

## INTRODUCTION

### NEWFOUNDLAND IN NORTH ATLANTIC STRATEGY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

When war came in 1914, and again in 1939, Newfoundland was without military forces of any kind. Since Britain first laid claim to the Island its security had depended on British naval control of the North Atlantic. But British strategy had generally assumed that in a crisis the issue of control would be decided in European rather than in North American waters and that, as long as an enemy could be bottled up in European ports and prevented from breaking out in force to the West, Newfoundland was safe from any major attack or occupation, although in wartime it might be subject to raids. This situation might justify maintaining a token garrison in St. John's to take care of raids, but substantial garrison forces or fortified bases in Newfoundland were deemed by British military authorities to be largely superfluous.<sup>1</sup>

In 1870 the last Imperial forces were withdrawn entirely from the self-governing colonies, including the garrison of some 300 men in Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> Henceforth Newfoundland would be responsible for its own local defence. Sporadic attempts were made from time to time to establish a militia force, but without success. Under responsible government Newfoundland thus adopted by default the traditional Imperial policy of reliance on the Royal Navy for security rather than on local defence forces under its own control. Local defence forces, even a militia, in peacetime seemed a luxury that Newfoundland could not afford.

The Newfoundland people, however, remained deeply conscious of their ties with the mother country and proud of being Britain's oldest colony. In each world war Newfoundland promptly offered a contingent and made its major efforts overseas rather than in home defence. In both wars Newfoundland military units were integrated with the British Army and had distinguished battle records, especially in the Somme Battle of the First War when the Newfoundland Regiment suffered dreadful casualties.<sup>3</sup> In both

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, G. S. *Newfoundland in British Strategy from Cabot to Napoleon in Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies*. Edited by R. A. MacKay, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1946. p. 245-264.

<sup>2</sup> Stacey, C. P. *The Withdrawal of the Imperial Garrison from Newfoundland in Canadian Historical Review*. 1936. 1(2): p. 147-158.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson, G. W. I. *The Fighting Newfoundlander (A History of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment)*. St. John's, Government of Newfoundland, 1964. 614 p. and *idem. More Fighting Newfoundlanders (A History of Newfoundland's Fighting Forces in the Second World War)*. St. John's, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1969. 621 p.