

THE PERMANENT JOINT BOARD ON DEFENCE CANADA - UNITED STATES

Fourteen years ago, on August 18, 1938, Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Kingston, Ontario, and was awarded an honorary degree by Queen's University. This was the year when the miasma of Munich pervaded the air of Western Europe; in Canada and the United States, the belief that the insulation of geography gave adequate protection to the Western Hemisphere was still widely held. Accordingly, when Mr. Roosevelt, in his convocation address, made the first formal commitment of the United States to aid in the defence of Canada by stating "I give you assurance that the people of the United States will not stand idly by if domination of Canadian soil is threatened by any other Empire", his declaration was acclaimed for its boldness and significance.

Prime Minister King made a statement of equal importance to Canadians in a speech two days later, when he said: "We, too, have our obligations as a good friendly neighbour, and one of them is to see that, at our instance, our country is made as immune from attack or possible invasion as we can reasonably be expected to make it, and that, should the occasion ever arise, enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way, either by land, sea, or air to the United States, across Canadian territory."

The Ogdensburg Declaration

It is an interesting historical coincidence that two years to the day, and indeed almost to the minute, after the Kingston speech, Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. King emerged from the President's private car at Ogdensburg, New York, and gave to the waiting press a statement that later became known as the Ogdensburg Declaration:

The Prime Minister and the President have discussed the mutual problems of defence in relation to Canada and the United States.

It has been agreed that a Permanent Joint Board on Defence shall be set up at once by the two countries.

This Permanent Joint Board on Defence shall commence immediate studies relating to sea, land and air problems including personnel and material.

It will consider in the broad sense the defence of the north half of the Western Hemisphere.

The Permanent Joint Board on Defence will consist of four or five members from each country, most of them from the services. It will meet shortly.

The Ogdensburg Declaration was greeted with general enthusiasm on both sides of the border, although in some American quarters doubts were expressed about the effect such an association with a belligerent country would have on the status of the United States as a neutral power, and one Canadian newspaper made the comment that concern over the lack of North American defence facilities should not blind Canada to the fact that its first line of defence lay with the Canadian forces in Britain.

In its establishment, the PJBD benefited by the traditions developed over the years by the International Joint Commission and organized itself along similar lines in two sections, Canadian and American, each with a chairman and secretary. The first Canadian chairman was Oliver Mowat Biggar, a distinguished lawyer who had served as Judge Advocate General of the Canadian forces during the First World War. He was succeeded, in 1945, by General A. G. L. McNaughton, who continues to serve in this capacity.