

## **"The Defence of Alaska Must Remain a Primary Concern of the United States: "Canada and the North Pacific, May-June 1942"**

**Galen Roger Perras**

For most Americans the besting of Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku's armada by a vastly outnumbered American force at Midway in June 1942 was "a victory not only of courage, determination and excellent bombing technique, but of intelligence, bravely and wisely applied." But for Canadians, that battle, if remembered at all, most likely evokes memories of Charlton Heston playing the part of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz as airplanes thundered down carrier decks on the silver screen. No Canadians fought at Midway or shared in the glory of that American triumph. Indeed, when asked by the US to despatch aircraft to Alaska as Japanese ships bore down upon the Aleutian Islands on the Midway operation's northern flank, Canada rejected the request and reconsidered only when the Americans applied considerable pressure — an unhappy contretemps which one Canadian official historian has said "could have been concluded with far less difficulty" had the Canadian military "been kept fully in the intelligence picture."

This judgement is incorrect. Canada was not kept fully informed, but that was not the major reason for the initial choice to deny assistance to the US. Rather, the Canadian decision can only be understood in the context of a fight over home defence recently concluded in Ottawa. Stung by accusations they had ignored home defence; convinced their American counterparts were prone to exaggerating Japanese capabilities; and eager to demonstrate that they took governmental concerns seriously, Canadian military leaders argued that aiding Alaska would weaken home defences. Unfortunately, possessing a poor understanding of the joint Canadian-American plans governing North American security, and overconfident in the wake of their recent rebuff of an American attempt to institute joint command on the west coast, the Canadian services were ill-prepared to resist sustained American pressure during a crisis.

The rationale for the Midway offensive is well-known and need not be discussed in any detail here. Japanese military leaders faced an unusual problem: their victories came so quickly and "with so few losses that they had actually outpaced the planning of the Imperial General Headquarters and the staffs of the Army and the Navy." Further complicating matters was the fact that the Japanese army and navy, their relations strained by years of bickering over budgets and policy, had very different ideas of what should be done. The navy, worried that the Allies might counterattack, wanted to strike at India,

Australia and Hawaii. Preferring to remain on the defensive, and concerned naval plans would require an additional twelve divisions, the army declined to support that position.<sup>4</sup>

Admiral Yamamoto broke the stalemate. Convinced Japan's only hope for victory lay in destroying the American carriers, the admiral hoped to destroy them at Midway Island, 1000 miles northwest of Pearl Harbor. Vigorously opposed by the naval staff because Midway's proximity to Hawaii would render Japanese ships vulnerable to land-based aviation, Yamamoto's plan was adopted when the admiral threatened to resign. But there was a price attached to that surrender: in exchange for dropping its objections, the navy wanted to occupy the Aleutian Islands, both to protect the Midway operation's northern flank and to draw American strength away from the main attack.<sup>5</sup> By 5 May the Japanese plan was complete. Six carriers (with 234 airplanes), seven battleships and fifty-seven cruisers and destroyers would set sail from Japan on 24 May. A week later the main force would assault Midway, while two light carriers, five cruisers, twelve destroyers and 1600 troops would bomb the American base at Dutch Harbor in the eastern Aleutians before withdrawing westward to occupy the islands of Attu, Kiska and Adak.<sup>6</sup>

But unbeknownst to the Japanese, their greatest asset, surprise, was gone. American cryptanalysts had broken the Japanese naval code, and by 20 May Yamamoto's plan was in American hands. Stunned by the extent of Japanese ambitions, United States Navy (USN) commander Admiral Ernest J. King scrambled to put together a force to blunt the enemy thrust. Most of the ships were despatched to Midway, but on 17 May King ordered Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief Pacific (Cincpac), to concentrate a naval task force in Alaskan waters. Led by Admiral Robert A. Theobald, Task Force Eight (TF8), comprised of just five cruisers, thirteen destroyers, and a seaplane tender, no match for the approaching enemy armada, had clear orders from Nimitz:

In your operations against the advance of the enemy into the Aleutian-Alaskan area you will be governed by the principle of calculated risk which you shall interpret to mean the avoidance of exposure of your force to attack by superior enemy forces without good prospect of inflicting, as a result of such exposure, at least equal or greater damage to the enemy, or at least frustrating his plans.<sup>7</sup>

The chances of frustrating Japanese plans would have been far greater if a carrier were assigned to the Aleutians, but with just three American flattops in the entire Pacific, none could be spared for TF8. Instead, making clear that his ships would be "almost completely dependent on" army aircraft for air cover, Nimitz asked King to press the army to place planes in the eastern Aleutians. Unfortunately, the army had just eighty-one airplanes in Alaska, with another twenty-five on the way, a level of force Alaskan air force chief Major General William Butler judged to be "entirely inadequate to prevent the enemy from capturing the vital bases in Alaska." But when Butler asked for reinforcements, Army Air Force chief General H. H. Arnold, facing heavy commitments elsewhere, declined to add anymore.<sup>8</sup>

Arnold's answer grated on Lieutenant General John DeWitt. Head of Western Defense Command (WDC), a jurisdiction stretching from Alaska to the Mexican border,

De Witt, along with Alaska Defense Command (ADC) chief Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner, had been trying to get more resources to Alaska for almost two years. Indeed, just days before American intelligence intercepted Japan's Midway scheme, DeWitt had asked for five more squadrons for Alaska, a request that Dwight Eisenhower, citing "the hazards we are accepting in Alaska and the Aleutians with the small aviation forces available in that region," wished to fulfil. But as the army's chief planner, Eisenhower knew aircraft were in short supply, and he advised that "we should be particularly careful to tell General DeWitt just what he may count upon as reinforcements in an emergency, particularly of the air type."

Discouraged, DeWitt transferred one squadron from the continental portion of his command, but when asked by General George C. Marshall on 20 May whether air operations from the Aleutians were feasible, DeWitt promptly replied affirmatively. Six days later he got his answer: the War Department would send 109 planes to Alaska, but DeWitt was to scrap his plan to despatch another three squadrons from the WDC.<sup>10</sup> Convinced this was insufficient, but realizing that further aid from the army was unlikely, DeWitt cast his gaze toward Canada. On 29 May, announcing that a delay might have serious consequences, DeWitt contacted Canada's Pacific Command to request two squadrons (one fighter, one bomber) for Yakutat, an American base southeast of Anchorage, within twenty-four hours."

DeWitt had good reason to expect a favourable reply. Under the terms of the 1941 Canadian-American Joint Defense Plan Two (ABC-22), the signatories had pledged jointly to defend North America, including Alaska, "to their utmost capacity." Moreover, that pledge, especially as it pertained to Alaska, had been reaffirmed at the highest political levels. On 1 April, at the inaugural gathering of the Pacific War Council (PWC), President Roosevelt, remarking that he had invited Canadian membership in that body "because he thought that Canada might do more than she was now doing" in the Pacific, indicated he hoped to use Soviet bases to bomb Japan. If the Russians agreed, the Aleutians would become a vital bridge between Alaska and Siberia, and thus a more important target for the Japanese. Unfortunately, the US was engaged heavily elsewhere, prompting Roosevelt to remark pointedly "that we will have to look to Canada for assistance in securing Alaska and the Aleutians. I have an idea that Canada can do this without interference with her commitments to the United Kingdom."<sup>12</sup>

Although Roosevelt's remarks surprised Canadian leaders (and some Americans as well), they were not unwelcome in Ottawa.<sup>13</sup> Japan's entry into the war had prompted many Canadians to reconsider their main military effort in Britain. In March, Canada's Under-Secretary of External Affairs, N. A. Robertson, doubting that every Allied nation had to make its primary effort against Germany, had recommended curtailing the growth of the army overseas in favour of assembling additional resources on the west coast. Noting that local commanders had agreed already to place a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) squadron on Annette Island (just off the southern end of the Alaskan Panhandle), and believing that there was "a great deal to be said for having some Canadian troops somewhere assuming a direct and public responsibility for the defence of some portion of United States territory," Robertson thought that a wider Canadian role in Alaska might also balance the growing American presence in the Canadian northwest.<sup>14</sup>

Still digesting Robertson's recommendations, the Prime Minister was present in Washington for the PWC's 15 April meeting at which Roosevelt made clear that Alaska, more than any other area, was vulnerable. Obviously impressed, King emphasized his plan to place two home defence divisions in BC, adding that if the Americans would reinforce the port of Prince Rupert, he might be willing to send forces to Alaska "later on."<sup>15</sup>

King's willingness to aid Alaska, at first glance, is surprising given the Prime Minister's oft-stated concerns that additional military commitments risked conscription, and his recent refusals to provide aid to Australia and the Falkland Islands.<sup>16</sup> Possibly Roosevelt's comments about Alaska's vulnerability, coming just two days after Robertson's assistant had warned that it "was the most exposed area on this continent," had made a strong impression.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, King may have reasoned that a small and manageable Canadian presence in Alaska would signal to his expansionist military that the war was not confined to Europe. But as a letter to an acquaintance indicates, King was most worried about Canadian-American relations and home defence. Admitting that Canada might well require American assistance to defend its west coast, King noted that:

Not to be able to send planes and ships into American territory, as for example Alaska, and islands that lie beyond, is to risk much in the way of additional co-operation by the United States in the defence of our country, as well as their own, and to convey to American citizens generally a wholly erroneous impression, especially where, as of present, they are sending troops and ships and men to the United Kingdom, to Australia, New Zealand and India. This is a very serious ground of misunderstanding to permit to continue for any length of time.<sup>18</sup>

Still, it is important to note that King, a master of ambiguity, had said only that he might send aid to Alaska at an unspecified date; perhaps because King had been so ambiguous, the Americans wasted little time in trying to transform that promise into reality. On 27 April General S. D. Embick told the Canadian Section of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) that the War Department wanted the RCAF to ensure it could shift planes quickly to Alaska if needed. In the absence of political guidance, and after considerable discussion, the PJBD agreed to determine whether west coast commanders had devised arrangements to permit the prompt movement of Canadian reinforcements. If not, local officers were to designate "if practicable, specific units in connection with plans for the redistribution of air strength."<sup>19</sup>

Taking this direction seriously, L. F. Stevenson, the Air Officer Commanding Western Air Command, had a fighter squadron in place on Annette by 5 May and had made preliminary arrangements to send two squadrons of fighters and reconnaissance craft to Alaska when DeWitt's plea for aid arrived. Having already volunteered to Ottawa on 27 May his willingness to despatch another reconnaissance squadron to Annette even if that meant accepting temporary weakness in Canadian defences, Stevenson was amenable to sending the additional formations to Yakutat under American control.<sup>20</sup>

Stevenson's superiors in Ottawa shared none of his enthusiasm. Indeed, the RCAF representative at the 27 April PJBD meeting had objected to the recommendation for local cooperation on the grounds that it interfered with the prerogative of the Canadian Chiefs

of Staff (COS) to delegate responsibility to local commanders. Moreover, Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ), concerned that the PJBD initiative seemed "to place upon Canada the onus of providing re-enforcement [sic] in the event of an attack upon Alaska," and arguing that Canadian aid would be adequate only if American forces in Alaska were strong, convinced the Cabinet War Committee (CWC) on 14 May that "the defence of Alaska must remain a primary concern of the United States, Canadian re-enforcements [sic] being limited to local support in the Panhandle."<sup>21</sup> Taking their cue from government, the service chiefs, supported by Minister of National Defence for Air, C. G. Power, would permit the Canadian squadrons to go only as far as Annette. There they would stay, under Canadian control, until circumstances warranted their transfer to Yakutat.<sup>22</sup>

Stunned by this rebuff, both Buckner and DeWitt sprang into action. DeWitt telephoned General R. O. Alexander at Pacific Command to inquire if there was any way to alter the ruling, while Buckner asked Stevenson on the morning of 30 May again for two Canadian squadrons for Yakutat or points west. Sympathetic, Stevenson told Ottawa that the aircraft should go to Yakutat, but no further until and unless other RCAF units were moved to BC to protect Vancouver, Victoria and Prince Rupert.<sup>23</sup> But when Air Minister Power and his staff convened to consider the American appeal on 31 May, they had before them a message from the Canadian Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Lieutenant General Kenneth Stuart, advising against moving any aircraft beyond Annette Island. Agreeing with Stuart, Power's advisers added that the RCAF was ill-prepared to supply bombers away from Canadian soil, and that the bombers would have to go into action with inadequate fighter protection. Convinced the planes should remain at Annette, Power told the Prime Minister that the policy of not despatching Canadian forces to Alaska at the cost of Canadian security would not change until the "situation developed further and [the] purpose of reported enemy concentrations more clearly indicated."<sup>24</sup>

Disappointed again, DeWitt opted for a higher-powered approach and asked General Embick to convince the Canadians that two RCAF squadrons should be based at Yakutat at least until 8 June. Quick off the mark, Embick summoned the PJBD's Canadian army member, Major General Maurice Pope, to his Washington office. Revealing that a Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor was expected within two or three days, Embick made very clear that the US was very anxious for immediate Canadian aid. Although unconvinced this strategic appreciation was well-founded, Pope believed that the Americans were greatly concerned and therefore advised Embick to make his case to Air Commodore F. V. Heakes.<sup>25</sup>

Although Embick must have had his doubts about that course of action given that Heakes was the RCAF officer who had objected to the PJBD's 27 April decision concerning local support arrangements, Embick called Heakes in Ottawa on 1 June. Again emphasizing the critical nature of the situation, Embick asked that the airplanes in question be moved to Yakutat by 2 June for the period up to and including 8 June. And no longer willing to rely on his powers of persuasion, the American drew Heakes' attention to the fact that paragraph seven of ABC-22 obligated Canada to provide support for the defence of North America and Alaska.<sup>26</sup>

Less than four hours later Embick had his answer. Explaining that the RCAF had feared the desired formations would be stuck in Alaska for an indefinite period, Heakes said the planes would be forthcoming for the limited time suggested by Embick.<sup>27</sup> The

first of the bombers left for Yakutat the next day, and upon their arrival one of the planes was immediately ordered to carry out a short patrol over the Gulf of Alaska, "the first operational mission in support of Alaska Defense Command."<sup>28</sup> It would not be the last. Number 111 (F) squadron touched down in Anchorage on 8 June, and from then until the summer of 1943, Canadian aircrews fought in the Aleutian campaign.

As noted above, the official Canadian explanation for Ottawa's reluctance to aid Alaska was that the Americans, through their aversion to keeping Canada fully informed, brought on "complicated and occasionally irascible negotiations."<sup>29</sup> Certainly complicated and sometimes irascible, those discussions were not the product of a paucity of information reaching Canadian decision-makers. Pacific Command was warned as early as 18 May that Japan was preparing an offensive for the central and north Pacific, while a second American message five days later indicated that Japan might occupy Dutch Harbor between 20 May and 10 June. Moreover, two additional despatches, one on 26 May and the other four days later, declared that the enemy task force bearing down upon the Aleutians fielded two aircraft carriers, possibly as many as five cruisers and twelve destroyers, plus land-based aviation operating from the Kuriles in support.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly this stream of information did not match the flood of data coursing through American channels, but it was more than enough to present a rather disturbing picture. Why did Canadian officials seem nonplussed? In the first place, Canadian officers doubted US steadiness and intelligence-gathering capabilities. As late as 28 May, Maurice Pope, recounting a conversation with a British officer privy to very high level secret information, told Stuart that both he and the Briton did not share the USN's apprehension about the Pacific.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, for Pope the events of late May were but a repeat of another problem that had affected Canadian-American relations from 1941 until January 1942. Then, as Vice-Chief of the General Staff, Pope had opposed an initiative to establish an American-led system of unified command over all of the North American west coast. Unwilling before Pearl Harbor to accept the claim that it was "far better to trust in the honor of the United States, than to the mercy of the enemy," even after 7 December Pope doubted Japan would risk its fleet in strategically dubious attacks against North America.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, realizing that to accept American demands for unified command would be tantamount to admitting that the Canadian military's assessment of the Japanese threat was in error, Pope was pleased to see the Americans "steady" after December's shocks and then abandon their unified command scheme.<sup>33</sup>

Far more important, the Canadian military, Anglophile by outlook and history, centred in Ottawa and focused on Europe, downplayed the Japanese threat and had done so consistently since the 1930s. Although one CGS had warned in 1920 that with Germany's defeat "the centre of interest had shifted from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific," such sentiments were definitely in the minority.<sup>34</sup> By 1928, rather than worrying about Japan, the military was framing the defence question in the Pacific in terms of the danger posed by the US if Canada proved unable to guard its neutrality during a conflict between America and Japan, a concern that found voice in 1938 in Defence Scheme No. 2.<sup>35</sup> But the sincerity of the military's commitment to the home defence concept implied in Scheme No. 2 was questionable from the very beginning. Andrew McNaughton, who led the army from 1929 to 1935, and then returned from retirement in 1939 to head the Canadian forces sent to Britain, had more on his mind than neutrality. Obsessed with

preparing the army for another war in Europe and ensuring his service remained dominant in the provision of the nation's security, McNaughton admitted in 1932 that while neutrality in the event of an American-Japanese conflict was "a matter of increasing importance," it was not "the most serious or important military issue facing Canada."<sup>36</sup>

That attitude was firmly in place as hostilities loomed in August 1939. The army, maintaining Japan could launch nothing more than 250-man raids against BC while the Royal Navy was "intact in the Atlantic and the United States fleet... paramount in the eastern Pacific," quickly showed its true colours when it declared that using even half of its Mobile Force for home defence "cannot be justified on purely military grounds."<sup>37</sup> And once H. D. G. Crerar became CGS in 1940, home defence definitely took a back seat to his plan to build a five to seven division army in Britain. Although Crerar supported the PJBD's birth, he did so in the hope that the promise of an American security umbrella would encourage a more secure Canadian populace to abandon its tendency "to look inward and think in terms of strict 'continental' defence" in favour of seeing Britain as Canada's first line of defence.<sup>38</sup>

Sceptical that Japan would attack North America — although he admitted that an assault on Alaska was possible — Crerar was determined to ensure that "such a remote possibility should not be allowed to exert a noticeable influence on the Board at this time."<sup>39</sup> So when the PJBD sat down in late 1940 to put together defensive schemes, the Canadian army's position was made very clear; there was "no military reason which could make it advantageous for Canada to concentrate land forces in British Columbia for the initial support of U. S. garrisons in Alaska."<sup>40</sup> This position proved successful. The final version of Joint Canadian-United States Defence Plan No. 2 contained no reference to Alaskan aid by the Canadian army, although the RCAF and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) were obligated to provide assistance if needed.<sup>41</sup>

Having limited Canada's Alaskan liability, Crerar also wanted to ensure that his civilian superiors would not undo his efforts as he prepared to return to Britain, hopefully with more units for the struggle in Europe. As the Pacific crisis worsened in 1941, Crerar believed that if war came, Japan would direct the bulk of its forces against the south Pacific or the Soviet Union; Canada's west coast thus would suffer only occasional hit-and-run raids. But acknowledging that public pressure would mount for an increase in the army's strength in BC once war broke out, Crerar made plans to supplement the six infantry battalions already there with three more.<sup>42</sup>

But the army's plans had to pass the scrutiny of Prime Minister King. Unlike Crerar, King, who had hoped for a war of limited liability only to see that desire dashed with France's collapse in 1940, dreaded Japan's entry into the conflict. Telling a well-connected journalist in early November 1941 that Roosevelt thought war with Japan was "almost certain to come within 30 days," the Prime Minister declared that if that occurred, he and his ministers would:

have to put two or three divisions, perhaps more, on the Pacific coast as they think Japan very likely to attempt a diversion for the purpose of compelling North America to ease off support for Britain and Russia and thus help Hitler. The national mobilization act will have to be used for this purpose. Many thousands of young men will be called up. We will

have to equip them and therefore will have to cut down to some extent our aid to Britain. The realization, Mr. King thinks, will put an end to talk of conscription for overseas service.<sup>43</sup>

The military's plan to forestall such an eventuality began just hours after Canada received word of the Pearl Harbor attack. Meeting the full Cabinet on the evening of 7 December, Stuart and his fellow service chiefs outlined the steps they were taking to safeguard the west coast and described the chance of a Japanese attack as "very remote." As Maurice Pope made clear, "the declaration of war against Japan simply provides us with an additional enemy. The forms and scales of attack laid down are not thereby changed. No troop movements are involved for purely military considerations."<sup>44</sup>

But these early assessments were made without any knowledge of what had transpired at Pearl Harbor. When the government was told on 9 December just how much damage had been done to the USN, King, stunned by the "appalling" losses, thought it "wholly probable" there would be attacks, even landings, on Canada's west coast.<sup>45</sup> Determined not to let public pressure and a panicked government undo its plans, the military maintained that although Japan might raid North America, Japan's major effort would be in the south Pacific. While the Canadian military was willing to provide extra resources, primarily aircraft, for the west coast, it advised that "we must not allow ourselves to be stampeded by public opinion on the West Coast. The decisive theatre in this war is to the East and not the West. If we forget this truth and divert an unnecessary proportion of our strength to the West, then we are merely playing into the hands of our enemies."<sup>46</sup>

But the Ottawa-based service chiefs faced a serious problem in that their optimistic judgements were not unanimously shared. In the opinion of an American liaison officer attached to Pacific Command, "the Pacific coast of the United States and Canada and all of Alaska are entirely open to attack. We have nothing here [with which] to defend ourselves." This sentiment was echoed by a 10 December American army assessment. Claiming that Japan seemed to have "complete information not only of our dispositions but of the habits, customs and traits of the American Army, Navy and people," the report argued that Japan could strike anywhere in the Pacific, including the west coast between Alaska to Panama.<sup>47</sup> And while NDHQ frequently dismissed such claims as the product of American "unsteadiness," its west coast subordinates often sided with the Americans. Possessing just five small vessels, ten aircraft squadrons (all obsolete), and six infantry battalions as 1942 dawned, Pacific Command's Joint Services Committee admitted its forces were inadequate to deal with even one Japanese capital ship or two enemy cruisers.\*

Far more damaging, however, was that public confidence in the military was fading badly in the new year. A Canadian brigade was lost at Hong Kong in December; Britain's fortress at Singapore fell in mid-February; and Allied forces were on the run everywhere else in the western Pacific. Facing claims in Parliament and in the press that the military was planning to retreat behind the Rocky Mountains if BC was invaded,<sup>49</sup> and eager to use public concern to buttress his own attempts to limit the growth of the army overseas, Prime Minister King and the CWC ordered the military on 18 February to re-examine the threat posed by Japan.<sup>50</sup>



The result was little short of disastrous for Stuart. Having recently rebuffed the American attempt to institute unified command, the army was confident it would prevail against the new pressure. Indeed, a week before the CWC issued its instructions, an officer in the army's Directorate of Military Operations and Intelligence, warning that strategic formulation was in danger of being "tossed about like a football on the political field," advised his superiors to make clear to the nation that it should rely on the expertise on the general staff, not the musings of armchair strategists.<sup>51</sup> Stuart's new military appreciation, presented on 20 February, took this advice to heart. Citing British and American claims that attacks on North America were highly improbable since Japan could gain far more, and with considerably less risk, through operations in the south Pacific, Stuart made clear the military's opinion that "Canadian defence measures — existing and proposed — will provide reasonable insurance against the forms and scales of attack envisaged." Moreover, the CGS pointedly asked the CWC if it considered Germany the main threat? If not, what scale of attack should the nation be prepared to counter? King admitted that Germany remained the primary foe, but reminded Stuart to keep in mind public apprehension and the fact that strategic circumstances could deteriorate rapidly.<sup>52</sup>

But what was deteriorating speedily was the strength of Stuart's position, and much of the fault was his own. A week before presenting the appreciation, the CGS had told defence minister J.L. Ralston that Alaska could be taken by just two Japanese divisions, a verdict guaranteed to undermine any assertion that the Pacific threat was minimal. Furthermore, another appreciation, prepared on 16 February by Pacific Command, predicted a coordinated German-Japanese assault against the USSR or a Japanese invasion of Alaska or even Canada.<sup>53</sup> This discrepancy did not go unnoticed. Meeting with journalists Grant Dexter and Bruce Hutchison on 27 February, the Prime Minister feared Japan would soon attack Siberia, Alaska and the Aleutians and finally BC once it had gathered the requisite forces. But as the Cabinet, and especially Ralston, was loathe to alter existing plans, and the general staff was absorbed in the task of building an army in Britain, King urged journalists to continue the Pacific defence row and "to keep banging away at the generals."<sup>54</sup> King was not shy either about making his case face to face. Inviting the CGS to a CWC meeting on 6 March, the Prime Minister read extensively from a memorandum proposing that a vulnerable BC deserved a larger garrison and more military infrastructure in preparation for future Allied offensives across the Pacific. Refusing to name the author except to say that he was a Member of Parliament, King told Stuart that the document was representative of the feelings "held by the Members of Parliament generally."<sup>55</sup>

Stuart's quiver was not yet empty. General McNaughton returned to Canada via the District of Columbia in early March, and the CGS no doubt hoped that the popular and cerebral McNaughton might prevail against the rising home defence tide. Certainly McNaughton was ready to play that role. Having met with Roosevelt while in Washington, the Canadian general was pleased to discover that the President thought a Japanese invasion of Alaska was unlikely. What Roosevelt did fear was that an attack on the Aleutians might so alarm the American populace that the US might be compelled to send resources there rather than to more important areas. Agreeing that "in all probability there would be a similar result in Canada," McNaughton declined to repeat those remarks when he came before the CWC on 6 March. Instead, although admitting he had made no

special studies of Canada's security problems, McNaughton nevertheless supported the appreciations put forward by the COS. Nuisance raids against the west coast likely were all Japan could muster, and while public opinion had to be considered, Canada's major efforts should continue to be protecting Britain and increasing industrial production.<sup>56</sup>

King's account of the meeting was far different. Claiming the general had agreed to give more consideration to home defence, King said he had asked McNaughton to visit Pacific Command, a request the general could not grant.<sup>57</sup> How might this discrepancy be reconciled? While the CWC minutes were summaries rather than verbatim reports of the discussions, it seems more likely that King chose to remember what best supported his case. When the CWS convened again on 18 March, King reported that McNaughton, in a private conversation the previous day, had agreed there was a need to put a mobile force on the west coast to allay public opinion. Perhaps McNaughton, a most political general, had decided that discretion was the better part of valour, for King noted in his diary that the general favoured the mobile force option rather than an attempt to guard everything.<sup>58</sup> Maybe McNaughton thought this the best way to limit the resources kept at home, but it is likely significant that the general was unavailable to dispute King's version of events.

What was clear was that the military's position was crumbling. It was a bitter realization for some. Complaining to Dexter that the Prime Minister was not frank with him, Ralston also asserted that British Columbians would never be satisfied: "Send them one division and they will ask for two: send them two and they will demand four, etc."<sup>59</sup> But it was Stuart who faced the toughest choice, and he made it. Having learned that the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff had revised the forms and scales of west coast attack upwards to include the possibility of raid by two brigades, on 17 March Stuart recommended completion of the Sixth Division for Atlantic Command and the creation of a Seventh Division for Pacific Command. Three days later, after Ralston suggested another division might be required, the CGS, telling other officers that to refuse would cost him his job, approved the Eighth Division for BC.<sup>60</sup> King's vision of home defence had prevailed.

It is in this context of failure and surrender that the American request for assistance in Alaska must be placed. Having fought so hard to limit the home defence commitment, Stuart and the rest of the senior military leadership were not inclined to welcome any additional task that might draw even more resources to the west coast. Moreover, it seemed that government was not unsympathetic to this particular cause. The Prime Minister's absence from the aid debate is notable. King certainly knew about the problem. Informed of Japan's impending offensive on 26 May King, describing the telegram as perhaps "the most significant message received since Canada entered the war," instructed the CWC's secretary to record carefully his comments and to make an explicit reference to the cable. Certain an invasion of Alaska would have a "serious" effect on Canada and that "the various phases of the Canadian war effort should now be viewed in light of this immediate possibility," the Prime Minister confided to his diary that to that point the service chiefs and defence ministers had not overcome their European fixation to comprehend the true global nature of the conflict. Only he could "claim from the start that I visualized it as a world war and sought to base our policies on that assumption."<sup>61</sup>

But absent was any indication that King supported sending Canadian aircraft to Alaska, excepting of course his April "promise" to Roosevelt, an omission the military

could not help but notice, especially when Air Minister Power, a close ally of King, supported rejecting DeWitt's petition. Nor did it take any great leap in logic for Stuart, *et. al.* to conclude that a Prime Minister intensely interested in home defence might refuse to aid Alaska if it could be portrayed as possibly making Canadian places more vulnerable. Unfortunately for the Canadian military, they underestimated American resolve and determination. Unlike the unity of command debate, this time, facing an unparalleled threat to vital strategic interests in the Pacific, the Americans would not take no for an answer.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, in Article Seven of ABC-22 they had the "law" on their side. Had Canada not modified its initial refusal to provide aircraft, the US would have had good reason to doubt the usefulness of joint defence plans with Canada.

Was there any lasting impact from this unhappy episode? If the Americans had any hard feelings, they do not seem to have been expressed publicly. Yet had the battle at Midway not gone America's way, passions might have been very much more evident. Indeed, the most lasting impact was likely one that few Canadians would have anticipated in May 1942. The temporary attachment of just two squadrons for one week in the Alaskan theatre became a commitment that would end only in January 1944 after the provision of more planes, escort ships, and finally a reinforced army brigade for the Aleutian campaign.<sup>63</sup> Even more ironically Stuart, who had done so much to block the diversion of military resources to the west coast, would lead the charge in 1943 when the Canadian brigade was approved for use in the Aleutians. What a difference a year can make.

## NOTES

\* Galen Perras obtained his PhD from the University of Waterloo and is currently an SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Calgary. His book, *Franklin Roosevelt and Canadian Security, 1943-1945: Necessary, But Not Necessary Enough*, will be published later this year by Praeger Books.

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9. General George C. Marshall to President Franklin Roosevelt, 4 May 1942, in Alfred D. Chandler (ed.), *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The War Years: I* (Baltimore, 1970), 280-281; and National Archives (NA), War Department Records (WDR), Office of the Director of Plans and Operations, RG165, file OPD 381 PTO Section II, Eisenhower to Brigadier General St. Clair Streett, "Measures to Meet Current Threat in the Pacific," 20 May 1942.
10. NA, United States Army Command Records, Alaskan Department, RG338, box 14, file 201, DeWitt to General Simon Bolivar Buckner, 19 May 1942; telegram 1072, Marshall to DeWitt, in Chandler (ed.), *Eisenhower Papers*, 312-313; and NA, WDR, Office of the Chief of Staff, RG165, General Joseph T. McNarney to King, "U. S. Air Reinforcements of U. S. Forces in Alaska," 26 May 1942.
11. National Archives of Canada (NAC), Department of National Defence Records (DND), RG24, vol. 18823, War Diary of General Staff Headquarters, Pacific Command, DeWitt (via the United States Liaison Officer) to General R. O. Alexander, 29 May 1942.
12. Joint Canadian-United States Basic Defense Plan No. 2, 28 July 1941, in David R. Murray (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations. 1939-1941 Part II. Volume 8 (DCER)* (Ottawa, 1976), 249-261; and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Map Room Files, box 168, folder 3, Naval Aide's Files, Pacific War Council (PWC), April 1942-April 1944, memorandum of first Pacific War Council meeting, 3 April 1942.
13. When asked why Roosevelt had singled Canada out at the PWC meeting, senior State Department official John Hickerson suggested the President had done so "solely with the [political] object of playing up Canada's part in the Council vis-a-vis the members from 'down under.'" American service representatives on the Permanent Joint Board of Defense (PJBD) were even more puzzled since the US did not need Canada's "direct help."
- NAC, Maurice Pope Papers, MG27 III F4, diary entry for 2 April 1942; and Queen's University Archives (QUA), C. G. Power Papers (CGPP), box 77, file 1432A, Pope to Lieutenant General Kenneth Stuart, 10 April 1942.
14. NAC, Privy Council Records, RG2, vol. 48, file D-19-A (1942), Robertson to W. L. M. King, 2 March 1942; and NAC, Department of External Affairs Records, RG25, acc. 89-90/029, box 28, file 23-(A)s pt. 1, Robertson to King, 6 April 1942.
15. NAC, RG25, vol. 2152, file 149, memorandum by King, 15 April 1942.
16. See R. G. Haycock, "The 'Myth' of Imperial Defence: Australian-Canadian Bilateral Military Cooperation, 1942," *War and Society*, XXI (May 1984), 65-84; Galen Roger Perras, "The Parties with Whom We Have Been Estranged So Long Can Scarcely Be Brought into a Close Relationship at a Moment's Notice: 'Canada's Failure to Provide Military Aid to Australia, 1942-1945'" (Unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Studies Association of North America, Vancouver, 7-9 March 1996); and Perras, "Anglo-Canadian Imperial Relations: The Case of the Garrisoning of the Falklands in 1942," *War and Society*, XIV (May 1996), 73-97.
17. NAC, W. L. M. King Papers (WLMKP), Memoranda and Notes, MG26 J4, H. L. Keenleyside to King, 13 April 1942.
18. *Ibid.*, Correspondence, MG26J1, vol. 321, file Babbage to Blackmore, King to C. Mortimer Bezeau, 21 April 1942.
19. Canada, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History (DHist), file 314.009 (D17), PJBD meeting minutes, 27 April 1942.
20. NAC, DND, RG24, vol. 11765, file PC 010-9-20, vol. 1, L. F. Stevenson, "Memorandum Regarding RCAF Reinforcing Alaska in an Emergency," 14 May 1942; and QUA, CGPP, box 69, file D-2019, telegram A431X214, Stevenson to Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ), 27 May 1942.
21. DHist, file 314.009 (D17), O. M. Biggar to King, 18 May 1942; *Ibid.*, Air Commodore F. V. Heakes to Biggar, 20 May 1942; and NAC, Cabi-

net War Committee Records, RG2 7c, Cabinet War Committee (CWC) meeting minutes, 14 May 1942.

22. QUA, CGPP, box 69, file D-2019, Canadian Chiefs of Staff (COS) meeting minutes, 29 May 1942; and *Ibid.*, telegram A13, Air Marshal L. V. Breadner to Alexander and Stevenson, 29 May 1942.

23. QUA, CGPP, box 69, file D-2019, telegram 402A465, Stevenson to AFHQ, 30 May 1942.

24. *Ibid.*, "Memorandum of Telephone Call from Lt. Gen. Stuart, Victoria, at 2340 hours, May 30th, 1942," 1 June 1942; *Ibid.*, minutes of conference in Minister's office, 31 May 1942; and *Ibid.*, memorandum for record by Power, 31 May 1942.

25. Stanley W. Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada* (Washington, DC, 1959), 253; DHist, file 314.009 (D67), telegram MP40, Pope to Stuart, 1 June 1942; and NAC, MG27 III F4, diary entry for 1 June 1942.

26. QUA, CGPP, box 69, file D-2019, "Report of telephone conversation — Lieut. General Embick, US Army, and Air Commodore Heakes, RCAF, regarding movement of squadrons to Yakutat and resultant action - 1145 hours 1. 6. 42," 1 June 1942.

27. *Ibid.*, telegram A80, Heakes to Embick, 1 June 1942.

28. Douglas, *Creation*, 413-414.

29. *Ibid.*, 412.

30. NAC, RG24, vol. 13823, War Diary of General Staff Headquarters, Pacific Command, 1-30 May 1942, telegram, Western Defence Command (WDC) to US Liaison Officer, Victoria, 18 May 1942; NAC, RG2, vol. 32, file D-19-1 (1942), telegram 2304z, 23, Commodore W. J. R. Beech to Naval Service Headquarters, 23 May 1942; and QUA, CGPP, telegram X463A476, Stevenson to AFHQ, 1 June 1942.

31. DHist, file 314.009 (D67), telegram MP35, Pope to Stuart, 28 May 1942; and NAC, MG27 III F4, diary entry for 28 May 1942.

32. NA, State Department Records, RG59, box 8, file Correspondence of PJBD on Defense no. 2, F. H. LaGuardia to Biggar, 2 May 1941.

33. DHist, file 72/145, "Note on Question of United States-Canada Unity of Command," 18 December 1941; and *Ibid.*, Maurice Pope, "Note on Meeting of Permanent Joint Board on Defence Held at New York, 19th-20th Dec. 41," 22 December 1941.

34. NAC, RG24, vol. 2324, file HQS 66, vol. II, Major General J. H. MacBrien to Secretary of the Militia Department, 30 April 1920.

35. DHist, file 322.009 (D22), Joint Services Committee, "Pacific Coast of Canada," 22 November 1928; and *Ibid.*, file 322.016 (D12), "Defence Scheme No. 2. Plan for the Maintenance of Canadian Neutrality In the Event of a War Between the United States and Japan," 11 April 1938.

36. NAC, RG24, reel C4975, file HQS 3367, vol. 19, draft Canadian liaison letter no. 4, McNaughton to War Office, 31 December 1932.

37. *Ibid.*, RG24, vol. 2648, file HQS 3498, vol. 22, General Staff, "The Mobilization of Mobile Force," 21 August 1939.

38. NAC, H. D. G. Crerar Papers, MG30 E157, vol. 1, file 958C.009 (D12), Crerar to McNaughton, 9 September 1940.

39. DHist, file 82/196, vol. 1, Crerar to Stuart, "Joint Canadian-United States Basic Defence Plan-1940 (First Joint Draft)," 14 September 1940.

40. NAC, RG2, vol. 4, file D-19-2 1940, Crerar to J. L. Ralston, 14 October 1940.

41. "Joint Canadian-United States Basic Defence Plan No. 2 (Short Title ABC-22)," 28 July 1941, in *DCER*, VIII, 250-251.

42. QUA, CGPP, box 59, file D-1030, Crerar to Ralston plus attached appreciation, "Defence of Pacific Coast of Canada," 18 November 1941; and NAC, RG2 7c, Crerar to Ralston, "Army Programme 1942-43," 18 November 1941.

43. QUA, Grant Dexter Papers (GDP), transfer case 2, folder 20, memorandum by Dexter, 7 November 1941.
44. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 7 December 1941; NAC, WLMKP, Diaries, MG26 J13, diary entry for 7 December 1941; and NAC, RG24, Pope, "Joint Canadian-United States Defence Plan No. 2 (ABC-22)," 8 December 1941.
45. NAC, MG26 J13, diary entries for 9 and 11 December 1941.
46. NAC, RG2 7c, COS "Appreciation," CWC document no. 40, 10 December 1941; and *Ibid.*, Nelles to Ministers, CWC document no. 42, 11 December 1941.
47. Naval Historical Center [NHC], Glenn Howell Papers, Logs, box 25, vol. CXXIX, diary entry for 31 December 1941; and NA, WDR, War Plans Division (WPD), Lt. Colonel P.M. Robinett to Commanding General, Field Forces, "Brief Estimate of the Situation in the Pacific," 10 December 1941.
48. DHist, file 193.009 (D3), "Joint Services Committee — Pacific Coast Appreciation of the Situation as of 1st January 1942," 1 January 1942.
49. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, statement by Howard Green, 29 January 1942, 151-156; and *Vancouver Sun*, 5 February 1942.
50. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 18 February 1942.
51. DHist, file 112.3M2.009 (D133), untitled memorandum prepared in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence, 12 February 1942.
52. DHist, file 112.3M2 (D497), "Chiefs of Staff Appreciation," 19 February 1942; and NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 20 February 1942.
53. QUA, GDP, transfer case 3, folder 21, Dexter to George Ferguson, 13 February 1942; and DHist, file 322.009 (D157), "Appreciation of Possible Japanese Action on the Pacific Coast by Intelligence, Pacific Command," 16 February 1942.
54. *Ibid.*, transfer case 3, folder 21, memorandum by Dexter, 28 February 1942.
55. NAC, MG26 J1, vol. 335, file Smuts to Syrett 1942, King to Stuart, 6 March 1942; and NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes. The document in question was written by Gerry McGeer from British Columbia. Obsessed with the Japanese threat and the economic development of BC, McGeer peppered Canadian and American officials with countless multi-page letters outlining the need to make the province a staging point for a major offensive against Japan. The material read by King at the CWC meeting was taken from a letter sent to the Prime Minister; NAC, Ian Mackenzie Papers, vol. 19, file 24-53. McGeer to King, 5 March 1942. McGeer's attempts to alter Allied strategy is discussed in Galen Roger Perras, "'We Have Missed Another Great Opportunity:' G. G. McGeer, Alaska, and the Politics of Failed Advocacy," *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, V, No. 3 (July 1995), 33-55.
56. NAC, A. G. L. McNaughton Papers, MG30 E133, vol. 183, file PA 5-3-2-5, memorandum by McNaughton, 9 March 1942; and NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 6 March 1942.
57. NAC, MG26 J13, diary entry for 6 March 1942.
58. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 18 March 1942; and NAC, MG26 J13, diary entry for 17 March 1942.
59. QUA, GDP, transfer case 3, folder 22, memorandum by Dexter, 16 March 1942.
60. NAC, RG2 7c, Stuart to CWC, "Proposal to Mobilize Units Required to Complete Order of Battle of 6th Canadian Division," and "Proposal for Mobilization of Three Brigade Groups of the 7th Division," CWC documents 122 and 123, 17 March 1942; and CP. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa, 1970), 47n.
61. NAC, RG2 7c, CWC meeting minutes, 27 May 1942; and NAC, MG26 J13, diary entries for 26, 27, and 31 May 1942.
62. The unity of command debate is discussed in Galen Roger Perras, "'It Is Far Better to Trust in

the Honor of the United States, Than in the Mercy of the Enemy: 'Unity of Command on the West Coast, 1934-1942" (Unpublished paper presented at the "World War II: What It Took to End the War" conference, Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington, 23-27 August 1995.

63. Canada's participation in the Aleutian campaign is discussed in Galen Roger Perras, "Stepping Stones on a Road to Nowhere? The United States, Canada, and the Aleutian Campaign, 1942-1943" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 1995).