

CHAPTER I

CANADA AT WAR

The Outbreak of War

On 28 JUNE 1914 an assassin's bullet struck down the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. The incident, occurring at a time when a dangerous tension strained the relations between the two armed camps into which the great powers of Europe had grouped themselves, precipitated the devastating conflict which we have come to call the First World War.

The slaying took place at Sarajevo, capital city of Bosnia, a Balkan province which Austria after thirty years of occupancy had formally annexed in 1908. The plotters were allegedly agents of a Serbian secret society, and on 23 July Austria, seizing the opportunity to end the "Greater Serbia" movement which she saw as a threat to the prestige, if not the very existence, of the Dual Monarchy, presented a harsh ultimatum whose demands Serbia could not possibly accept and retain her national sovereignty. Austria hoped to crush Serbia in a purely local war, but in view of Russia's known encouragement of Serbian ambitions, she had taken the precaution of obtaining Germany's assurance of support in the event of a wider conflict. With only forty-eight hours allowed for her answer Serbia immediately appealed to Russia for help, at the same time seeking advice from France, Britain and Italy. She replied to the ultimatum in most conciliatory terms, proposing that the matter be settled by arbitration. But Austria found in the reply enough reservations to break off diplomatic relations at once, and three days later, on 28 July, she declared war.

One by one the major powers were drawn into the conflict - although there is strong evidence that not one of them wanted a general war, and Britain in particular made genuine efforts to prevent one. Germany, committed by the defensive alliance in which she had joined Austria-Hungary in 1879 (which the addition of Italy three years later had made the Triple Alliance), must bear the responsibility of initially giving Austria a free rein. A week after the assassination an Austrian emissary seeking advice in Berlin had received a "blank cheque" from the German Emperor. The decision to enter hostilities was left to Vienna, but the Kaiser assured the Austrian ambassador that in the event of war Germany would stand by Austria's side "with her accustomed faithfulness as an ally".¹ Subsequently Germany, believing that the Austro-Serbian conflict could be localized, made belated efforts to bring Austria to mediation as Russia

moved towards mobilization. These attempts, if indeed they were genuine, proved ineffective. Although Russia was not anxious to fight, in keeping with her frequent encouragement of her Slav protégé she took the momentous decision on 30 July of ordering a general mobilization - a measure which by European states was considered tantamount to a declaration of war. A German demand that these warlike preparations cease brought no reply, and on 1 August Germany declared war on Russia. Five days later Austria followed her ally's lead; but Italy, the remaining partner of the Triple Alliance, remained neutral until May 1915, when she entered the war on the opposing side.

Since 1894 Russia had been linked with France in a defensive pact directed against the Central European powers. Britain had no actual alliance with either country. Early in the twentieth century, however, she had been led to forsake her "splendid isolation" when the German Fleet Law of 1900 called for "a battle fleet of such strength that even for the most powerful naval adversary a war would involve such risks as to make that Power's own supremacy doubtful"? The resulting Anglo-French Convention of 1904 (the *entente cordiale*) and a similar agreement with Russia in 1907 had set the stage for close political cooperation between the three nations. Although the Triple Alliance was thus confronted by a "Triple Entente", German statesmen in July 1914 believed that their war plans need take into account only Russia and France. These plans, as we shall see, called for simultaneous hostilities against both countries, with an initial offensive in the west. Accordingly the German ultimatum to Russia was matched by a demand that France declare her intentions. The reply was given before the deadline on 1 August: "France will act in accordance with her interests."³ Each nation issued mobilization orders that afternoon, and at 6:15 p.m. on the 3rd, alleging several hostile French acts, Germany declared war on her ancient rival.

During the critical days that followed the Sarajevo assassination, Great Britain had made repeated efforts to preserve peace. Her Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, successively proposed direct conversations between Vienna and St. Petersburg; mediation in those capitals by Germany, Italy, France and Britain if Austria and Russia should mobilize; and a conference of the ambassadors of these four powers in London to seek a peaceful settlement. All these proposals came to nothing, as in each case the various powers, with the exception of Britain and Italy, either gave an outright rejection, or countered with alternative proposals, or delayed answering until too late. Even after Austria's declaration of war on Serbia there was considerable opposition within the British Cabinet to participation in a European war; but on 30 July Grey received from the German Chancellor, Dr. Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, a proposal that did much to change the Government's "overwhelmingly pacific" attitude.⁴ This was a strong bid for Britain to remain neutral, accompanied by a virtual admission that Germany intended to violate Belgium's neutrality - to respect which Germany, France and Britain were pledged as signatories of a treaty of 1839.

The proposal was summarily rejected, but on 2 August the German Minister to Brussels presented an ultimatum demanding agreement to a German advance against France through Belgian territory. The Belgian Government “firmly resolved to repel by all means in its power every attack upon its rights”, and King Albert asked for French and British aid. The British Government was now assured that the House of Commons would support a policy of resistance to Germany, and on the morning of the 4th, as news came of a German violation of Belgian soil, Sir Edward Grey sent an ultimatum giving Berlin until midnight to withdraw her demands on Belgium. In an interview with the British Ambassador Bethmann-Hollweg deplored the terrible step taken by His Majesty’s Government, that “just for a scrap of paper Great Britain was going to make war on a kindred nation who desired nothing better than to be friends with her.”⁵ The time limit passed without a satisfactory reply.

Britain was at war with Germany.

Canada Supports Great Britain

When a quarter of a century later the Second World War broke out, the Canadian Government was firmly committed to a policy of not involving the country in hostilities without first consulting Parliament. As a result, in 1939 Canada formally remained “neutral for one week after the declaration of war by Britain”.⁶ In 1914, however, seventeen years before the enactment of the Statute of Westminster, Canada’s constitutional position within the Empire gave her little share in formulating foreign policy and none in declaring war or making peace. She found herself at war through the action of the British Government. “She had not been consulted; she had herself made no declaration of war; and she had in no way taken part in the diplomatic exchanges which had led to the final catastrophe.”⁷ Like her sister Dominions, however, Canada reserved the right of deciding what form her participation should take. That her contribution would be whole-hearted and generous there was never any doubt. Thus it was possible on 1 August for the Governor General, Field-Marshal H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, to cable the Secretary of State for the Colonies his Government’s firm assurance

... that if unhappily war should ensue the Canadian people will be united in a common resolve to put forth every effort and to make every sacrifice necessary to ensure the integrity and maintain the honour of our Empire.⁸

Canada’s position had been made clear on various recent occasions by her leading statesmen. In January 1910 Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister, declared in the House of Commons, “When Britain is at war, Canada is at war. There is no distinction.”⁹ The Leader of the Opposition at the time, Sir Robert Borden, had expressed himself in similar vein, and now on the eve of war pronouncements in the daily press made it clear that the whole country accepted this view.

The Canadian Parliament was not in session, having been prorogued on 12 June. On 30 July members of the Cabinet still in Ottawa met to consider the

European situation and on 31 July the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, returned to Ottawa from an interrupted holiday in Muskoka. Other Cabinet Ministers who were away reassembled in the capital without delay. During the tense days which preceded the fateful decision preliminary steps were taken for safeguarding the country and for ensuring the most effective means of furnishing aid to the Empire. A second cablegram to the Colonial Office on 1 August sought “any suggestions and advice which Imperial Naval and Military authorities may deem it expedient to offer” and intimated that “a considerable force would be available for service abroad”. Word that war had broken out with Germany was received in Ottawa at 8:45 p.m. on the 4th, and published in a Canada Gazette extra next day. Although Canada had not needed Parliamentary consent to be at war, her law provided, as her Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Frederick Borden, had put it at the Colonial Conference of 1907, “that if it is desirable to contribute a force to Imperial defence abroad, Parliament shall be called together”¹⁰ Accordingly Parliament was immediately summoned to meet in emergency session on 18 August.

With the tension of uncertainty past a great wave of loyal demonstrations surged across Canada. The enthusiasm of crowds in the Montreal streets singing “La Marseillaise” and “Rule Britannia” was matched by the stirring spectacle of the the impromptu parades, waving of flags, processions of decorated automobiles, and impassioned speeches with which every western city from Winnipeg to Victoria received the news of war.¹¹ This outward display of patriotism quickly passed, as thoughtful Canadians, facing the grim realities of war, foresaw the awful possibilities that lay ahead. Yet it had been no idle outburst of sentiment. A statement in the Toronto Telegram of 6 August was to be proved remarkably correct: “The men who have cheered the loudest will be among the first to offer their services.” From all parts of the country came applications from officers, men and whole regiments volunteering for active service, so that a considerable force was assured even before war was declared.

The importance of taking full advantage of this national enthusiasm was fully realized. On 4 August the Governor General cabled London:

Great exhibition of genuine patriotism here. When inevitable fact transpires that considerable period of training will be necessary before Canadian troops will be fit for European war, this ardour is bound to be damped somewhat. In order to minimize this, I would suggest that any proposal from you should be accompanied by the assurance that Canadian troops will go to the front as soon as they have reached a sufficient standard of training.

The Canadian Militia before 1914

What was the nature of the resources from which an unmilitary nation like Canada could furnish an organized body of troops for service overseas? She had a small Permanent Force of regular soldiers. Its statutory strength, set at 750 in 1883, had been increased from time to time until in 1905, when the decision to abandon Halifax and Esquimaltas Imperial naval bases led to the withdrawal of

the last British troops in Canada, it reached a maximum of 5000. This quota, however, was never fully recruited. A limited establishment was set each year, its numbers determined by the amount of the annual Parliamentary vote, but even with this reduction it was often found difficult, because of more attractive conditions in the labour market, to obtain sufficient recruits.¹² For the fiscal year beginning 1 April 1914 the total authorized establishment of the force was 3110 all ranks and 684 horses.¹³ It then comprised two regiments (each of two squadrons) of cavalry - the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse; the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery with two batteries, and the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery with five companies; one field company and two fortress companies of engineers; one infantry battalion - The Royal Canadian Regiment; together with detachments of the various service and administrative corps. The Permanent Force's main peacetime functions were to garrison the fortresses on either coast and assist in training the militia.

Although lacking a large standing army ready for immediate action, in her Non-Permanent Active Militia Canada had the basis of the contingents that she must mobilize when the need should arise. The past decade had seen a steady increase in the strength and efficiency of this force of citizen soldiers. Between 1904 and 1913 the number of men undergoing annual training had grown from 36,000 to 55,000, an expansion that had been matched by marked improvement in organization and training. Just before the end of the previous century Major General E. T. H. Hutton, one of the last British soldiers to serve as General Officer Commanding Canadian Militia, had reported that the condition of the militia force of Canada was "unsatisfactory in the extreme", it being "but a collection of military units without cohesion, without staff and without those military departments by which an army is moved, fed, or ministered to in sickness".¹⁴

That was in 1898, and General Hutton and his successors had set about creating a "militia army"-a balanced force of all arms with the necessary administrative services, sufficiently well trained and equipped to make a worthwhile contribution in emergency. The South African War provided the occasion for Canada for the first time to send a military contingent overseas. A battalion was raised from volunteers supplied by 82 different militia units, and about 150 men of the Permanent Force. It sailed for Cape Town in October 1899 as the 2nd (Special Service) Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry (which became The Royal Canadian Regiment on 1 November 1901), and performed creditably at the Battle of Paardeberg. It was closely followed by a second Canadian Contingent consisting of two battalions of Mounted Rifles and a brigade of field artillery. Other units were sent later, the total Canadian contribution numbering more than 8000 (including a battalion provided for garrison duty at Halifax). The participation of these troops in the war spurred the interest of the Canadian public in its military forces. There was justifiable pride in the award of four V.Cs. to Canadians.* Not only did the militia benefit from the experience gained in South

Africa, but a precedent had been set for Canadian military participation in future conflicts beyond her shores.

Following the South African War an improved system of administration brought reforms and development. The increasing government support given to Sir Frederick Borden as Minister of Militia (1896-1911) and his successor, Sir Sam Hughes, is demonstrated by the rise in the Militia expenditures from three millions at the turn of the century to \$11,000,000 for the fiscal year ending 31 March 1914.¹⁵ An Army Service Corps was set up in 1901, to be followed within three years by the organization of a Corps of Engineers, an Ordnance Corps, a Signalling Corps and a Medical Corps.

In 1904 the post of General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, which (by law) had been held by officers of the British Regular Army since 1875, was virtually abolished after the Canadian Government had relieved Lord Dundonald of his position at the instance of the Minister of Militia. A new Militia Act (1 November 1904) continued to provide for a Commanding Officer of the Militia but on an optional basis -though the provision remained on the Statute books for the next forty-six years the position was never filled.

Considerable though the contribution by the eight British commanders had been, serious differences of opinion had arisen between at least two of the G.O.Cs. and the Minister of Militia. Most of the trouble may be attributed to the absence of a clear-cut division between the responsibilities of the civil and military branches of the Militia Department. The Militia Act entrusted the G.O.Cs. with the "military command and discipline of the Militia", and the British Generals were inclined to place a more liberal interpretation upon this clause than the Ministers. Having come to Canada owing allegiance to neither political party, the former considered that their role was to bring about the greatest possible improvement in the organization and training of the Militia. And so they issued orders and made decisions on their own responsibility, giving no heed to the possible effect on domestic politics. Inevitably friction occurred with certain Ministers who felt that the G.O.Cs. were exceeding their powers and should subordinate themselves to the Government they were temporarily serving.

The void left by the abolition (in practice) of the G.O.C. was filled by the 1904 Militia Act's establishment of a Militia Council, composed of the Minister as President; four Military Members (the Chief of the General Staff, Adjutant General, Quartermaster General and Master General of the Ordnance); a Civilian Member (the Deputy Minister); a Financial Member (the Accountant of the Department of Militia and Defence); and a civilian Secretary. Its duties were "to advise the Minister on all matters relating to the militia which are referred to the Council by the Minister".¹⁶ Unlike the Army Council in the United Kingdom on which it was based, which assumed the powers previously exercised by the

* One of these was won by Lieutenant R.E.W. Turner, who in the First World War rose to the rank of Lieutenant General and the command of all Canadian forces in the British Isles.

Secretary of State for War or the Commander-in-Chief,¹⁷ the Militia Council was purely advisory. The Minister was now supreme, the Government's senior military adviser, normally the Chief of the General Staff,* becoming the first Military Member of the Council. With this change in the management of Militia affairs public quarrels between the Ministers of the day and their principal military officers became a thing of the past, and a period of at least outward tranquillity began.

Imperial Military Ties

We have already noted that Canada had not bound herself by any formal commitment to furnish troops for Imperial defence overseas. Yet it was never in question that she would send forces to the aid of the Mother Country in an emergency, and the need of preparing to meet this demand was to stimulate the growth of her militia and direct the course of its development. From the Imperial viewpoint it was obviously desirable that there should be a high degree of coordination within the Empire's military forces, and much was accomplished in a series of Imperial Conferences. The representatives of the various parliaments quickly made clear their opposition to any "departure from the principle of Colonial self-government"; the Colonial Conference of 1902 decisively rejected a War Office proposal that Dominions should maintain local contingents earmarked for Imperial wars (Canada's quota would have been one brigade of field artillery and one infantry brigade—a total of 3000 men).¹⁸ An important step forward was taken when the 1907 Conference proposed the creation of an Imperial General Staff selected from the forces of the Empire as a whole. It would study military science and disseminate to the various governments military information and intelligence, prepare schemes of defence, and "without in the least interfering in questions connected with command and administration" give advice, when requested, on matters of training and organization.¹⁹

Two years later, delegates to a special Imperial Defence Conference, meeting in London with the shadow of war upon them, proceeded to lay "the foundation of a workable system which will enable us, should necessity arise, to employ the potential military strength of the Empire for a common Imperial purpose".²⁰ They agreed on a number of measures to secure general uniformity throughout the Empire in such matters as war organization, administration, training, armament and equipment. The organization of units of the Dominion forces was to be modelled as far as possible on the War Establishments[†] of the Home Regular Army; any contingent despatched by a Dominion for Imperial service overseas would be accompanied by a due proportion of administrative

* There was one exception. Maj-Gen. P.H.N. Lake (C.G.S. 1904-8) was Chief Military Adviser to the Government from November 1908 to October 1910 in addition to performing the duties of Inspector General, Brig-Gen. W.D. Otter, a Canadian, was C.G.S. at the time; held this appointment from April 1908 to October 1910.

† Tables showing the authorized composition of a unit upon mobilization, expressed in numbers and ranks of personnel, and number and types of weapons and transport.

units; as far as practicable each Dominion would take into use the Field Service Regulations and training manuals issued to the British Army (and would be consulted with respect to amendments in subsequent editions); and Dominions would adopt as far as possible Imperial patterns of arms, equipment and stores.

The Conference approved the principle of an Imperial General Staff with branches in all self-governing Dominions; except for a few special cases, only Staff College graduates were to be eligible to hold appointments on this General Staff. During 1909 the War Office suggested that, as a temporary measure, the Canadian Section of the Imperial General Staff should consist of six military positions, including the Commandant and two officer-instructors at the Royal Military College (which had been established at Kingston in 1876 to provide a military education to young men desiring to obtain Commissions in the Canadian Militia). In the meantime, despite the objections raised by the War Office, Canada decided to proceed with the formation of a purely Canadian General Staff from which officers would be selected to form the Canadian Section of the Imperial General Staff. Although appointment to the Canadian General Staff was not dependent upon the attainment of any definite standard of military qualifications, it was ruled that no officer would be posted to an appointment on the Canadian Section of the Imperial General Staff unless he was a Staff College graduate or had served with credit on the staff of a force in the field.

The Conference of 1909 had other practical results for the Canadian Militia. More officers went to the United Kingdom to qualify as General Staff Officers at the Camberley Staff College; an interchange of officers began with Great Britain, Australia and India; Militia Headquarters undertook to organize the additional Corps and Line of Communication services required to complete divisional establishment; and mobilization schemes were prepared for the defence of Canada and for an Overseas Expeditionary Force.

Further progress followed the visits, at Canada's invitation, of two eminent British soldiers - in 1910, Sir John French, Inspector General of the Imperial Forces, and in 1913 Sir Ian Hamilton, Inspector General of the Overseas Forces. On the recommendation of the former officer the Militia in Eastern Canada was reconstituted on a divisional basis, to provide for ready conversion to a wartime footing. The ten eastern Military Districts became Divisional Areas,* in which were organized six infantry divisions and four cavalry brigades. The Districts in Western Canada continued to exist, and provided for three cavalry brigades. It was necessary to obtain six General Staff Officers from the United Kingdom for appointment to the new Divisional Areas (as well as one for all Western Canada), for Canada was still sadly short of officers thus qualified, having only twelve Staff College trained officers of her own when war broke out in 1914.

Sir Ian Hamilton's chief concerns were with bringing the actual strength of the Active Militia (43,000 in 1913 closer to its peace establishment (60,000);

* The Divisional Areas were renamed Military Districts by a General Order dated 1 March 1916.

raising the general standard of training; and building up stocks of equipment, clothing, ammunition and reserve stores for issue on the outbreak of war. Though Sir Ian found some improvement in training since Sir John French's inspection, he insisted that there was no room for relaxation of effort. The chief limitation was the brevity of the annual training. The period authorized for city corps of the Active Militia was sixteen days, of which at least four days had to be spent in summer camp. Rural units, however, did all their training in twelve days at camp, and Sir Ian urged that this should be supplemented by four days of concentrated local training. Furthermore, the increase in personnel had outstripped the provision of the tools of war, so that it had been necessary to equip new regiments from the stores intended for use in the mobilization of older units. The 200 modern guns available in Canada would arm the artillery of only two divisions, and motor vehicles and horsedrawn transport wagons were almost entirely lacking. There was insufficient clothing for even the Militia's peace strength, and much of this was old and obsolete.²¹

The prospect of increasing artillery stocks in the near future was not good, for being dependent upon English sources of supply Canada had to compete with the War Office in getting her orders filled from British factories. She had long since taken steps to correct a similar situation with respect to small arms. In 1900, when arms manufacturers in the United Kingdom were working at capacity to make good in the British Army the wastage of the South African War, the Canadian Minister of Militia had found it impossible to place an order for 15,000 .303-inch Lee-Enfield rifles -to supplement 40,000 of these arms purchased in 1896. The Government therefore decided that Canada should make her own rifles; and when attempts to have a British company manufacture the Lee-Enfield in Canada failed, a contract was signed for the production in the Dominion of a .303 rifle designed by Sir Charles Ross-even though this meant a departure from the principle of uniformity of armament within the Commonwealth. A factory was built by the Ross Rifle Company on ground adjoining the historic Plains of Abraham at Quebec City, and the Militia received the first 1000 rifles in 1905. Defects natural in a new and unproved weapon soon appeared, and the rifle underwent a number of modifications (more than eighty in the Mark II pattern alone). Although successes gained by Canadian marksmen at Bisley using the Ross brought the rifle a high reputation as a target weapon, complaints of defects continued to come in from the training camps and the relative merits of the Ross and the British Lee-Enfield for service in the field became the subject of a widespread controversy in Press and Parliament. By the time that manufacture of the Mark III pattern began late in 1911, the barrel had increased from 28" to 30-1/2" in length and the total weight of the rifle from 7-1/2 to 9-1/2 pounds. This was the pattern authorized for the Canadian Militia when war broke out. By 30 July 1914 12,200 had been delivered out of orders totalling 30,000. Production was stepped up to capacity, and another 30,000 rifles were ordered on 10 August.

* For the detailed story of the Ross rifle see Appendix 111 to Colonel A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the War, 1914-1919, General Series, Vol. I* (Ottawa, 1938).

On the Eve of War

Although all the recommendations of the British Inspectors General were not implemented immediately, their timely reports contributed to the outburst of activity that took place in the Militia organization in the three years before the outbreak of war. The man chiefly responsible for this upsurge was Colonel (afterwards Honorary Lieutenant-General Sir Sam) Hughes, who on the defeat of the Laurier administration in 1911 had taken over the portfolio of Militia and Defence from Sir Frederick Borden. Continually warning the Canadian parliament and people of the grave threat of war with Germany, he secured an increase in the defence budget of three and a half million dollars between 1911-12 and 1913-14. An enthusiastic champion of Imperial defence, he is reported as telling a Vancouver audience in 1912: "Germany has to be taught a lesson, and the lesson to be taught her is that Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand are behind the Mother Country."²² In 1912 and again in the following year he conducted a party of Canadian militia officers to Europe to tour north-western France and attend the annual manoeuvres staged by the British, French, German and Swiss armies. In the summer of 1914 he ordered a mixed force of more than 10,000 militiamen to concentrate at Petawawa, Ontario (which had been acquired as a central training camp in 1905). There they carried out combined manoeuvres which more closely achieved active service conditions than any held in Canada since the Fenian disturbances half a century before. In all 59,000 troops carried out training in Canada that year, and but for the outbreak of war the total would have reached 64,000.²³

The authorized establishment of the Canadian Militia in July 1914 (as distinct from actual strength) was 77,323 all ranks, distributed as shown in the following table:²⁴

Arm of Service	Permanent Active Militia		Non-Permanent Active Militia	
	Personnel	Horses	Personnel	Horses
Cavalry.....	346	265	12,146	10,615
Artillery, Horse and Field.....	254	267	4,172	2,481
Artillery, Heavy.....	---	---	602	388
Artillery, Garrison and Siege.....	656	53	1,554	6
Engineers and Signals.....	314	6	2,196	523
Corps of Guides.....	---	---	499	379
Officers Training Corps.....	---	---	595	---
Infantry.....	793	12	47,691	690
Army Service Corps.....	164	55	1,927	937
Army Medical Corps.....	101	26	2,136	607
Other Corps and Services*.....	482	---	695	100
Totals.....	3,110	684	74,213	16,726

* Included in the "Other Corps and Services" were veterinary, ordnance, pay and postal personnel, together with a number of miscellaneous detachments employed in instructional and administrative duties.

But if the years immediately before the war found Canada's land forces progressing under the direction of an enthusiastic Militia Department, the condition of her naval service was far less satisfactory. (There was no air force; in 1909, the year of the first aeroplane flight in Canada, the Militia Council had witnessed demonstration flights at Petawawa, but a very limited Canadian military flying service was not organized until after war broke out.) The naval defence of Canada had suffered from a failure of the political parties to agree on a common policy. In the early years of the twentieth century, when other members of the Commonwealth were contributing increasing amounts to the support of the Royal Navy, the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, opposing such subsidies as contrary to the "principle of Colonial self-government", gave nothing. At the Colonial Conference of 1902 Laurier announced that the Dominion was "contemplating the establishment of a local Naval force in the waters of Canada".²⁵

Yet from 1902 to 1909 nothing was done to implement this policy. In the latter year the Canadian House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution approving "the speedy organization of a Canadian naval service in co-operation with and in close relation to the Imperial Navy". The Naval Service Act of the following year authorized a Canadian Navy, to be controlled by a Minister of Naval Service who was also Minister of Marine and Fisheries. Two old cruisers, H.M.C.S. Niobe (1897) and H.M.C.S. Rainbow (1891), were purchased from the Admiralty to be used as training ships, and tenders were invited for the construction of four light cruisers and six destroyers for the Royal Canadian Navy. In 1909 the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Robert Borden, supported Laurier's resolutions, and in 1910 he claimed that he still favoured a Canadian Navy as a long-term policy. The defeat of the Laurier administration in the 1911 general election, however, produced a reversal in policy.

Nevertheless the growing crisis in Europe changed Borden's views and led him to take emergency measures. Inspired by a secret Admiralty opinion "that no step which Canada could take at the present time would be so helpful to the British Navy, or so likely to put a stop to dangerous naval rivalry, as the provision of capital ships for general Imperial service",²⁶ he forced through a bill voting up to \$35,000,000 for the construction of three Dreadnoughts for the Royal Navy. The measure did not pass the Liberal-controlled Senate -which suggested an appeal to the country. As a result nothing was done about an Imperial contribution and very little about the rudimentary Canadian naval organization founded by Laurier. The contracts for the additional warships had never been awarded, and at the end of 1912 all recruiting for the Royal Canadian Navy stopped and men were allowed free discharge before their term of engagement was completed. By 3 August 1914 the strength had sunk to 393 officers and ratings (including members of the newly formed Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve and personnel on loan from the Royal Navy). H.M.C.S. Rainbow, on the west coast, had not raised steam since March 1913, and Niobe, which had stranded on Cape Sable in July 1911, had been caught by the new naval policy before being completely repaired and had not put to sea again.

Mobilization Plans and Defence Preparations

For some years after its institution the Militia Council, occupied with the task of enlarging and reorganizing the Militia, had found neither the funds nor the trained personnel to undertake the arduous and intricate work of drawing up a plan for mobilizing its armed forces. Eventually there emerged almost simultaneously two different schemes -one for the general mobilization of the Militia, and one for providing a limited force for service abroad. In 1911 a British General Staff Officer, Colonel W. G. Gwatkin, was secured from the War Office to head a mobilization committee which had begun drafting the previous year under the chairmanship of the Chief of the General Staff, Brig.-Gen. W. D. Otter. By 1914 plans were well advanced for transferring from a peace to a war footing the six divisions of the militia so far as their incomplete organization and deficiencies in arms and equipment would have permitted. At the same time, under instructions from Otter's successor, Major-General C. J. Mackenzie, a British officer, Gwatkin drew up plans for mobilizing for active service overseas a Canadian contingent consisting of a division and a mounted brigade.

Under this scheme each divisional area and district would contribute its quota of troops, in general the six divisional areas in Eastern Canada furnishing the units for the infantry division and the three western military districts providing the mounted brigade. Service in the contingent would be voluntary, with preference given to men with previous service or military training. Divisional and district commanders -upon whom the plan placed much responsibility -selected their own "places of assembly" (to be approved by Militia Headquarters), whence the troops after partial mobilization would move to Petawawa, which was chosen as the "place of concentration". If mobilization should take place in winter, units would be fully mobilized at their place of assembly and thence proceed direct to the port of embarkation. One of the principal defects of the scheme was its failure to provide for adequate mobilization stores. We have already noted the difficulty in obtaining sufficient stocks for the existing Militia, and it was ruled that there should be no accumulation of reserve supplies for the use of an entirely problematical overseas force. Notwithstanding this and other deficiencies (no Line of Communication units were included), the scheme did supply a considered plan for the provision of troops on a fair ratio throughout the Dominion for a contingent of the same strength as that subsequently mobilized in 1914.²⁷

The preparation of mobilization plans formed only a part of the concern of those charged with the responsibility of ensuring Canada's readiness for war. The military action to be taken when war threatened had been prescribed in a defence scheme drawn up in 1898 and elaborated in local mobilization plans. In that year the British Government, acting upon a request made by the Canadian Government, appointed a defence commission to investigate the Dominion's defence problems, prepare a defence scheme, and make recommendations as to the military organization best suited to Canadian conditions. The commission was composed of an officer of the Royal Navy, three British Army officers

(including Major P.H.N. Lake, who in 1904 was to become Canada's first Chief of the General Staff) and two Cabinet Ministers representing the Canadian Government.²⁸ During its five-month tour of duty the commission consulted forty prominent Militia officers,²⁹ and at the end of the year submitted two comprehensive reports, "No I - Defence Scheme", and "No II - Recommendations". Although never formally approved by the Canadian Government (in April 1903 the Governor General admitted to the Colonial Office that pressure of work during the past three years had deferred consideration of the reports by the Privy Council),³⁰ "Report No I" remained the accepted Defence Scheme for Canada until after the First World War. It does not appear ever to have been formally revised, though the Colonial Defence Committee in London had suggested that this be done annually and a revised Defence Scheme passed to it for information and comments. Despite this omission there is little doubt that the existence of the Scheme was of great assistance to officers charged with the responsibility of mobilization planning. From 1908 defensive measures affecting both the Department of Militia and Defence and the Department of Marine and Fisheries (e.g., the regulation of traffic of defended ports and the construction of floating defences) were dealt with by an Interdepartmental Committee representing these two ministries. (The new Department of the Naval Service was added after 1910.)

In the non-military field arrangements for coordinating the defensive action to be taken by the several Government departments in the event of war were completed much later. At the beginning of August 1912 the two service chiefs, reminding their respective ministers that it had "become increasingly apparent during the past two years that the machinery for the Defence of Canada lacks a directing head", presented them with proposals for setting up a Canadian Defence Committee. These recommendations pointed to the dependence of other ministries upon the Naval and Militia Departments, and stressed the importance of having "a practical organization to coordinate the often conflicting claims of strategy, commerce and finance". The proposed committee would be headed by the Prime Minister and would include the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Ministers of Militia and Defence, Naval Services, and Finance, as well as the Chief of the General Staff and the Director of the Naval Service. Among the questions which the Government could refer to such a committee would be those dealing with the whole military and naval defence policy of the Dominion; cooperation with the Imperial Forces; the strategical location of fortresses and dockyards, the construction of railways and canals, and the conservation of national resources; and coordination of action between the Government Departments in times of emergency.³¹

These recommendations however did not pass the two ministers, in spite of the urgings of their senior officers. Indeed, as late as 1 July 1914 Colonel Gwatkin, who had become C.G.S. the previous October, wrote (apparently to the Governor General's office - the file copy of the letter bears no address), "With a little persuasion the Premier, I think, would take a step in the right direction and appoint himself President of a Canadian Defence Committee; but I give you

solemn warning that unless you stimulate us into activity, we shall merely drift.”³² Many years later another C.G.S., holding similar views, was more successful. In August 1936 there came into being a Canadian Defence Committee (subsequently referred to as the Defence Committee of the Cabinet) whose composition and functions closely followed the proposal which had been shelved almost a quarter of a century before.³³

Action was finally taken as a result of a strong recommendation received in March 1913 from the Overseas Defence Committee in the United Kingdom that Canada, in common with the other self-governing Dominions, should compile a “War Book”, similar to the one drawn up by the Imperial Government, showing the precise steps to be taken in time of emergency by each Department of State.³⁴ An Interdepartmental Conference at which seven departments were represented held its first meeting in January 1914, and with commendable energy completed its assignment in six months. The War Book defined the tasks to be undertaken by each department in the “Precautionary Stage” - when relations with any foreign power had become so strained that measures against a possible surprise attack were necessary - and for the further measures required upon the declaration of war. The delay in establishing the Interdepartmental Conference had left so little time for its work of compiling the War Book that its final deliberations were interrupted on 29 July by the arrival from London of the warning telegram ordering the adoption of the Precautionary Stage.

Fortunately preparation of the individual War Books of the Departments of Militia and Defence, Naval Service and Customs - the Departments most concerned at the time - had been completed, and the action outlined in them was taken “without delay or hitch of any kind - everything working smoothly”.³⁵ Prearranged measures were put into effect without delay. Immediate steps were taken to guard wireless stations and cable landings, man the fortresses at Halifax, Quebec and Esquimalt, and establish an examination service at these three ports. To perform these tasks the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery and The Royal Canadian Regiment were placed on active service, and in each of the two coastal military districts details of infantry and garrison artillery were called out from the Non-Permanent Active Militia. On 2 August the Minister of Militia took over control of cables and the Minister of the Naval Service control of wireless telegraphy; both these channels of communication at once came under a strict censorship. A personal letter from Colonel Hughes to the Press of Canada appealing for the exercise of “wise reticence upon matters affecting military operations” was followed by formal instructions on security sent to all newspapers by the Deputy Chief Censor. Without waiting for Parliament to meet, the Governor General in Council enacted a number of emergency measures to regulate finance, trade and commerce, and to preserve good order throughout the country.

The Department of the Naval Service in keeping closely in touch with the Admiralty followed the British lead by placing the Canadian permanent naval forces and the Naval Volunteer Force on active service on 4 August. On the same day H.M.C.S. Niobe and Rainbow were put at His Majesty’s disposal “for

general service with the Royal Navy”,³⁶ a disposition that was to continue throughout the war, with all charges being borne by Canada. At the Admiralty’s request the 3600-ton *Rainbow* had steamed bravely out of Esquimalt early on the 3rd “to guard trade routes north of the Equator”, and specifically to escort to safety two British sloops without wireless (*Algerine* and *Shearwater*) which were working north from San Diego. After her long period of neglect the *Rainbow* was in no condition to engage in hostilities. She had barely half her proper complement (many of whom were untrained), and no high explosive shells. The main enemy threat came from the modern light cruiser *Leipzig*, which was reported in Mexican waters. The *Rainbow* reached San Francisco on 7 August but was compelled to return to Esquimalt to refuel, luckily without having encountered the German warship. The *Shearwater* was found on the 13th and the *Algerine* on the following day and both were brought safely to Esquimalt.³⁷ Their crews went by train to Halifax to join H.M.C.S. *Niobe*, which by 1 September had completed a hasty refit and was ready for duty with other units of the Royal Navy on the Atlantic Patrol.

Speedy action to augment Canadian naval strength at the outbreak of war took place on the west coast, where between 29 July and 5 August negotiations to purchase two submarines were initiated and completed, and delivery of the vessels effected – all within a week. The acquisition of the submarines, which had been privately built at Seattle for the Chilean Government, owed much to the initiative of the Premier of British Columbia, Sir Richard McBride, who, while Ottawa was urgently seeking the Admiralty’s advice on whether or not to buy, on his own responsibility provided the purchase price of \$1,150,000 from provincial funds, which the Federal Government repaid three days later.* The two craft, redesignated C.C.1 and C.C.2, were based at Esquimalt for nearly three years, carrying out patrol work and training duties. In 1917 they moved by way of the Panama Canal to Halifax, where they remained until the war ended.

Apart from calling out the military units and detachments referred to above there was no large-scale mobilization while the outbreak of hostilities was still in the balance. On the fateful 4th, a few hours before word of the declaration of war reached Ottawa, the Canadian Government was advised by London that there seemed to be “no immediate necessity for any request on our part for an expeditionary force from Canada”, although it would be wise “to take all legislative and other steps” which would enable such a force to be provided without delay if required later.³⁸ Two days later a signal brought the grateful acceptance of His Majesty’s Government of the Canadian offer to send a force, and asked that it “be despatched as soon as possible”. On 7 August the Army Council advised that “one division would be suitable composition of expeditionary force”.³⁹

* The intriguing story of this unusual transaction is related in detail in the Navy’s official history, G.N. Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, Vol. I, Chapter 13.