | 25 August 1942               | 30 August 1943    | 11 October 1963                       |
| <i>Huron</i>         | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,927 tons   | Built in Britain for Canada  | 19 July 1943      | 30 April 1963                         |
| <i>Iroquois</i>      | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,927 tons   | Built in Britain for Canada  | 20 November 1942  | 24 October 1962                       |
| <i>Micmac</i>        | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,990 tons   | Built in Canada              | 12 September 1945 | 31 March 1964                         |
| <i>Nootka</i>        | <i>Tribal</i> -class destroyer       | 1,990 tons   | Built in Canada              | 7 August 1946     | 6 February 1964                       |
| <i>Algonquin</i>     | <i>V</i> -class destroyer            | 1,710 tons   | 2 September 1943             | 28 February 1944  | 1 April 1970                          |
| <i>Sioux</i>         | <i>V</i> -class destroyer            | 1,710 tons   | 14 September 1943            | 5 March 1944      | 30 October 1963                       |

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