

wars, because of the Royal Navy's control of the North Atlantic, Newfoundland, although possessing no defence forces at the outset, had time both to organize for despatch of forces abroad and to organize a militia for home defence.

But it was becoming increasingly evident well before the war, or should have been, that Britain's historic Atlantic strategy no longer sufficed and that in the rapidly developing air age Newfoundland was acquiring a new strategic importance. Experimental transatlantic flights usually began or ended there and as early as 1935 it was agreed between Britain, Canada, Newfoundland and Ireland that a regular transatlantic air service should be established as soon as facilities were available. Britain agreed to construct an airfield for land planes at Gander Lake and a flying boat base at Botwood.⁴ Newfoundland subsequently agreed to meet part of the British costs. The first flying boat arrived at Botwood in 1937 and the first wheeled plane touched down at Gander just before the outbreak of war in 1939.⁵ Although the primary purpose of the new airports was the promotion of civil aviation, none could long deny that they had military significance.

The Approach of War

Meantime, the international situation was deteriorating rapidly and Canadian defence authorities were becoming concerned over their lack of information about British plans for the defence of Newfoundland and adjacent waters in the event of war. In 1937 the Chiefs of Staff sent forward to their Minister a memorandum pointing out that the defence of Canada's east coast area and that of Newfoundland were inseparably linked, that no good purpose was served by treating the defence of Newfoundland and the defence of Eastern Canada separately, and that the steel industry at Sydney, Nova Scotia, which produced some thirty percent of Canada's steel, was dependent for its ore on the mines at Bell Island in Conception Bay. The memorandum suggested that the problem of Newfoundland's defence should be discussed at the forthcoming Imperial Conference scheduled for later in the year, but such a discussion was not held, probably because of Prime Minister King's well known reluctance to be drawn into commitments on Imperial defence.⁶

One difficulty that had to be overcome before effective co-operation for the defence of Newfoundland could be achieved was that Newfoundland, having given up responsible government at least temporarily, had in effect reverted to the status of a crown colony whose defence and external relations were the responsibility of the United Kingdom government. Hence official communications between St. John's and Ottawa normally went through London. Moreover, in London the security of Newfoundland seemed much less

⁴ Document 1038.

⁵ Fraser, A. M. *A History of the Participation of Newfoundland in World War II*. Ottawa, Department of National Defence (Manuscript held in the Directorate of History HQ 1453-1 (D3)), n.d. p. 98.

⁶ Document 3 and Stacey, C. P. *Arms, Men and Governments (The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945)*. Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1970. p. 92-93.