

problematical than that of the United Kingdom. In answer to an inquiry from Canada as to what plans the United Kingdom might have for the defence of Newfoundland in the event of war, Canada was informed that no specific measures were planned for its local defence except the despatch of six mine-sweepers at the outbreak, to be followed by anti-submarine units. As for Newfoundland's "general defence", it was contemplated that this "would rest on the cover provided by the Royal Navy". Although pressed by their military advisers the Canadian government made no reply; Coloney Stacey, the official historian of the Canadian Army in World War II, thus comments: "Military absurdity could not have gone much further".⁷

The outbreak of war in 1939, however, at once raised the contingency of Canada's participation in Newfoundland's defence. Speaking in Parliament on September 8 Prime Minister King declared that "the integrity of Newfoundland and Labrador is essential to the security of Canada"⁸ and that in contributing to the defence of Newfoundland Canada would not only be defending Canada but also assisting Britain. At the request of the Admiral of the American and West Indies station of the Royal Navy Canada undertook a reconnaissance of the Newfoundland coast in the week before Canada declared war. But before undertaking the task Canada requested permission from Newfoundland for the RCAF to fly over any part of Newfoundland or Labrador and to make use of airport facilities. To this the Governor replied promptly that Newfoundland was entirely agreeable.⁹

The Newfoundland Government was more imaginative and realistic than either London or Ottawa. As early as September 15, 1939, it cabled the United Kingdom pointing out that the new Newfoundland airport at Gander was certain to be a useful asset in the war effort, but that Newfoundland did not have the resources to make optimum use of it for war purposes. It suggested, therefore, that the airport and the seaplane base at Botwood be transferred to Canadian use and control for the duration of the war. But the proposal was shot down by the United Kingdom authorities on the ground that it would interfere with plans for civil aviation.¹⁰ Further steps looking toward closer military co-operation between Canada and Newfoundland were taken tentatively during the seven months of the "phoney war" but with no very important concrete results.

The Collapse on the Western Front in 1940

The catastrophic events on the Western front in the spring and early summer of 1940 shocked North American governments into action. In April, Norway and Denmark were occupied; in May, the Low Countries were over-run, and France was attacked and in three weeks capitulated. The French fleet had avoided capture but who could say for how long? The British expeditionary force had escaped from France but virtually

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 93.

⁸ Document 41.

⁹ Documents 36 and 38-40.

¹⁰ Documents 45 and 51.