

From Fleets to Navies: The Evolution of Dominion Fleets into the Independent Navies of the Commonwealth

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En 1909, la Conférence Impériale a créé un mécanisme pour la création de nouveaux services navals au sein du Commonwealth britannique qui a connu un succès extraordinaire. Plus de dix grandes marines et plus d'une douzaine de services plus modestes peuvent tracer leurs origines à partir de la Marine royale britannique. Mais il a fallu de nombreuses années pour comprendre les effets du « système 1909 ». Le clonage des nouvelles marines à partir de la royale a permis la génération rapide d'une capacité de combat dans une mesure qui n'auraient point été possible autrement. Mais le court-circuitage d'un si grand nombre d'activités qui auraient été nécessaires à la création d'une force marine a également abouti à l'absence de développement de plusieurs des éléments normaux d'un service naval, ce qui a entraîné pendant de nombreuses années, des flottilles et non des forces marines. Cet article analyse l'évolution des nouveaux services et évalue leurs structures, leurs cultures internes et leurs relations avec les gouvernements et les peuples.

The centenary of the Canadian Navy marks a profoundly important moment in the development of a nation and its armed forces, but it is an anniversary that has significance well beyond Canada's maritime domains. For countries such as Canada, execution of the 'fleet unit concept' proved very different than the 1909 Imperial Conference intended, but it provided the model for a successful 'cloning' of naval services that has continued to this day. Although the maritime areas of the globe are no longer divided up into the various Stations of the Royal Navy, the latter has a worldwide legacy in the existence of no less than ten major navies – Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa and Sri Lanka – and more than a dozen smaller services directly or indirectly founded upon it.

To provide even a partial history of all these services is not possible within the scope of a single paper. This essay will therefore focus largely on the experience of the oldest Commonwealth navies, those of Canada and Australia in particular, but it will also attempt to incorporate some assessment of the other navies. A key theme will be the argument that the efforts made over the last century to develop various national

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navies have brought about a shared approach and outlook – a recognisably ‘naval’ culture – that is distinguishable and distinctive and which has had and will continue to have important operational and perhaps even strategic consequences.

The Beginning

The fleet unit concept that Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher introduced to the Imperial Conference of 1909 had profound results for the British Empire. It cut the Gordian Knot which local naval development had represented throughout the nineteenth century. The Admiralty often supported efforts to develop local naval defence forces, but the results had not been heartening. Aside from the issues of operational control and the ambiguous status of their ships, colonial naval efforts suffered from a lack of sustained financial commitment, the poor quality of many personnel and the rapid obsolescence of equipment.¹ By providing a construct which allowed for the development of local forces that could make an effective military contribution to both local and imperial defence while meeting many of the often conflicting demands of the Dominions and the Admiralty, Fisher’s plan acted as a catalyst. It promised mechanisms which could not only ensure that money was well spent, but also that standards were maintained and the prestige of the Royal Navy protected.

The fleet unit concept created not only an effective force structure but with it a proper career progression for local personnel. It also provided, even if the detail had yet to be worked out, systems to ensure that training, doctrine and equipment could be maintained at the necessary levels. In none of these areas had the various colonial navies excelled, despite the best efforts of many devoted officers and sailors.² The fleet unit concept promised, by contrast, to place imperial naval development so closely into the embrace of the Admiralty that such problems would not be allowed to emerge again.³

So progressive was the plan in its acceptance of the concept that the defence of the British Empire should be founded upon collective security, it should not be surprising that the 1909 Imperial Conference represented the beginning of systematic naval activity not only for Australia, but, however small the scale, for Canada, New

¹ For a survey of the Australian experience, see Colin Jones, *Australian Colonial Navies* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1986).

² The experience of Sub-Lieutenant (later Rear-Admiral) H.J. Feakes on joining the 36-year old *Cerberus* in 1907 is relevant. H.J. Feakes, *White Ensign – Southern Cross: A Story of the King’s Ships of Australia’s Navy* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1951), 120-121.

³ For the best surveys of the initiation and early implementation of the fleet unit concept see Nicholas Lambert, “Economy or Empire? The fleet unit concept and the quest for collective security in the Pacific, 1909-14,” in Keith Nelson and Greg Kennedy (eds), *Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 55-83; and Nicholas Lambert, “Sir John Fisher, the fleet unit concept, and the creation of the Royal Australian Navy,” in David Stevens and John Reeve (eds), *Southern Trident: Strategy, History and the Rise of Australian Naval Power* (Sydney: Allen Unwin, 2001), 214-224.

Zealand and even South Africa. It also laid the groundwork for other, as yet unimagined navies.

The Emerging Navies

There were and would remain anomalies. The delicate balance between local needs and susceptibilities and the larger ones of the Empire as a whole was a difficult one to draw and the Admiralty proved less than adept. Nicholas Lambert has commented on the “steady deterioration in relations between Britain and the Dominions between 1912 and 1914,” largely due to Winston Churchill’s efforts to renege on the fleet unit concept⁴, but this was not the only source of difficulty.

The development of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN)’s fleet unit sewed the seeds of its early success but also of the Australian service’s later problems, many of which would be experienced in their turn by the other Dominions. The RAN’s rapid expansion was achieved by ‘cloning’ what was effectively a new branch of the Royal Navy, rather than building a national organisation from the ground up. Strenuous efforts were made to create local infrastructure, extending to the construction of warships up to and including light cruisers,⁵ but the RAN depended absolutely upon the RN for skilled personnel, doctrine, training and equipment, and it would do so long into the future. To the Admiralty’s credit, it did its best to support the national identity of the young navy. Australian born officers who had entered the RN as ‘colonial cadets’ were encouraged to serve on loan to the new service.⁶ Three out of ten RN flag officers who commanded the Australian Fleet or Squadron between 1919 and 1939 were Australian natives.⁷ Nevertheless, from the outset there were difficulties in naval organisation and discipline and their application to national conditions that would prove hard to resolve.

The approach paid undeniable dividends in that Australia possessed a combat ready force from the start. The battle cruiser *Australia* and her consorts played a vital role in protecting Australia and ejecting the Germans from the southwest Pacific in 1914 – little more than ten months after the arrival of the capital ship in Australian waters. German war plans for the East Asiatic Cruiser Squadron changed from the moment that

4 Lambert, “Economy or Empire?,” 74-75. Christopher Bell addressed the subject of “Churchill and Dominion Navies” in a paper originally presented to the conference, sparking a rare vigorous historical debate; subsequently expressed elsewhere, at the time of this publication it stood as: “Sentiment vs Strategy: British Naval Policy, Imperial Defence, and the Development of Dominion Navies, 1911-14,” in *The International History Review*, 2014, at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2014.900817>, accessed 12 June 2014.

5 See John Jeremy, *Cockatoo Island: Sydney’s Historic Dockyard* (Sydney: University of NSW, 1998), 24-31 and 70-76.

6 Chris Coulthard-Clark, *Action Stations Coral Sea: The Australian Commander’s Story* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 11-13.

7 G. Hermon Gill, *Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942, Volume I Series 2: Australia in the War of 1939-1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1957), 651-652. This does not include Commodore (later Admiral Sir) Francis Hyde, RAN, who commanded from 1926 to 1929.

the *Australia* arrived on station.⁸ This lesson was not lost on New Zealand,⁹ whose much smaller naval force (an old cruiser originally commissioned as a training ship) had to operate under the protective umbrella of the Australian fleet unit while the battle cruiser that the country had paid for, the *New Zealand*, remained in British waters.

RAN units were also able to take part in the 1914-18 war in many other campaigns, including the North Sea and the Mediterranean, and did so with a high degree of professionalism. The concept of Dominion navies was thus, in Australia's case (and in New Zealand eyes) fully vindicated because the RAN had played an effective role within the worldwide maritime conflict, while also ensuring the protection of Australia and its approaches when Whitehall was less focused on that matter.

On the other hand, the small and under-resourced Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) had also been successful within the limited context of defending Canada's maritime approaches against German submarines. Canadian forces at least partially covered for North America's deficiencies in anti-submarine defences in 1917-18. Ironically, the Canadian relationship with the Admiralty was less than happy, perhaps because of the RCN's lack of capable major units, its local focus and the consequent difficulty of receiving the attention that it deserved in Whitehall.¹⁰ Both its operations and its difficulties with the Admiralty foreshadowed the RCN's experience in the Battle of the Atlantic in 1939-45.

There were other problems. For the RAN in particular, a substantial part of the naval support effort took place well away from Australia. This had several drawbacks. Dependence upon the RN meant that much expenditure, however favourable the actual price (and the British were more often generous than not), went to the UK and not to local industry. This not only meant that there was no substantial development of a national infrastructure to support the navy, but also made authorities less enthusiastic about such expenditure. This in turn meant that no national naval-industrial complex and few accompanying interest groups came into being. Equally to the point, it kept national decision makers from developing the appropriate degree of sophistication in their understanding of the issues.¹¹

⁸ Peter Overlack, "The commander in crisis: Graf Spee and the German East Asian Cruiser Squadron in 1914," in John Reeve & David Stevens (eds), *The Face of Naval Battle: The human experience of war at sea* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 75-77.

⁹ I.C. McGibbon, *Blue-Water Rationale: The Naval Defence of New Zealand 1919-1942* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1981), 26-27.

¹⁰ See Michael L. Hadley & Roger Sarty, *Tin Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces and German Sea Raiders 1880-1918* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

¹¹ As typified in the minute prepared for the Australian Minister for Defence for submission to the Admiralty during the Imperial Conference of 1937, in which the Minister complained about the need to modernise the heavy cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra* and stated that "it is desirable that the first outlay should be the last except for periodic refits." Australian Archives A 5954/1 Item 1058/5, Australian Delegation Paper No 7, "The Type of Squadron for the Royal Australian Navy," 8 March 1937.

This was less of an issue with the RCN, whose lack of support from the government ironically meant that it expended a much higher proportion of its resources on local activities, rather than the external expenditure required for complex major warships. The problem in Canada was not so much a lack of sophistication as a lack of interest, stemming at least partly from the recognition that Canada's security remained closely entwined with that of the United States. In these circumstances, it was a stroke of genius for the RCN to set up local volunteer reserve units across the heartland of Canada in the 1920s.¹² These not only raised awareness of the navy in a continentally minded country, but also provided the basis for the extraordinary expansion of 1939-45. They also meant that the government's ability to cut the very limited funds made available to the RCN was limited by the likely reaction from local communities.¹³

There were tensions between the navies. The old problem of quality within the officer corps of the local navies had not yet been solved and would not be until the products of the new naval colleges reached maturity. The RAN in its early years was certainly seen by the RN as the repository of too many second grade officers.¹⁴ While there was an element of snobbishness in this judgement – an attitude of which the RN took many years to rid itself and which was viewed with some bitterness by its victims¹⁵ – there was also truth in the accusation. It is significant by contrast that the young officers of the RAN and RCN who were the products of the national naval colleges¹⁶ were viewed with respect by the RN from the first¹⁷ – a respect sustained by their performance in the years that followed in their professional courses and at sea. This performance was sustained in later decades and emulated by the officers of India and other nations when they too came to train with the Royal Navy.

¹² Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Volume I: Origins and Early Years* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952), 337-338.

¹³ See Hugh Francis Pullen, "The Royal Canadian Navy between the Wars, 1922-39," in James A. Boutilier (ed), *The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1968* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 62-72.

¹⁴ See Jellicoe to the Secretary of the Admiralty, letter of August 1919 (covering the Report of the Naval Mission to Australia), in A. Temple Patterson (ed), *The Jellicoe Papers: Selections from the private and official correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe Volume II 1916-1935* (London: The Navy Records Society, 1968), 313.

¹⁵ As in the experience of Lieutenant (later Admiral Sir) Francis Hyde on being transferred from the RNR to the RN. This was one of his key motivations for his transfer to the nascent RAN in 1912. Australian War Memorial (AWM)MSS 1494 Item 2, Isla Hyde letter to Robert Hyslop, 20 February 1965.

¹⁶ The RANC was set up in 1913, the RCNC in 1911. The latter was closed in 1922 and not reopened until 1942 during the Second World War. In the interim, RCN junior officers did their initial training with the RN.

¹⁷ See the Second Sea Lord's 1922 comment that, "The Australian young officers compare very favourably with ours in the Sub-Lieutenants examinations and are generally more self reliant and wide awake." 2SL Minute of 21 April 1922, in Nicholas Tracy (ed.), *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire, 1900-1940* (Aldershot: Ashgate for The Navy Records Society, 1997), 312.

There were also issues with the lower deck, particularly due to the higher pay that RAN personnel received. RN ratings on loan to the RAN were given supplementary allowances to bring them up to the level of their Australian equivalents, but it was a fact that Australian units operating in British formations in the First World War were viewed with considerable jealousy of the “over fed, over paid, over sexed and over here” variety.¹⁸ Certainly, the RAN sailors were unimpressed by the British system, one commenting of the food in barracks (admittedly in June 1918) that the Australians were so appalled by its quality that they were “compelled to buy our own meals when ashore.... How these poor unfortunate British sailors survive is a queerie.”¹⁹ The differentials in pay and victualling were progressively reduced throughout the inter-war period, particularly as the RAN suffered even more from the economic rigours of the Depression than did the RN, but never entirely disappeared.

The Period Between the Wars: 1919-39

The last year of the First World War saw the Admiralty make another essay into the possibility of an Imperial Navy, of which Whitehall would have administrative and operational control. The logic was unassailable in terms of efficiency. It was also totally unrealistic (as elements within the Admiralty understood from the outset) and the Dominion premiers made this clear at the Imperial Conference of August 1918.²⁰ The subsequent report on the naval defence of the Empire by Admiral Jellicoe in 1919 was equally unrealistic in its assessment of force structure and resources, but acknowledged the need for the navies to remain separate and identifiable national entities, albeit with the expectation of coming under single (Admiralty) command during major crises.²¹ The Admiralty, spurred by the difficulties which the Canadian and South African naval services were experiencing in achieving any sort of critical mass, returned to the subject in 1922, but finally accepted in 1923 that there was no practical alternative. As the Director of Plans commented, there was always the “probability that the Dominions will vote more if they retain control of the expenditure, and can afford more if most of the money is spent locally.”²²

Nevertheless, although the RCN was temporarily invigorated in 1919 by the gift of a cruiser and two destroyers, with the RAN receiving even more substantial largesse, many problems had not been resolved. Imperial naval defence was one of the major victims of the anomalies that existed in the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Dominions.

¹⁸ A young officer in the battle cruiser *Australia* in the Grand Fleet 1915 noted that “Our sailors were not over-popular ashore in the canteens, as they were comparative millionaires.” See “Selections from the Memoirs and Correspondence of Captain James Bernard Foley,” in N.A.M. Rodger (ed), *The Naval Miscellany Volume V* (London: George Allen & Unwin for The Navy Records Society, 1984), 506-507.

¹⁹ James R. Clifford Diary entry of 11 June 1918, reproduced in *The Grey Funnel Line: Official Newsletter of the HMAS SYDNEY and VLSVA*, 14:3 (March-June 2008), 52.

²⁰ McGibbon, *Blue-Water Rationale*, 36-37.

²¹ See excerpts from Jellicoe’s reports in *The Jellicoe Papers, Volume II: 1916-1935*, 27-391.

²² Robert Hyslop, *Australian Naval Administration 1900-1939* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1973), 191.

The latter were not yet truly sovereign, but in the area in which sovereignty counted most, that of strategic policy, they had sufficient ability to exercise it as to prevent the British placing any reliance upon them except in extreme situations. This was clearly demonstrated by the unfavourable reaction of Australia, New Zealand and Canada to the possibility of war with Turkey over Chanak in 1922²³ and, in the naval context, reinforced by the limitations placed upon the local British C-in-C for the employment of the exchange cruiser *Brisbane* during the troubles in China in 1925.²⁴

Ironically, the series of Washington treaties and the disarmament efforts which followed continued to treat the British Empire as a single entity in determining naval strength. The Dominion totals were included within those of the RN, which meant that the Admiralty would not be able to access all of its fighting strength in many situations short of a war of national survival. The London Treaty of 1930 exacerbated the problem by creating total tonnage limits for both cruisers and destroyers. This markedly affected the Admiralty's relationship with the Dominion navies between 1921 and 1936. The Dominions' ambiguous status created matching ambiguities in the value that the Admiralty placed upon their naval development.²⁵ In warship categories (such as sloops) in which there were no limitations, the Admiralty happily endorsed expansion, but it was much less enthusiastic in relation to the restricted types.²⁶ The British motives were not properly understood by the Dominion governments and it is difficult to avoid the judgement that their failure to examine naval strategic questions from first principles was because it was more convenient – because it was cheaper – to accept a British lead and the British line. The Australian CNS in the mid-1930s found that his Minister and the principal departmental adviser opted uncritically for Admiralty policy when the latter differed from that of the local naval staff,²⁷ creating significant difficulties for the RAN.

Such ambiguities did not stop considerable work being done to improve co-operation in key areas. Perhaps most important were those of intelligence and control of shipping. Progress was made throughout the 1930s on many aspects of trade protection planning and the onset of war in 1939 saw a system move into action that was not only reasonably mature but also immediately effective, a result that one historian has described as a “high achievement” for the Commonwealth navies.²⁸

²³ Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Volume I: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism 1919-1929* (London: Collins, 1968), 198.

²⁴ Gill, *The Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942*, 22-23.

²⁵ See the First Sea Lord's minute of 17 June 1930 in Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Volume II: The Period of Reluctant Rearmament 1930-1939* (London: Collins, 1976), 66-67.

²⁶ B.N. Primrose, “Australian Naval Policy 1919 to 1942: A Case Study in Empire Relations” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1974), 188.

²⁷ James Goldrick, “The naval professional: Admiral Sir Francis Hyde KCB, CVO, CBE, RAN,” in David Stevens and John Reeve (eds), *The Navy and the Nation: The influence of the Navy on modern Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 344-346.

²⁸ Mark Bailey, “The Australian role in the development of a worldwide Imperial trade control and naval intelligence system 1919-39,” in David Stevens (ed), *Maritime Power in the*

An associated effort was the establishment of local volunteer reserve units around the British Empire. Tiny in scale and largely officered by expatriates, some nevertheless represented the kernel around which national navies would be formed in the post-1945 period. The most important was the Straits Settlement (later re-titled Malayan) Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, which formed at Singapore in 1934 with an additional branch at Penang in 1939.²⁹

By the 1930s the Admiralty was also struggling with the issue of a nationalised Indian Navy. The documentary trail on this subject is not edifying to the modern eye because the relative eagerness of the Admiralty to militarise the Royal Indian Marine was balanced by a steady refusal to accept non-Caucasian officers being treated in the same way as those of European descent.³⁰ Such attitudes were widespread. The first Indian officer was not recruited into the RIM until 1928 and even then a deliberate policy was maintained of recruiting two European officers for every Indian. This did not change with the formal creation of the Royal Indian Navy in 1934.³¹

The Second World War and the Second Wave

The six years of the Second World War meant profound developments in the individual services. The RAN was soon overtaken by the extraordinary expansion of the RCN. There was a new round of creation as the naval services of New Zealand and South Africa evolved into distinct entities: the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) established in September 1941, and the South African Naval Forces (SANF) in August 1942.

The exigencies of the conflict forced every navy to move towards a more self-reliant existence. The Admiralty, itself under great stress, did not possess the capacity to support the expansion of the local services to the degree that occurred, while disruption to sea communications undermined reliance upon British industrial output. The war also highlighted certain inadequacies in British naval technology and doctrine, particularly by comparison with the United States Navy (USN). Some of these deficiencies were the result of the systematic under-funding and operational over-commitment of the Royal Navy in the 1920s and 1930s, but this was not the whole explanation. The USN was much better prepared for the extreme distances of the Asia-Pacific, possessed ships of greater endurance, habitability and engineering reliability and had addressed the offensive and defensive aspects of naval air warfare much more effectively. These advantages, amongst others, were manifest, sometimes cruelly, to the RAN and RNZN in the South Pacific between 1942 and 1945, and came as an equal shock to the British Pacific Fleet (BPF – which also included elements of the RAN, RCN, RNZN and SANF) in 1944-45.³² The situation in the Atlantic was not quite so clear cut, but the RCN had an

Twentieth Century: The Australian Experience (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 83.

²⁹ Royal Malaysian Navy, *Tentera laut Di Raja Malaysia: Tahun 55* (Kuala Lumpur: RMN, 1990), 20.

³⁰ See Tracy, *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire*, especially 487-505.

³¹ Vice-Admiral A.E.F. Bedford, "The Royal Indian Navy," in *The Naval Review* XXVI:2 (May 1938), 216.

³² Vice-Admiral Sir Louis Le Bailly's memoir, *The Man Behind the Engine: Life Below the*

increasing view of the superiority of much of the American equipment and systems as US mobilisation took effect. That the Canadian 'take up' of US material was not greater than it was may have owed more to a lack of expertise in determining naval-industrial and scientific requirements than to any other cause.³³ It may also have owed much to the availability of Canadian personnel to man British units which could not be crewed by the over-stretched manpower of the Royal Navy.

The expansion or outright creation of shipbuilding and repair industries, together with sophisticated weapon and sensor manufacturing and repair facilities – both Canada and Australia developed their own naval radar systems³⁴ – were additional signs of the development of mechanisms of support required to sustain independent naval forces. Many decisions had to be taken without recourse to Admiralty advice. The tendency remained to look towards Whitehall, and this would be encouraged by certain developments immediately after the war, but the first steps had been taken.

On the other hand, the war reinforced the integration of the Commonwealth navies with the RN in other ways. Shared experiences developed a mutual respect that was to last for many years – and of which the legacy still exists. Some of the Royal Navy's *hauteur* remained, as did some of the willingness of other nationalities to take offence, but enormous progress was made. The first products of the officer training programmes of the RAN and the RCN reached professional maturity during the war and many served in command alongside the RN or in command of RN ships. Canada's nationalisation policies saw some occupying flag rank in the early years of the war; the Australians took a little longer, but in both cases their performance confirmed that they could hold their own. Vice-Admiral H.T.W. Grant became Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) in Canada in 1947; he had commanded HMS *Enterprise* during the successful surface actions against German destroyers in the Bay of Biscay in 1944. Rear-Admiral J.A. Collins became CNS in Australia in 1948; he had commanded HMAS *Sydney* at the destruction of the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in 1940. The result was a freemasonry amongst the flag officers of the Commonwealth navies of the post-war era that flowed into the management of many of the problems that they shared.³⁵

It was the same with the junior ranks, and with the Reservists and Volunteer Reservists who were seconded to the RN in a host of roles. RANR and RANVR officers and ratings made up some 10 per cent of the anti-submarine specialists in RN units in the

Waterline (Emsworth: Kenneth Mason, 1991) and his associated work *From Fisher to the Falklands* (Institute of Marine Engineers, London, 1991), have the most forthright account of the materiel deficiencies of the BPF.

³³ David Zimmerman, *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 164-168.

³⁴ David Zimmerman, "The RAN and the RCN and High Technology in the Second World War," in T.R. Frame, J.V.P. Goldrick and P.D. Jones (eds), *Reflections on the RAN* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1991), 206-219.

³⁵ Alastair Cooper, "At the Crossroads: Anglo-Australian Naval Relations, 1945-1971," in *The Journal of Military History* 58:4 (October 1994), 705.

Battle of the Atlantic.³⁶ The RN Fleet Air Arm drew substantially upon the RNZNVR and the RCNVR for aircrew. Seven submarines were sunk by Australian commanded units of the RN, while no less than eight RN units of the BPF in August 1945 were Commonwealth commanded.³⁷ The experience of serving with ‘colonials’ had gone from the exception to the norm in the RN, while the programmes of exchange service for career officers continued, as did the training in the United Kingdom of junior and specialist officers of every navy. The part played by RN personnel, many of them retired, in the wartime expansion of the Commonwealth navies was also substantial. Outstanding personalities included Rear-Admiral G.W. Hallifax, who led the South African Seaward Defence Force from 1940 until his death in an air crash in 1941,³⁸ and Acting Commander (later Captain) H.M. Newcomb, who spearheaded the RAN’s extraordinarily successful ASW personnel training programme and later formed its Electrical Branch.³⁹ The RCN in particular benefited from the contribution made by retired or passed over RN officers in command at sea; these officers, such as A.F.C. Layard,⁴⁰ often provided the kernel of professionalism around which the expertise of the volunteer reservists grew.

The Third Wave of Development

There were other legacies of the war. The performance of the RIN had been notable, particularly as it was sustained by a much more restricted industrial base than the other Commonwealth services. Events had also helped destroy many of the racial shibboleths of the pre-1939 era. Significantly, few Indian officers who were trained by or served at sea with the RN after 1945 have recorded any experience of racial discrimination, despite the occasional surprises which resulted from the first encounters of personnel from the different cultures.⁴¹

The third wave of development of new national navies was thus well under way, albeit under difficult circumstances. The post-war history of the RIN was fraught with tension and uncertainty, magnified by the trauma of the 1946 mutiny.⁴² Nevertheless, the transition into first one and then two national services in 1947 was handled with skill by

³⁶ For the Australian anti-submarine personnel training effort for service with the RN, see G.R. Worledge (ed.), *Contact! HMAS Rushcutter and Australia's Submarine Hunters 1939-1946* (The Anti-Submarine Officers' Association, 1994), esp 24-31.

³⁷ Taken from the listing of the BPF on VJ-day in John Winton, *The Forgotten Fleet* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), 389-396.

³⁸ Allan Du Toit, *South Africa's Fighting Ships: Past and Present* (Rivonia: Ashanti, 1992), 27-29.

³⁹ Worledge, *Contact!*, 11-19.

⁴⁰ Michael Whitby, “The strain of the bridge: the Second World War diaries of Commander A.F.C. Layard DSO, DSC, RN,” in Reeve and Stevens, *The Face of Naval Battle*, 200-218.

⁴¹ See for example, Vice-Admiral R.D. Katari, *A Sailor Remembers* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982). For a summary of the relationship with the senior RN officers seconded to the IN the late 1940s and 1950s, see Rear-Admiral Satyindra Singh, *Blueprint to Bluewater: The Indian Navy 1951-1965* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1992), 280-288.

⁴² Chris Madsen, “The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny 1946,” in Christopher M. Bell and Bruce A. Elleman (eds), *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 212-231.

those on the spot and by the Admiralty. The greatest success lay in the acceptance by the new leaders of India and Pakistan of the requirement for time to evolve the RIN and the Royal Pakistan Navy (RPN) into fully national organisations. The Admiralty had to face the fact – and achieve local understanding of that reality – that the appallingly slow pace of local naval development and nationalisation in the inter-war period meant that no Indian or Pakistani officers were ready to lead their services and that they would not be ready for up to a decade if they were to gain the necessary experience at sea and ashore. The RIN (the Indian Navy from 1950) would have an RN Chief of Naval Staff until 1958, the RPN (the Pakistan Navy from 1956) until 1953.

The Admiralty also proved sympathetic to the financial constraints of the new navies – sometimes displaying a much more shrewd understanding of monetary realities than local authorities. The exact extent of direct financial support is impossible to map, but there is certainly evidence of both overt and ‘under the counter’ assistance to both India and Pakistan in the first decade of their independent existence.⁴³ How much this was driven by the influence of Earl Mountbatten, particularly as First Sea Lord and then as Chief of Defence Staff until 1965, is difficult to say, but that influence was present on a number of occasions, particularly in the refit of Pakistan’s newly acquired light cruiser *Babur* (ex-*Diadem*) in a British royal dockyard.⁴⁴

The Post-War Era: Sophisticated Cooperation

The uncertainty of the immediate post-war period did little to damage the older linkages between the Commonwealth navies. Neither Australia nor Canada turned at this time to the USN to the extent which their wartime experience might have suggested. There were several factors behind this apparent inertia. The first was the self-absorption of the USN, preoccupied as it was by demobilisation. Although a shared commitment to the occupation of Japan remained, there was little reason to encourage close American co-operation with the Commonwealth navies, certainly not such as to lift the restraints which existed on sharing classified information. The second, even more significant, was that the financial situation in the wake of the demise of lend-lease and the need for solidarity within the ‘sterling area’ did not make even the most efficient American systems particularly attractive. This was the more true when the RN possessed so many modern ships which it could never man and which would be better off in Commonwealth hands than the reserve fleet or scrapyards. The RCN and the RAN each retained units which had either been built to Admiralty order in-country and manned by their own personnel or lent to them during the war. For both services, this meant that their fleets included major ships which their governments would not have been willing to fund. The RNZN received two cruisers immediately after the war on loan, which met its requirements for replacements for older units, but which also ensured that they were kept

⁴³ See Singh, *Blueprint to Bluewater*, 63-68 and 78. Also Pakistan Navy History Section, *Story of the Pakistan Navy 1947-1972* (Islamabad: Naval Headquarters, 1991), 90.

⁴⁴ Mountbatten Papers, Admiral the Earl Mountbatten letter to Rear-Admiral M.S. Choudri, 2 January 1957. See also James Goldrick, *No Easy Answers: The Development of the Navies of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1997), 54-56.

in running order.

That the Admiralty was still thinking in worldwide terms was clear, but there were fundamental differences in its approach from that of pre-war. Despite the difficulties which the RN experienced in coming to terms with the total reality of its straitened financial situation, there were no longer any ideas that it could manage without the Commonwealth navies. Their performance and that of their governments during the war had developed a new confidence in Whitehall in their ability to accept and share responsibilities for maritime security. There was also an element of mutual financial advantage, although this was not as great as the Admiralty first thought because of its own under-estimation of the deficiencies in Britain's post-war industrial capacity, deficiencies which could not be remedied simply through the infusion of extra funding.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, if the Commonwealth navies could be persuaded to join British building programmes, then smaller than desired British production runs could be increased to the benefit of industry and at less expense to the smaller nations than if they attempted to go their own way.⁴⁶

The policy was, at least for the 1950s and early 1960s, extraordinarily successful, both within the alliance framework that embraced Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, but also, to a limited extent, with India and Pakistan. Admiral S.M. Nanda, who served as Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy from 1970 to 1973, summed up the atmosphere: "The British felt that the navy of each country should be capable of shouldering the twin responsibilities of local defence as well as providing support to joint operations. They felt that the Commonwealth nations should be able to request each other to provide protection to trade transiting through their areas of influence."⁴⁷ The First Lord of the Admiralty spoke in similar terms in 1958 when he described the Commonwealth navies as "a powerful element on the side of stability and the maintenance of sea communications throughout the world."⁴⁸

The immediate focus of this approach was the establishment of the post-war naval aviation capabilities of the RCN and RAN. The Admiralty made available two light fleet carrier hulls to each service for the equivalent of the price of one.⁴⁹ It also went to considerable lengths to provide the technical advice, expert personnel and material support that each navy required, to the point of sometimes giving priority to

⁴⁵ See Eric Grove's assessment in Eric J. Grove, *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War Two* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 72.

⁴⁶ The clearest example of this was that the Australian requirement for a jet fighter capable of operating from a light fleet carrier made production of the navalised version of the Venom practicable because of the increased numbers involved. See James Goldrick, "Carriers for the Commonwealth," in Frame et al, *Reflections on the Royal Australian Navy*, 237.

⁴⁷ S.M. Nanda, *The Man Who Bombed Karachi: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004), 114-115.

⁴⁸ Statement to the House of Lords, 11 June 1958, in "Naval Affairs," *The Naval Review* XLVI:4 (October 1958), 472.

⁴⁹ Goldrick. "Carriers for the Commonwealth," 232.

them over its own needs.⁵⁰ Both the first of the Canadian and Australian carriers had a substantial proportion of RN personnel – as well as ex-RN personnel – onboard when they commissioned. With the Cold War and the emergence of the Soviet submarine threat, the focus of such support and co-operation soon shifted to anti-submarine warfare (ASW). In 1948 New Zealand acquired six ASW frigates from the UK at a reduced cost. Both Canada and Australia followed soon after with substantial programmes to improve their ASW capability. Under the auspices of the Simon's Town Agreement in 1955, South Africa also invested in frigates,⁵¹ while in the same year India placed orders for frigates with the UK, and Pakistan in its turn used US military aid funding to acquire frigates and destroyers from Britain.⁵²

The first seeds of mutual support between the younger navies were also being sewn. The RNZN made increasing use of Australian training schools as cheaper and more convenient alternatives to those of the UK. From 1951, selected NZ cadets trained at the RAN College,⁵³ while Australia transferred a surveying frigate in 1949 and four minesweepers in 1952.⁵⁴ Australians as well as former Royal Navy officers served in the Pakistan Navy in key specialist roles.⁵⁵

It was thus not surprising that the Korean War of 1950-53 marked a peak of Commonwealth naval cooperation. Some 32 RN warships served in the conflict, as did nine of the RAN, eight of the RCN and six of the RNZN. Two Australian units serving with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan were diverted to operations off Korea within four days of the North Korean invasion. The first RNZN units left Auckland for Korean waters five days later, and three destroyers of the RCN sailed from Esquimalt two days after that.⁵⁶ There were normally at least six destroyers or frigates from the three smaller navies on station – which effectively doubled the local strength of the British Far East Fleet in these categories. The Australian carrier *Sydney* also conducted a highly successful deployment in 1951-52, which allowed the RN to withdraw its on-station carrier for much needed maintenance and crew rest. Throughout the Korean operations, units passed to and from the tactical control of commanders of other Commonwealth nations with little fuss. The extent to which mutual trust existed can be demonstrated by the fact that in 1952 it was to the RAN screen commander (a

⁵⁰ G.A. Rotherham, *It's Really Quite Safe* (Belleville, ON: Hangar Books, 1985), 293-294.

⁵¹ Du Toit, *South Africa's Fighting Ships*, 172-175.

⁵² Goldrick, *No Easy Answers*, 24-27 and 54-55.

⁵³ I.J. Cunningham, *Work Hard, Play Hard: The Royal Australian Naval College 1913-1988* (Canberra: AGPS, 1988), 49.

⁵⁴ Grant Howard, *The Navy in New Zealand: An Illustrated History* (Wellington, Reed, 1981), 89.

⁵⁵ *Story of the Pakistan Navy*, *op. cit.*, 105-106.

⁵⁶ Ben Evans, *Out in the Cold: Australia's Involvement in the Korean War 1950-1953* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial & Department of Veterans' Affairs, 2000), 11. See also G.F. Hopkins, *Tales from Korea: The Royal New Zealand Navy in the Korean War* (Auckland: Royal New Zealand Navy Museum, 2002), 19; John Bovey, "The Destroyers' War in Korea, 1952-53," in Boutilier, *The RCN in Retrospect*, 252.

Captain) that the executive officer and medical officer of the British carrier *Glory* turned for advice about the mental health of their own commanding officer.⁵⁷

New Directions

Yet, however close the Commonwealth naval relationships had become, the Korean War also made clear future realities. The substantial effort of the Royal navies was dwarfed by the commitment of the United States. For many of the navies, the question now was how well they could integrate operationally with the USN.

Furthermore, while the Commonwealth network of national forces to protect the Allied sea lines of communication was impressive, it was based on some tenuous relationships. The first to go were the navies of the sub-continent. From the outset, the Admiralty had viewed the continuing rivalry between India and Pakistan with dismay, the more so when it became apparent that seconded RN officers soon adopted the same attitude as the locals.⁵⁸ India's non-alignment and Pakistan's preoccupation with protecting itself from its larger neighbour meant that neither could really fit within the concepts of mutual alliance and support which Britain was attempting to encourage.

These problems were manageable throughout most of the 1950s and while the RN maintained a significant presence on the East Indies Station. The Joint Exercise Trincomalee (JET) series constituted one of the few mechanisms of formal Indo-Pakistani interaction in any form. The British generally held the ring successfully and the exercises which were conducted under the JET umbrella were regarded as high points in the operational cycles of all the navies concerned, however bitter the play in the inter-naval sports competitions (particularly hockey).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, separation became inevitable, particularly as the British became less able and less willing to share the latest tactical doctrine and technology. That separation became fact with the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 and the Indian decision to purchase Soviet weaponry because the British would not supply all the technology that the Indians wanted at prices they could afford.⁶⁰

The late 1950s and the 1960s were marked by a number of sometimes conflicting themes of naval development elsewhere in the Commonwealth. There was continuity in one key element – although the smaller navies were progressively developing more indigenous capacity for training, procurement and doctrinal development, both they and the RN and USN were progressively improving their capacity to operate with each other. The RCN in particular systematically integrated into both NATO and US-led arrangements for the maritime defence of North America. By far the strongest of the smaller navies in the 1950s, it developed particular expertise in ASW in response to the Soviet threat to North America and the transatlantic supply routes. In this context, the

⁵⁷ G.G.O. Gatacre, *A Naval Career: Reports of Proceedings 1921-1964* (Manly, NSW: Nautical Press and Publications, 1982), 250-251.

⁵⁸ Goldrick, *No Easy Answers*, 19.

⁵⁹ Singh, *Blueprint to Bluewater*, 488 and 492-496.

⁶⁰ This story is summarised in James Goldrick, "Imperial Jetsam or National Guardians? The Navies of the Indian sub-continent, 1947-72," in N.A.M. Rodger (ed), *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 205-207.

RCN worked with the RN much more as a partner in NATO than the older construct of a UK lead. Its systems and ships reflected this trend, with Canada making considerable efforts to develop its own defence industries, while turning increasingly to the USA rather than the UK for equipment it could not produce itself. Thus, although the first Canadian light fleet carriers had British aircraft, the *Bonaventure*, which was completed in the UK in 1956, did not.⁶¹

Australia and New Zealand, on the other hand, remained closely linked with the British and thus the RN within the context of the defence of southeast Asia. The Malayan region was the focus and, after the end of the Korean commitment, both RAN and RNZN units were formally committed to the “British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (Far East)” and to regular deployments with the British Far East Fleet.⁶² As late as 1959, the Admiralty talked in terms of a “balanced British Commonwealth Eastern Fleet,”⁶³ even though the political objections to such a construct were as obvious as ever. At the same time, the connections with the USN were continuing to strengthen through the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and mechanisms such as the Radford-Collins agreement of 1951. The Royal Malayan (after 1958, the Malaysian) Navy was also growing rapidly, acquiring an operational frigate in 1960 and playing a leading role against Indonesian incursions in the confrontation. Its external support came not only from the RN, but from Australia and New Zealand, and it was a sign of the times that Malaysia’s Government asked the RAN and not the RN to provide a senior officer to lead the Service from 1960 to 1967. Had an Australian not been available, the Malaysians were prepared to ask India or Pakistan.⁶⁴ In 1965, the departure of Singapore from the Malaysian federation meant the creation of another navy, formally inaugurated in 1967,⁶⁵ and which was soon receiving considerable assistance from the RNZN in the form of instructional staff.

The 1960s brought other developments which separated the RN further from the Commonwealth navies. First and most important was the progressive reduction in British strength. The East Indies Station had been abolished in September 1958⁶⁶ and, although Confrontation with Indonesia in 1965-66 created a situation in which there were more

⁶¹ For an analysis of this period, see Joel J. Sokolsky, “Canada and the Cold War at Sea, 1945-68,” in W.A.B. Douglas (ed), *RCN in Transition 1910-1985* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 209-232.

⁶² Jeffrey Grey, “The Royal Australian Navy in the Era of Forward Defence, 1955-75,” in David Stevens (ed), *In Search of a Maritime Strategy: The Maritime Element in Australian Defence Planning Since 1901* (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The ANU, 1997), 106.

⁶³ Eric J. Grove, “‘Advice and assistance to a very independent people at a most crucial point’: the British Admiralty and the Future of the RAN 1958-60,” in Stevens, *Maritime Power in the Twentieth Century*, 140.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Grey, *Up Top: The Royal Australian Navy and Southeast Asian Conflicts 1955-1972* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin & AWM, 1998), 36-40.

⁶⁵ Peter H.L. Lim, *Navy: The Vital Force* (Singapore: Republic of Singapore Navy, 1992), 25-27.

⁶⁶ Desmond Wettern, *The Decline of British Seapower* (London: Jane’s, 1982), 156.

operational British units east of Suez than west, by 1968 the plans for UK withdrawal from the Far East had been publicly announced.

The loosening of links with South Africa, increasingly isolated by its apartheid policies, was already well under way. The South Atlantic Station was disestablished in 1967. After 1964, the UK government would not enter into new arms contracts, although it made an exception in 1966 with the sale of ASW helicopters. The British finally abrogated the Simon's Town Agreement in 1975 and withdrew the last RN facilities in 1976. A United Nations embargo on arms sales followed in 1977. The South African Navy clung to its role as the 'Guardian of the Cape Sea Route' for many years – an approach welcomed by the government as providing some residual linkages with the western alliances, but these measures forced it to concentrate on the protection of South African territory and interests.⁶⁷

From 1965, Australia and New Zealand were actively involved in the Vietnam conflict, without the British. There were efforts to sustain some form of permanent combined force for the protection of Malaysia and Singapore under the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA), but the days of significant British naval presence in the region – and thus daily interaction with the RAN and RNZN – were numbered. The last British frigate was withdrawn in 1976, leaving only the Hong Kong based squadron of patrol vessels.⁶⁸ Richard Hill's comment of 1994, that the withdrawal stood "far and away ahead of any other post-war British strategic decision before or since,"⁶⁹ is a fair one.

The second development was the transition from British ships and systems. India had already made the move, as had the Canadians. The Australians took the step when they selected the USN Charles F. Adams-class destroyer and the associated Tartar surface to air missile ahead of the RN Devonshire class and the Sea Slug. There were several factors behind this decision, not least because the Americans were able to offer favourable financial conditions (very much after the model of the Admiralty in the 1930s with the second HMAS *Sydney*). A key element, however, was the RAN's unease at the technological inferiority of the *Sea Slug* missile. Although the Admiralty did not press the issue,⁷⁰ the Australian decision was not universally well received in the RN, the captain of the first Australian DDG being greeted by the Flag Officer Second-in-Command Far East Fleet (Vice-Admiral C.P. Mills) with the comment that he "could not understand why they (the RAN) had bought that American rubbish."⁷¹

Ironically, these events paralleled one of the most successful examples of RN supported naval development in the RAN and RCN. With the onset of the Cold War, in 1949 the British had agreed to the establishment of RN submarine divisions in both

⁶⁷ Du Toit, *South Africa's Fighting Ships*, 176-178.

⁶⁸ Wettern, *The Decline of British Seapower*, 378.

⁶⁹ J.R. Hill, "British Naval Planning Post-1945," in Rodgers, *Naval Power in the Twentieth Century*, 219.

⁷⁰ Grove, "Advice and assistance," *op. cit.*, 153.

⁷¹ Rear-Admiral Guy Griffiths AO, DSO, DSC, RAN (ret'd), "DDGs in Vietnam: HMAS HOBART: 7 March – 27 September 1967," in Frame et al, *Reflections on the RAN*, 331.

Australia and Canada to provide training for the ASW forces which had become the key capabilities of both navies (and of New Zealand). As British strength waned, it became clear that national submarine forces would have to be created to provide the ASW training capability. In Australia's case, there was also the idea that submarines could provide a useful offensive capability.⁷² A small number of personnel had received submarine training throughout the 1950s; this effort was substantially increased from 1961. An Australian order for submarines was announced in 1963; that for Canada had been announced the year before.⁷³ British industry benefited substantially from the orders to build seven (and eventually nine) submarines, but the fact is that the creation of the submarine forces in the two navies was an extraordinarily successful effort at cloning such capabilities, as Laurence Hickey details elsewhere in this volume. The British made available large numbers of expert personnel, training facilities, doctrine and much advice. The cost recovery process may have covered all the RN's direct expenses, but certainly did not represent what the programmes would have cost the RCN and RAN had they gone it alone. On the other hand, the relationship had some benefits for the RN. At a time when large numbers of submariners were ashore being trained to man the new nuclear-powered attack and ballistic missile-firing submarines, British commitments to NATO were maintained largely because Canadians and Australians, being prepared for their own new construction units, were helping man the diesel-electric boats that made up the existing submarine force.⁷⁴

The Cold War and Beyond

The events of the last quarter of the twentieth century maintained the trend of increasing separation between the Royal Navy and those of the Commonwealth. While efforts continued to support the establishment and development of naval forces around the world, including the provision of refitted frigates to the newly emergent Bangladesh Navy, the majority were dependent upon the involvement of British industry in the provision of weapons and equipment. Patriation of specialist training accelerated as individual services either became larger and more capable or decided that their particular national requirements were becoming too different from those of the United Kingdom to justify the increasingly expensive use of British facilities. India, forced to go its own way in developing doctrine and tactics for its Soviet ships, was already developing a system of indigenous training that soon allowed it to support other services in its turn.⁷⁵ The last Australian sub-lieutenants to undertake their courses in UK went home in 1975; the last RAN Principal Warfare Officers graduated from HMS *Dryad* at the end of 1985. In

⁷² Alastair Cooper, "The Era of Forward Defence, 1955-1972," in David Stevens (ed.), *The Royal Australian Navy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 188.

⁷³ Raymond V.B. Blackman, *Jane's Fighting Ships 1963-64* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co), 16 and 36.

⁷⁴ Commander D.W. Mills, "Providing the People (2)," in J.E. Moore (ed.), *The Impact of Polaris: The Origins of Britain's seaborne nuclear deterrent* (Huddersfield: Richard Netherwood, 1999), 231.

⁷⁵ Singh, *Blueprint to Bluewater*, 293.

1995, the paying off of the last RN diesel-electric submarine meant the end of Australian and Canadian participation in the Submarine Commanding Officer Qualifying Course (the 'Perisher') and exchange postings between the navies were progressively reduced, largely in the name of economy. Royal Navy task group global deployments became rarer, being largely replaced by single ship visits. Visits in the other direction also became less frequent and it seemed as if the 1977 Silver Jubilee Naval Review at Spithead, with its substantial Commonwealth involvement, marked the end of an era.

Yet there was another side to the coin. If the older and larger navies had apparently gone their own way, the RN still provided many training services to the newer and smaller. The International Principal Warfare Officer course at HMS *Dryad* regularly contained students from services such as the Royal Malaysian Navy. The RN also continued as a benchmark for professional standards in many areas. In 1990, the Australians sent a frigate to undertake training with the British Flag Officer Sea Training organisation at Portland and they were to undertake this activity again in 2009.

The complexities of the 1980s and the post-Cold War era of the 1990s soon demonstrated that many other links remained. Even though Britain operated alone in the Falklands War of 1982, the RNZN helped by providing a frigate to substitute for the Royal Navy in the Middle East and the RAN provided sea training for a class of RN midshipmen. The 1990-91 Gulf crisis brought Canadian and Australian ships to the Gulf to join those of the British and other nations at the beginning of a campaign which did not stop until the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in the 2003 war with Iraq. That conflict saw Australian and British ships operating closely together, providing fire support for Royal Marine forces ashore. The Australian commander of the naval forces in the northern Gulf operated with a fully integrated RAN-RN command staff.⁷⁶ In 1999, a British destroyer, the *Glasgow*, operated as part of an Australian-led multinational task force to cover the intervention in East Timor, while New Zealand and Canada also provided naval units. In 2001, South African Naval Forces provided assistance in the Australian apprehension of an illegal fishing vessel off Capetown after the longest 'hot pursuit' in history.⁷⁷ The Five Power Defence Agreement exercises off the coast of Malaysia continued to provide a regular meeting place for five Commonwealth navies. At the time of writing, anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean see several of the larger navies involved, although it is significant that the various deployments are not under a Commonwealth umbrella but within other alliance or partnership arrangements or as individual national efforts. Nevertheless, in an increasingly uncertain world, the opportunities for operational interaction may be becoming greater, not less.

Reflections on Relationships

It will be clear from this narrative that the history of the Commonwealth navies

⁷⁶ Captain P.D. Jones, RAN, "Maritime Interception Operations Screen Commander in the Gulf Part II 'Operations *Bastille* and *Falconer*,'" in *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, No. 110 (Spring 2003), 14.

⁷⁷ Lieutenant-Commander Trevor Gibson, RAN, "The one that didn't get away," in *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute* 27:1 (Autumn-Winter 2001), 22-25.

and their relationship with the Royal Navy is extremely complex and only partly understood. It deserves substantial scholarly attention to submit what is still a battery of questions to analysis. A subject which has received much attention in terms of the relationship between the RN and the Commonwealth services has been the extent to which the ethos of the RN was a false model for the younger nations, with their more open cultures and less rigid class systems. This is a legitimate question and there is certainly evidence to indicate that some RN attitudes were inappropriate and occasionally destructive, particularly in the very early years of the new services. Many other consequences of the ‘cloning’ of the Dominion navies, however well-meant professionally, were also less than desirable. What has yet to be resolved, however, is the extent to which the naval cultures created within each country appeared to be alien because they were *British* in origin, or whether such alienation was the result of being *naval* in nations which did not have an inherently maritime outlook.

For example, reliance upon RN training systems and immersion in RN operations took the officers of the young navies away from their homelands for many years. It is likely, although this has never been systematically analysed, that the professional standards of the small navies were maintained at the levels they were, partly because of the expertise that their people gained in RN service, through being able to operate in much more complex and sophisticated environments than was possible on their home stations. It is also arguable that being placed within the ranks of the Royal Navy created a competitive attitude amongst the members of the new services, who were determined to prove that they were as good as – and better than – the British.⁷⁸ Yet such ‘world’s best practice’ professional standards in mariner and warrior skills were developed at least partially at the expense of their connections with their own countries.⁷⁹

The difficulty was that the perception of an impressed British identity meant that the values held by the officers of the new navies were sometimes mistaken by external observers as being those of Britain and the old world,⁸⁰ rather than – as they often were – values that were intrinsically naval. The focus on professional training rather than education inherent in the Royal Navy’s curriculum also did not help in that the understanding of the young officers of the role of the navy in the maintenance of the global security and economic system upon which the entire British Commonwealth depended was essentially emotional rather than rational. “There is nothing the Navy cannot do” was deeply ingrained but rarely analysed.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Captain W.S. Chalmers, “Australia and her Navy Today,” in *The Naval Review*, XX:1 (February 1932), 35-46, see esp 44.

⁷⁹ See a Canadian analysis of this question by William Glover, “The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy,” Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert and Fred W. Crickard (eds), *A Nation’s Navy: In Quest of Canadian Naval Identity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 71-90.

⁸⁰ See for example, the comments made by T.B. Millar in *Australia’s Defence* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 168.

⁸¹ See Bill Glover’s argument on this subject in “The RCN: Royal Colonial or Royal Canadian Navy,” *op. cit.*, 71-90.

All this should not have been surprising, particularly as some of the young officers concerned did fail to make the distinction between the United Kingdom and its navy and were occasionally 'captured' by the ethos of Britain to a degree that made it difficult for them to operate comfortably in their national environments. However, it also tended to make it very difficult for them to put the naval case to national defence policy makers, particularly when they were arguing the importance of national interests as opposed to rigid concepts of territorial defence.

Ironically, the personnel of the RCN and RAN and the other Commonwealth navies – even apparently 'anglicised' officers – were always readily identifiable to the RN as being representatives of their nations and this was equally the case from the outset with the ships of the new navies, however substantial the proportion of RN or ex-RN personnel in their crews. Indeed, in an era in which mass emigration was taking place from the United Kingdom to the Dominions, it was hardly surprising that the 'new chums' from Britain should quickly identify with their chosen service and nation, just as more recent transfers do and equally successfully. The battle cruiser HMAS *Australia*'s commissioning at Portsmouth in 1913 in the presence of the great and good of Britain was informally concluded with a junior rating calling (successfully) for "Three cheers for Wallaby land."⁸² Such conscious efforts at asserting national identity were sustained throughout 1914-18, the Australian official historian describing the deployed RAN units under RN control as "primarily Australian and persistently Australian,"⁸³ and continued afterwards, sometimes to the point of breaching accepted protocols, as in the case of Captain Victor Brodeur's 1936 insistence on flying the pendant of senior national officer present afloat, as the senior RCN officer, in the presence of the British C-in-C North America and West Indies Station.⁸⁴ Such national gestures certainly occurred in the Second World War and were just as frequent with the ships of the rapidly expanding Royal Indian Navy when they operated with British forces.⁸⁵

It is thus not surprising that more recent assessments of the problems encountered by the various services should suggest that there were other causes to those difficulties than just imposed social structures and outlooks. A recent review of the 'mutinies' in the RCN in 1949 has pointed to the relatively small number of 'RN grown' personnel involved and shown that earlier assessments placed excessive emphasis on the RN-RCN linkages at the expense of issues related directly to the Canadian situation.⁸⁶ The 1946 mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy was clearly triggered by poor leadership and by the

⁸² Kathryn Spurling, "A strategy for the lower deck of the Royal Australian Navy," in Stevens, *Southern Trident*, 274.

⁸³ A.W. Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy 1914-1918, Volume IX: The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1928), 335.

⁸⁴ David Zimmerman, "The Social Background of the Wartime Navy: Some Statistical Data." In Hadley et al, *A Nation's Navy*, 257.

⁸⁵ For example, regards the RIN effort to make its presence felt at the 1937 Coronation Parade in London, see D.J. Hastings (ed.) *'Bombay Buccaneers': Royal Indian Navy* (London: BACSA, 1986), 39-40.

⁸⁶ Richard H. Gimblett, "The Post-War 'Incidents' in the Royal Canadian Navy 1949," in Bell and Elleman, *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century*, 258-259.

cultural insensitivities of British officers, not all of whom spoke their ratings' languages⁸⁷ – but it, too, involved and had causes in much wider issues than those of the RIN alone.⁸⁸

The fact is that a comprehensive analysis of this aspect must be integrated with surveys of social change and development outside navies and the military, if it is to be placed properly into the context of what were profound alterations of the social systems of entire nations.⁸⁹ One acute observer of the Australian scene in 1938 noted that “everybody” talked of “home” – even if they had never seen the United Kingdom themselves.⁹⁰ Any reader of the works of the Canadian Robertson Davies or the Australian Martin Boyd must acknowledge that their shrewd fictional studies of their societies show that the men of the Commonwealth navies were not always alone in any attitudes that they may have had to the mother country.⁹¹

The real drawbacks in the arrangement were more complex, as illustrated by the problems of officer development. In strictly professional terms, the repeated exposure to and judgement by RN standards was largely beneficial – the RAN in particular adhered for many years to the policy that an officer would not be promoted unless he had served in the RN in his current rank and been recommended for promotion according to RN standards.⁹² Given the internecine disputes amongst senior officers that occurred in both the Australian Army and the RAAF in the 1930s and 1940s, the RAN's avoidance of them must have some connection with this ability to judge by external standards. It is notable, as demonstrated by recent research, that the RCN suffered greatly from the individual rivalries of Canadian flag officers during the Second World War, a time when the Canadians were only advancing their own, despite the tiny size of the promotion pool, to meet the nationalist dictates of the Mackenzie King government.⁹³ It is also notable that such personal rivalries did emerge in the RAN in the 1950s, again in a situation when the Navy was required to look to its own, all too small cadre of senior officers for its leadership.⁹⁴ When a national officer was installed in a key post, the lack of alternatives

⁸⁷ Madsen, “The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny 1946,” 229.

⁸⁸ For an Indian perspective, including one Indian officer's comment that “it would not be proper to opt for a simplistic diagnosis and put the blame for the mutiny wrongly on this category of officers as a class,” see Rear-Admiral Satyindra Singh, *Under Two Ensigns: The Indian Navy 1945-1950* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1986), 61-80.

⁸⁹ Some of these issues are raised in “Roundtable: Reviews of Christopher McKee *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945* with a Response by Christopher McKee,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 15 (June 2003), 177-228.

⁹⁰ Arnold L. Haskell, *Waltzing Matilda: A Background to Australia* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1942), 68.

⁹¹ The author also touches on this question in “Strangers in their Own Seas? A Comparison of the Australian and Canadian Naval Experience, 1910-1982,” in Hadley et al, *A Nation's Navy*, 334.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 336.

⁹³ See Richard O. Mayne, *Betrayed: Scandal, Politics and Canadian Naval Leadership* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

⁹⁴ As an example, in 1959 the outgoing Australian CNS, Vice-Admiral Sir Roy Dowling,

sometimes meant that people were too long in their jobs. Vice-Admiral Percy Nelles clearly was, at exactly a decade before his removal from the post of Canada's Chief of Naval Staff in 1944.⁹⁵ John Collins certainly felt that seven years (1948-1955) as the head of the RAN was more than enough for himself,⁹⁶ and for the South African Navy, however talented the officer, there must have been some drawbacks in the twenty-year tenure of Admiral H.H. Biermann (1952-1972).

The real issue was that the career profile of the RN became increasingly difficult to impose upon the smaller navies. The latter organisations did not have the range of senior appointments, particularly at flag rank, to 'grow' the people needed to lead their service. Officers could find themselves serving as Deputy Chief of Naval Staff or Chief of Naval Personnel in the rank of Captain – their RN equivalents would be flag officers with at least ten years' more service to their credit. The RN, although it did its best, had only a limited ability to share senior appointments with the Dominions to assist in the development of those headed for the top.⁹⁷

The fact remained, and it was not properly addressed for many years, that the smaller navies required their officers to diversify their professional skill base into political and administrative matters earlier than did the RN. Captain Herbert Richmond summed up the challenge in 1918 when he wrote "It is hardly fair to expect officers untrained in Staff work and possibly...with a very limited experience of administration outside of ship-work to compete with the political and other difficulties extant...it would require an officer of the very greatest ability to occupy the post of Director of the [Canadian] Naval Service and he would have to be supported by a Staff of highly trained officers competent to represent their requirements unequivocally and to realise to the full what these requirements were."⁹⁸ The question would be the extent to which those

disliked Rear-Admiral D.H. Harries so much that he was unwilling to put him to Cabinet as a candidate for his successor as CNS, opting solely for Rear-Admiral H.M. Burrell. Only after pressure was put on him by his minister after soundings had been taken informally within the Navy as to the merits of both candidates was Harries' name included. In the event, Burrell was selected through the intervention of Richard Casey, the External Affairs Minister, who had been unimpressed by Harries' lack of tact and diplomatic skills in Washington during the Second World War. Source: author conversations 1993-1994 with the Honourable Fred Osborne CMG, DSC*, the then-Minister for Air and the 'sounding taker' as a naval reserve veteran on behalf of his colleague the Minister for the Navy.

⁹⁵ Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 6-7 and 264.

⁹⁶ Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins, *As Luck Would Have It* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965), 174-176.

⁹⁷ The only exchange appointment in the RN (as opposed to the loan by the RN of a suitably qualified officer) at flag rank appears to have been the appointment of Rear-Admiral G.F. Hyde as Flag Officer Third Battle Squadron from 1929 to 1931 as the precursor to his return to the RAN as Chief of Naval Staff. An exchange between the RAN and the RN for the First Naval Member and the C-in-C East Indies was proposed in the early 1950s but did not proceed.

⁹⁸ Hadley and Sarty, *Tin-Pots and Pirate Ships*, 296-297.

services might have to accept – or at least risk – a reduction in seagoing and warfighting skills to achieve such earlier diversification.

To be fair to the Admiralty, it did come to understand the difficulty. The British attitude to the development of the Indian Navy after independence, having recognised the singular failure to bring Indians early enough into the commissioned ranks, was certainly well judged. The development of the new leadership was forced as fast as it could be without compromise of professional standards and, judging from the evidence of his memoirs, Admiral R.D. Katari did not regret a moment of the eleven years that it took for him to transition from the rank of commander at Independence to vice-admiral and chief of the naval staff.⁹⁹

There was another problem, even more difficult to quantify, within the original model for naval development, whereby the RN provided senior officers to lead the new Services. These officers arrived, as often as not, with an aura of prestige and authority which allowed them to interact more effectively with local political establishments than many nationals. The three successive British Chiefs of Naval Staff in Australia between 1937 and 1948 all seem to have been successful in this way,¹⁰⁰ and one British squadron commander of the 1930s, Rear-Admiral E.R.G.R. Evans, capitalised in Australia on his own Antarctic and Great War heroics to become a national celebrity, doing much for the RAN's image. Such officers often did their best to reflect local requirements and not those of Britain. At its most extreme, this could mean the Admiralty regarding with some alarm the description by the British Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Navy in 1949 of Pakistan as "the enemy."¹⁰¹ It could also result in a British Chief of Naval Staff in Australia in 1942 being openly critical of Whitehall's mismanagement of its Far Eastern strategy.¹⁰² On the other hand, the smaller countries were not always pleased with the quality of the personnel sent out by the RN and it was also true that not all the Admiralty's selections for appointments in the Dominions actually agreed to go.¹⁰³

Apart from the challenges that imported RN officers faced in adapting to local conditions and the steep learning curves involved, a deeper problem was that their expertise and their prestige were largely lost to the navy they had led when they completed their postings. For much of the last century, there were few naval grey eminences within the retired communities of the Dominions and thus less chance of informed and responsible public comment on naval matters. By comparison, national armies possessed substantial reservoirs of potential support amongst community

⁹⁹ Katari, *A Sailor Remembers*.

¹⁰⁰ See Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin (CNS 1937-41), *Memoirs* (Duxley: Wintershill Publications, 1992), 118-121.

¹⁰¹ ADM116/5852, Undersecretary of State Minute M01679/49, 19 November 1949.

¹⁰² D.M. Horner *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 149.

¹⁰³ Pay was sometimes a problem. In 1919, two RN flag officers refused to serve as First Naval Member of the RAN and the pay had to be raised to 3,000 pounds before Rear-Admiral E.P.F.G. Grant accepted the appointment; see Hyslop, *Australian Naval Administration 1900-1939*, 93.

leaderships after both the First and Second World Wars. The relative scale of naval and military endeavours made this disparity inevitable, but not to the degree that ensued.

There was another cost. The symbiotic relationship was so effective that it delayed the growth of supporting infrastructure, both in government and industry, which the individual national navies required once the imperial bonds were weakened. This had other results in that the absence of local infrastructure also meant an absence of understanding in governments, industries and electorates of the totality of naval needs. It may also have inhibited the development of national consciousness in naval matters, particularly in relation to military strategy, by creating a perception that what was naval – or even maritime – was also inherently British and imperialist and therefore suspect to emergent nationalism. The author has elsewhere suggested that what Australia acquired in 1913 was a fleet and not a navy, and that the history of the RAN in the decades since has been one of trying to evolve into the full identity of a national navy.¹⁰⁴ To a greater or lesser extent, achieving that evolution has been the challenge for all the navies of the Commonwealth.

Yet this arrested development was understandable. The parent-child relationship was for a time a good bargain, manifested in Canada in the efforts to establish a Fleet Air Arm in the 1940s and a submarine force in the early 1960s. Australia and India had similar experiences. Neither Australia in 1948 nor India in 1961 would have been able to establish an efficient fleet air arm with the speed and facility that they did without extensive British assistance – it is salutary to compare the Commonwealth experience with the struggles of South American navies to get their carriers operational.¹⁰⁵ Capabilities of these types simply could not have been developed within the same timeframe or budget if they had not had direct British support. In other words, the Commonwealth navies for many years were able to deploy much more combat capability, much more quickly and much more effectively than would otherwise have been possible for countries of their size.

The relationship could not have been wholly one-sided. We do not understand the extent to which the Commonwealth navies influenced the RN, but they must have done so. There was always a reluctance in the UK to recognise the value of novelties ‘not invented here’ and, if recognised, to admit their origin. A few years after the Royal Navy has finally adopted the rank of substantive commodore and thirty years after the RAN did so, it is interesting to recall the snippiness with which the RCN was viewed when it took that step in the 1950s. And the truth is that many developments in which the smaller navies led the RN were drawn from the USN – the British Pacific Fleet’s rude awakening to so many American superiorities in 1944-45 had already been experienced by the Australian Squadron in 1942-43 and by the Canadians earlier still. It was certainly no accident that the RCN turned so soon to American aircraft for its light fleet carriers in

¹⁰⁴ Goldrick, “A fleet not a navy: some thoughts on the themes,” in Stevens, *Southern Trident*, 292.

¹⁰⁵ Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America: A Naval History 1810-1967* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 194-200.

preference to British types¹⁰⁶ or that the Indian Navy should seek out French ASW aircraft.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the fact that several of the Commonwealth navies exploited American technology so successfully, while retaining the fundamental organisation, doctrine and training of the Royal Navy, must have helped the latter develop a more critical attitude to its own equipment.

The free uniforms, higher pay rates and the availability of marriage allowance in the new navies certainly created significant additional pressure on the Admiralty for reform in the Royal Navy before the First World War¹⁰⁸ and may have assisted in forcing the substantial improvements in pay that were implemented in 1919. It could also be that the constant Commonwealth presence in RN ships at sea played its part in evolving social attitudes and breaking down the too-rigid class structures of the British service, adding their mite to the many other factors acting on this problem. A future RAN chief of naval staff had the experience of being told in 1938 after his exchange appointment as a lieutenant-commander in an RN heavy cruiser that he was “too familiar with the sailors.” His comment was “Perhaps I should have mended my ways, but I had no intention of doing that. In my view, the ship would have been more efficient if officers and ratings had been in closer touch.”¹⁰⁹

The Commonwealth presence in the years after 1945 may have also helped break down racial prejudices in all the navies – in particular, the shared training programs of junior officers from all over the world under RN tutelage from the 1940s onward helped greatly with what one veteran has described as their “cultural evolution,”¹¹⁰ and the ease with which integration of the young officers was achieved in the cabin flats of the naval college and the mess decks and gunrooms of the training ships must stand as a tribute to the Royal Navy of the era.

The jury is still out and historians have much more to do. Yet any survey of the last hundred years, particularly one conducted with an eye to the experience of nations not in the British Commonwealth, must lead one to the conclusion that the creation of the various navies has been extraordinarily successful. For the efforts of a century have resulted not only in the formation of more than a score of services, but a remarkable degree of shared professionalism, manifested not only in doctrine and procedures. The Canadian Rear-Admiral Fred Crickard has described this as “a transnational *operational ethic* transcending national norms.”¹¹¹ For it is a similarity of outlook in how navies

¹⁰⁶ Jan Drent, “‘A Good, Workable Little Fleet’: Canadian Naval Policy 1945-1950,” in Hadley et al, *A Nation's Navy*, 216.

¹⁰⁷ Singh, *Blueprint to Bluewater*, 140-141.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy 1900-1939: The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 30 & 59.

¹⁰⁹ Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Burrell, *Mermaids do Exist* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986), 65.

¹¹⁰ Michael White (ed.), *We were Cadet Midshipmen: RANC Entrants 50 Years On* (Queanbeyan: Grinkle Press, 2006), 98.

¹¹¹ Rear-Admiral F.W. Crickard, “Alliance Navies and National Interests: The RAN and the RCN,” in Greg Cox (ed), *Issues in Maritime Strategy: Presentations of the Royal Australian Navy Maritime Studies Program – 1994* (Canberra: RAN, 1994), 132.

should be employed that has at least partially succeeded in transcending cultural and racial barriers and which has survived into the twenty-first century. And the 'cloning' has certainly resulted, as demonstrated in two world wars and many other conflicts, in producing navies which were much more effective in military terms than such small services had any right to be.

Some aspects of this shared history, good and bad, remain significant, if little understood factors in the development of naval capability and of maritime strategy in many countries of the Commonwealth. They still need to be considered and understood, just as the Royal Navy still has its own thinking to do and adjustments to make in both its structure and its identity. The challenge for the future for all the Commonwealth navies will be to ensure that what is relevant and best in the legacy of the 1909 Imperial Conference is retained without compromising national requirements.