

trade, including approaches to ports, and protection of Canada's coastline. This was a formidable assignment for Canada's tiny navy of 6 destroyers (4 on the west coast), 5 mine sweepers (3 based on Halifax, 2 on Esquimalt), 1 sailing ship used for training recruits, and 1 motor launch.³⁶ Canadian naval policy had been based on two assumptions which were rarely mentioned, that in event of war the Atlantic and Pacific approaches would be under the control of friendly powers, and that, although there were no commitments on the part of Britain or Canada, Canada would not have to fight alone, but would presumably be associated in one way or another with Great Britain.

Enemy attempts at occupation of Canadian territory might be discounted but raids against communities on the east coast by powerful new ships of the German navy, such as the so-called "pocket battle ships", were not impossible. Canada's destroyer navy would have been powerless against such raiders. Fortunately no such raids against coastal communities occurred.

Before war broke out the Royal Navy had based two cruisers on Halifax to strengthen local defence in the area and to initiate a convoy system. The RCN were early directed to co-operate to the "fullest extent" with the RN. In practice when British and Canadian ships found themselves together, they were treated as a single force under the command of the senior naval officer present, whether British or Canadian.³⁷

The Convoy System

Protection of Canadian sea trade was also beyond the capability of the RCN at the time of the outbreak of war, but the direction to co-operate "to the fullest extent" with the Royal Navy cleared the way to co-operation in escorting convoys. The experience of the first world war had amply demonstrated the necessity of convoy operations to protect trade against the then new weapon of the submarine. Convoy operations in the second war began at once. From the outset, Halifax was the assembly port for east-bound convoys—the first of which sailed out of Halifax within a week after the Canadian declaration of war, protected by two RN cruisers and two RCN destroyers. The latter, however turned back as soon as the convoy had cleared Canadian waters, while the cruisers continued to a point within protection of British bases.³⁸

In the first eight months there was virtually no submarine activity in the Western Atlantic, Hitler having banned U-Boat operations there lest it precipitate intervention by the United States. The main theatre of U-Boat activity for the time being was the approaches to British ports. But after the fall of France, French Atlantic ports gave the U-Boats direct access to the Atlantic, and meantime the German submarine fleet was being rapidly expanded. The U-Boats began to appear wherever ships sailed the broad

³⁶ Tucker, G. N. T. *The Naval Service of Canada*. Vol. 2, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1952, p. 7.

³⁷ Stacey, C. P. *op. cit.* p. 16.

³⁸ Tucker, G. N. T. *op. cit.* p. 12 and Schull, Joseph. *The Far Distant Ships (An Official Account of Canadian Naval Operations in the Second World War)*. Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1961. p. 19.