

# 'A Tempest in a Teapot': Canadian Military Planning and the St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair, 1940-1942

Martin F. Auger

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[See table of contents](#)

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## ‘A Tempest in a Teapot’: Canadian Military Planning and the St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair, 1940-1942

THE SMALL FRENCH COLONY OF ST. PIERRE AND MIQUELON, located some 32 kilometers off the south shore of Newfoundland, was a source of great concern for the Canadian government during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> When Nazi Germany defeated France in June 1940, the fate of the French Empire became uncertain. Canada and other Allied countries feared that French colonies might be used by the Germans to conduct military operations against them. The proximity of St. Pierre and Miquelon to Canada and the British colony of Newfoundland constituted a major threat. Negotiations immediately ensued between the American, British and Canadian governments as to the future of France’s territories in the Western Hemisphere. The main argument was whether or not the French islands needed to be occupied by Allied military forces. The issue, however, was solved in December 1941 when the Free French movement of General Charles de Gaulle sent a small naval task force to rally the archipelago to the Allied cause. Most historians who have analyzed the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair of 1940 to 1942 have focused upon the Free French takeover. Although some historians have studied Canada’s role in the affair from a diplomatic perspective, none have provided an in-depth analysis of Canadian military planning during this crisis.<sup>2</sup> It is now clear that Canada undertook significant planning to launch an invasion. An understanding of the details of Canada’s invasion plan and the ultimate decision to postpone military action illuminates the changing structure of Canada’s relations with Great Britain and the United States.

The islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon are located in the Cabot Strait west of Newfoundland’s Burin Peninsula. They have a total area of only 242 square

1 I want to thank Jeffrey Keshen, Sacha Richard and Brian Villa of the University of Ottawa as well as the anonymous readers of *Acadiensis* for their insightful comments

2 The most important study of the St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair is Douglas G. Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941 – A Study in Diplomacy in the North Atlantic Quadrangle* (Toronto, 1970 [1966]). This book was re-published recently under the new title *Free French Invasion: The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941* (Calgary, 1999). Other related works include: William Hanna, “La Prise de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon par les Forces de la France Libre: Noël 1941”, *Revue d’Histoire de l’Amérique Française*, 16, 3 (December 1962), pp. 369-87; J. Mackay Hitsman, “St-Pierre and Miquelon during the Second World War”, manuscript, 1959, Army Headquarters Report 79, Department of National Defence, Directorate History and Heritage [DHH]; Martin Thomas, “Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere: The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941”, *The International History Review*, 19, 4 (November 1997), pp. 809-35; David B. Woolner, “Storm in the North Atlantic: The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941”, M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1990.

kilometers and consist of three main islands: St. Pierre, Grande Miquelon and Langlade – also known as Petite Miquelon. The archipelago is the remnant of France's old North American Empire. Under the terms of the 1763 Treaty of Paris, which was signed in the immediate aftermath of the Seven Years War, France was granted permission to retain St. Pierre and Miquelon as compensation for the loss of New France. Great Britain insisted, however, that the islands be demilitarized and used solely for fishery purposes. It is important to note that possession of St. Pierre and Miquelon offered France privileged access to the prolific fisheries of the Grand Banks. Despite the removal of the British military restrictions twenty years later, Great Britain and France assured each other of their determination to prevent St. Pierre and Miquelon from becoming "an object of jealousy between the two nations". Although French sovereignty was challenged on several occasions over the years, St. Pierre and Miquelon remained virtually undefended on the eve of the Second World War, possessing neither fortifications nor a garrison. The French colony's population of approximately 4,400 depended almost entirely on French maritime power for security. Administered by the *Ministère des Colonies* in Paris in conjunction with a local governor and administrative council, St. Pierre and Miquelon always maintained a strong sense of loyalty to metropolitan France.<sup>3</sup> Never was this faithfulness more tested than when German armed forces invaded northern France in early June 1940.

The sudden defeat of the French armies, which was followed by the conclusion of an armistice with Nazi Germany on 22 June 1940, came as a shock throughout the French Empire. Concerns over the future of France's overseas territories increasingly divided colonial governors between those anxious to fight on and support the Free French movement of General Charles de Gaulle, which had been created in London on 18 June, and those loyal to the new French government of Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain, established in Vichy, Central France. When Governor Gilbert de Bournat of St. Pierre and Miquelon recognized the legitimacy of the Vichy government, Allied authorities became worried. The problem was that Vichy France, although neutral in theory, was nothing more than a German satellite. The Allies feared that the new regime in France might eventually collaborate militarily with Nazi Germany. The pro-Vichy attitudes of the colonial administration in St. Pierre and Miquelon meant that Canada and Newfoundland, at war against Germany since early September 1939, suddenly faced a potentially hostile territory almost within sight of their shores.<sup>4</sup>

The Canadian government perceived St. Pierre and Miquelon as a threat for several reasons. At the time of France's capitulation, Ottawa was becoming more and more preoccupied with the fate of European possessions in the Western Hemisphere and feared that Nazi Germany might use the overseas territories of recently conquered countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and France to conduct military operations

3 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 3-15; E. Aubert de la Rue, *Saint-Pierre et Miquelon* (Montreal, 1944), pp. 9-11, 184-90; Georges Hardy, *Histoire de la Colonisation Française* (Paris, 1943), p. 315; C.P. Stacey, *The Military Problems of Canada – A Survey of Defence Policies and Strategic Conditions Past and Present* (Toronto, 1940), p. 19.

4 Denise Bouche, *Histoire de la Colonisation Française Tome Second – Flux et Reflux (1815-1962)* (Paris, 1991), pp. 351-2; Hanna, "La Prise de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon", pp. 370-1; William F. Rannie, *Saint Pierre and Miquelon* (Lincoln, 1972), p. 85; Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War, 1940-1945* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 44, 134.

against the Allies. With German submarines roaming the North Atlantic, the Canadian government began to consider the possibility that the enemy might use St. Pierre and Miquelon as an advance base. The French colony's proximity to Canada and Newfoundland could offer German submariners an excellent position to re-supply and coordinate attacks upon Allied convoys. The Canadian authorities were also concerned with the presence in the islands of the old 1,200-ton French armed sloop *Ville d'Ys*, which local authorities used to patrol the Grand Banks. The fact that Vichy France operated a warship so close to Allied shipping lanes was deemed to be intolerable by Ottawa.<sup>5</sup> Tension arose as well over St. Pierre and Miquelon's role in terms of intercontinental communications. The problem was that the colony was able to communicate with metropolitan France by means of its short wave wireless transmitting station, transatlantic cables and the high-powered radios aboard French deep-sea fishing trawlers operating along the Grand Banks. Ottawa feared that Vichy supporters in the archipelago could transmit vital information to France and inform German submarine crews about meteorological conditions, the movements of Allied warships and the progression of convoys. There was also the possibility that the islanders might tap or cut some of the transatlantic cables that passed near St. Pierre and Miquelon. Finally, the Canadian government became alarmed over the issue of the fisheries. There was great concern over the fact that local fishery products could be sent to Germany through France and, therefore, contribute to the enemy's war effort.<sup>6</sup> Thus it quickly became clear to Canadian officials that the French islands were now part of the larger struggle for the North Atlantic.

The government of Newfoundland was the first to suggest an immediate invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon. As early as 19 June 1940, Newfoundland authorities asked London for permission to take over and administer the French islands. As a British colony, Newfoundland had to obtain British approval and military support before undertaking such an action. The thinking behind this bold proposal was both strategic and economic. St. John's saw in the fall of France an opportunity to eliminate, once and for all, the historic rivalry that existed between Newfoundland and St. Pierre and Miquelon over Grand Banks fisheries. An annexation of the French colony, it was believed, could assure the dominance of the Newfoundland fishing industry in the region. It could also prevent Canada and the United States from being tempted to occupy the islands for the duration of the war and to transfer to themselves the cause of constant irritation that Newfoundland had historically endured because of their

5 Rear-Admiral P.W. Nelles, Chief of the Naval Staff – Royal Canadian Navy, to O.D. Skelton, Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 4 July 1940, External Affairs Documents [EAD], no. 573, in David R. Murray, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8* (Ottawa, 1976), p. 727. See also Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington D.C., 1960), pp. 44-8; Stanley W. Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada, 1939-1945* (Washington D.C., 1959), pp. 142-157; Jean Mauclère, *Sous la Flamme de Guerre* (Paris, 1946), pp. 115-7.

6 Memorandum from the Chief of the Naval Staff to the Minister of National Defence, 1 July 1940, EAD, no. 574, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 728.; Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Ministers, 21 August 1941, RG 24, reel C- 8366, file 8625, National Archives of Canada [NA]. See also Hitsman, "St-Pierre and Miquelon during the Second World War", p. 16; William L. Langer, *Le Jeu Américain à Vichy* (Paris, 1948), p. 224.

possession by France. For these reasons, Newfoundland wanted to act first.<sup>7</sup>

London declined Newfoundland's proposal for immediate action. Instead, the British recommended that Newfoundland should work out with Canada what forces might be needed to occupy the islands should the need ever arise. Upon receipt of these instructions, L. Edward Emerson, Newfoundland's Commissioner for Justice and Defence, went to Ottawa to discuss the issue with Canadian officials and assert his government's claim to primacy. On 27 June 1940, Emerson told O.D. Skelton, Canada's Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, that "the collapse of the French government makes it necessary for the governments of Canada and Newfoundland to consider the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon as a possible source of danger to the Allied cause" and that "we must therefore be prepared for the possibility of taking over the general administration of the islands". Emerson further warned that "it must also be borne in mind that the islands may not willingly submit to any treatment no matter how diplomatically it is suggested and that a force for occupation may have to be provided". Emerson wanted Canada to back up Newfoundland's initiative with such financial and military assistance as was required; in other words, Canada would invade the islands and Newfoundland would govern them.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Newfoundland's request, Canada's War Cabinet refused to prepare such an action for fear of offending the American State Department, which, it was believed, might interpret such an act as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>9</sup> The Canadian government did not want a repetition of the problems encountered in early April 1940 when Washington vigorously opposed Ottawa's intention to send a military expedition (Force "X") to occupy Greenland in the immediate aftermath of Germany's invasion of Denmark. Canada wanted to take over the Danish colony to prevent it from falling into German hands and to protect the cryolite mines at Ivigtut, which were essential for Canadian aluminum production. The United States, on the other hand, was extremely anxious that "no action of this kind be taken by Canada since it might offer an excuse to other large countries for taking over colonial territories of occupied European countries". At the time, the Americans were particularly concerned with Japanese aggression and expansionism. They maintained that such an action might incite Japan to invade European or even American possessions in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Preparing an occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon, Ottawa believed, would likely trigger another jurisdictional incident with the United States. Besides, as Commander F.L. Houghton, Director of Plans Division, explained in a memorandum: "These islands would be of little use to Canada or the

7 David MacKenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle – Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland Into Confederation, 1939-1949* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 73-4; Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Montreal, 1988), p. 134.

8 Memorandum from Newfoundland Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 27 June 1940, EAD, no. 570, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 723-5.

9 Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 27 June 1940, RG 2, reel C-11,789, files 1, 7c, NA.

10 Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada*, pp. 149-55; C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments – The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa, 1970), pp. 367-70; C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict – A History of Canadian External Policies, Volume 2* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 308-9.

enemy; better submarine or surface craft bases existed on the south coast of Newfoundland and could easily be occupied by the enemy". The Canadian government's decision not to intervene, however, was not unanimous. On 29 June, for instance, C.G. Power, Canada's Minister of National Defence for Air, told Jay Pierrepont Moffat, American Minister to Canada, that "if he had his way, Canadian troops would occupy it [St. Pierre and Miquelon]".<sup>11</sup>

Between 29 June and 1 July, Raymond Gushue of the Newfoundland Fisheries Board went to St. Pierre and Miquelon to investigate the situation. Gushue found the islanders despondent over the stunning defeat of France and expecting a takeover by some neighboring government. Their preference in this regard was to become part of the United States, an outcome which many believed would benefit the islands more than association with Canada and Newfoundland. In his report, Gushue sided with the British and Canadians and argued against Newfoundland's scheme to seize the islands. Such action, he emphasized, would be unwise in view of the legacy of bitterness, which remained from the decades of rivalry between the British and the French colony. According to him, the citizens of St. Pierre and Miquelon "would rather fight than be associated with Newfoundland".<sup>12</sup>

Tensions rose on 3 July 1940 when a British naval squadron attacked an important part of the French fleet anchored in the port of Mers-el-Kébir near Oran in Algeria. This action was done to prevent the French vessels, which included the modern battleships *Dunkerque* and *Strasbourg*, from falling into German hands. The French suffered more than 1,500 casualties. Vichy France's response was immediate: French aircraft bombed the British in Gibraltar, French warships were instructed to intercept British merchantmen and fire upon them at the least provocation and orders were given not to allow British ships within twenty miles of French coasts.<sup>13</sup>

As a state of undeclared war developed between Great Britain and Vichy France, the governments of Canada and Newfoundland became alarmed with the situation of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The Newfoundland authorities reacted immediately by banning all ships from sailing to the French islands. The presence in the French colony of the armed sloop *Ville d'Ys* contributed to such a decision. On 4 July 1940, Sir Humphrey Walwyn, Governor of Newfoundland, wrote O.D. Skelton that, "in view of latest information . . . we feel increased apprehension as to the position of St. Pierre and would like to suggest that suitable naval and military action should be taken to prevent the islands or French vessels there from hostile action against us or British shipping". That same day, Canadian Rear Admiral Percy W. Nelles, Chief of the Naval Staff, suggested that "in view of the action which is being taken against the French Navy in various parts of the world", the British cruiser H.M.S. *Caradoc* or one

11 Memorandum from Chief of the Naval Staff to Minister of National Defence, 1 July 1940, EAD, no. 574, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 728; Nancy Harvison Hooker, ed., *The Moffat Papers: Selection from the Diplomatic Journals of Jay Pierrepont Moffat, 1919-1943* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 315-6.

12 Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World*, p. 134.

13 Paul Auphan and Jacques Mordal, *The French Navy in World War II* (Annapolis, 1959), pp. 122-39; Adrienne Doris Hytier, *Two Years of French Foreign Policy – Vichy, 1940- 1942* (Paris and Geneva, 1958), pp. 51-64.



Canadian destroyer attack the *Ville d'Ys* in its harbor at St. Pierre.<sup>14</sup>

The United States took the deteriorating situation with Vichy France very seriously. On 5 July 1940, Moffat met with Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and expressed the American government's desire that Canada undertake no unilateral military occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon or other non-British European dependencies in the Americas. Washington was well aware that London was putting increasing pressure on Ottawa to be responsible for the protection of British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. Canadian troops were already garrisoning Bermuda (Force "B"), Jamaica (Force "Y") and Newfoundland (Force "W"), and were helping the British defend Iceland (Force "Z"). Within the next months, Canadian military detachments would also be deployed to Labrador (Force "G"), the Bahamas (Force "N") and British Guiana. There would even be plans to send garrisons to the Falkland Islands (Force "F") and to British Honduras. The Americans in general had no problem with this arrangement as long as Canada protected only British possessions, although they were concerned with Great Britain's desire to have Canada send a garrison to protect the important oil refineries located on the Dutch West Indian island of Aruba off Venezuela, which had been occupied by a Franco-British contingent since the fall of the Netherlands in May 1940. Occupying the overseas territories of other European countries without their approbation, as would be the case with an invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon, was deemed unacceptable in Washington.<sup>15</sup> In the end, Mackenzie King refused to authorize a Canadian takeover of St. Pierre and Miquelon and agreed to consult with the United States before taking any military action in the western hemisphere.<sup>16</sup>

Instead, the Canadian government resorted to diplomacy and attempted to negotiate with Governor de Bournat and the French authorities in St. Pierre and Miquelon. A joint delegation composed of J. Hubert Penson, Newfoundland's Commissioner of Finance, and Commander J.W. Rouër Roy of the Royal Canadian Navy visited St. Pierre from 17 to 20 July. The aim of the mission was to obtain a guarantee that the islands would not be available for enemy use and to discuss the role of the *Ville d'Ys* and de Bournat's relationship with the Vichy government. The outcome was most promising. The St. Pierre and Miquelon authorities agreed that the islands would not be used for any purpose by the enemy and guaranteed that they would advise Canada of any enemy activity in the area. But the French authorities refused to accept Commander Roy's suggestion that the *Ville d'Ys* join the Royal Canadian Navy or be interned in a Canadian or American port. They did, however, guarantee that the French warship would not be employed in any manner hostile to

14 P.W. Nelles to O.D. Skelton, 4 July 1940, EAD, no. 573, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 726-7; Governor of Newfoundland to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 4 July 1940, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA; Governor of Newfoundland to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 10 July 1940, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

15 Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, p. 156; C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War – The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa, 1966), pp. 83-6, 178-82.

16 Memorandum re. Prime Minister's Interview with Mr. Moffat, 5 July 1940, William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries, MG 26, J-13, fiche T-150, NA. See also Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada*, pp. 142-3; Hooker, *The Moffat Papers*, pp. 322-3.

British or Canadian interests.<sup>17</sup>

The Canadian government was satisfied with the mission. The St. Pierre and Miquelon authorities had responded to almost all of the Canadian concerns and Ottawa perceived this as a sign of friendship. The French colony no longer seemed to be a threat, at least for the moment. Contributing to this change of attitude was a hemisphere defence agreement reached by the United States and twenty Latin American republics at the Organization of American States conference in Havana on 27 July 1940. Taking into account the imperative need for continental security, these countries agreed to an inter-American provisional administration of European possessions in the Western Hemisphere that were threatened with transfer from one non-American state to another. The details of this arrangement were listed in the so-called Act of Havana which stated that one or more American countries, subject to the overriding control of an Inter-American Committee for Territorial Administration composed of representatives of each of the twenty-one American republics, could intervene in European colonies whenever necessary to prevent changes in sovereignty.<sup>18</sup>

Although Canada was not invited to the Havana Conference, the Canadian government welcomed the inter-American trusteeship plan, for it discouraged Nazi Germany from gaining control of European territories in the Western Hemisphere. The conference both relieved Canada of the need to garrison non-British European possessions such as Aruba and helped to install a sense of continental security in Ottawa. It also made a unilateral invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon by Canada even less feasible. On 1 August 1940, Loring Christie, Canadian Minister to the United States, gave American Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles assurance that, in spite of the Act of Havana, "the Canadian government had announced it had no intention of interfering either with the administration or status of the islands". Christie added, however, that "if any danger should arise as regards St. Pierre and Miquelon particularly, the Canadian government have assumed that this would be a matter of immediate interest to the United States and in that event would be glad to consider any means by which Canada could cooperate in any necessary defensive provision".<sup>19</sup>

Another reason that persuaded Ottawa to take no action against St. Pierre and Miquelon was the Ogdensburg Agreement. The fall of France and the mounting

17 Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, 17 July 1940, EAD, no. 583, R. Ristelhueber, Minister of France, to William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, 20 July 1940, EAD, no. 586 and Joint Report on Visit to St. Pierre, 17-20 July 1940 by Commander J. Rouër Roy – Royal Canadian Navy, 22 July 1940, EAD, no. 589, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 734-5, 736-7, 740-4; Gilbert de Bournat, Governor of St. Pierre and Miquelon, to J.W. Roy, Commander – Royal Canadian Navy, 20 July 1940, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

18 Fitzroy André Baptiste, *War, Cooperation, and Conflict – The European Possessions in the Caribbean, 1939-1945* (New York, 1988), pp. 38-49; Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada*, pp. 143-4.

19 Loring C. Christie, Canadian Minister to the United States, to O.D. Skelton, 1 August 1940, EAD, no. 602, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 758; "The Relation of the Act and Convention of Havana Adopted at the Second Consultative Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the American Republics, July 1940, to Possible Canadian Occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon", 21 June 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.



German threat to Great Britain forced the Canadian government to reconsider Canada's own defences in the summer of 1940. The obvious solution was to look to the United States for help. On 17 and 18 August 1940, Mackenzie King met with American President Franklin D. Roosevelt at Ogdensburg, New York, to nail down a continental defence pact. The two leaders agreed to establish a Permanent Joint Board on Defence, which would be responsible for coordinating joint defence planning between the two countries. This new accord bound Canada and the United States in matters of defence cooperation. Government officials in Ottawa feared that a unilateral Canadian military occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon might jeopardize the new agreement.<sup>20</sup>

The Canadian government was also less inclined to intervene in the affairs of St. Pierre and Miquelon for fear of offending French Canadians. The conservative, pro-Catholic Vichy regime, and its support of *Travail, Famille, Patrie*, appealed to numerous conservative French Canadians. For many, Vichy represented the legitimate government of France. Mackenzie King was particularly worried that French Canadians might interpret an invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon as "evidence of Anglo-Saxon arrogance and lack of sympathy with Vichy". This, he believed, could cause serious political controversy in Canada.<sup>21</sup>

Still, Canada's Joint Planning Committee of the Armed Services secretly studied the possibility of invading St. Pierre and Miquelon. The Committee had been working on such a scheme since 6 July 1940. Its conclusions were integrated into a 1 August 1940 secret report which stipulated that:

If it is the intention of the Canadian government to take over the administration of these islands, the Committee are of the opinion that the following action will be necessary: Take over the French sloop [*Ville d'Ys*] by the use of a superior naval force, order her into Halifax or other British port in order to prevent her carrying out any hostile action against us or from falling into the hands of the enemy. The Committee further recommends that this operation should be assisted by a flight of bomber reconnaissance aircraft. . . . If it is found that it will be necessary to station troops in the islands from the point of view of internal security the Committee considers that the maximum number of troops which might be employed would not exceed one company of infantry.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, the presence of the *Ville d'Ys* in the French colony was regarded as a problem in Canadian military circles. The issue was solved on 9 September 1940

20 James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada, Volume II: Appeasement and Rearmament* (Toronto, 1965), pp. 208-10; J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire – Canadians and the Second World War, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 32-3; Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto, 1992), p. 186.

21 Éric Amyot, *Le Québec entre Pétain et de Gaulle – Vichy, la France Libre et les Canadiens Français, 1940-1945* (St. Laurent, 1999), p. 329; John MacFarlane, *Ernest Lapointe and Quebec's Influence on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto, 1999), pp. 160-8.

22 Joint Planning Committee, "Memorandum on the Action Necessary for the Acquisition of the French Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon", 1 August 1940, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

when the islands' authorities decided to send the warship to Fort-de-France (Martinique) where the French Western Atlantic naval squadron of Admiral Georges Robert, Vichy High Commissioner for the French territories in the Western Hemisphere and commander in chief of the French Western Atlantic naval force, was located. This decision, however, was delayed until early November due to serious political unrest in St. Pierre and Miquelon.<sup>23</sup>

The fact was that a large proportion of the local population supported the Allies and the Free French movement of General de Gaulle. According to the British Vice-Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon, crowds would often demonstrate on the piers against the presence of the Vichy warship in the colony. The situation reached its climax on 15 September when a group of demonstrators reacted violently to the action taken by the crew of the *Ville d'Ys*, who had apparently prepared an anti-aircraft gun for action with the apparent intention of firing at the two Royal Canadian Air Force B-18 Digby reconnaissance-bombers which had been flying low over the islands. The small riot was quelled when the officers of the *Ville d'Ys* turned fire hoses and searchlights on the demonstrators and set up a cordon of armed seamen around the pier, but the situation demonstrated the existence of pro-de Gaulle sentiments on the islands. As a result, the British government began to consider that it might be desirable to have General de Gaulle proceed with arrangements for his supporters to take over the administration of St. Pierre and Miquelon in a *coup d'état*.<sup>24</sup> The Canadian government felt somewhat differently. According to O.D. Skelton: "It is not considered that action such as has been suggested . . . is, under present circumstances, either necessary or advisable."<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, the British government was becoming increasingly concerned with the disposition of France's Grand Bank fishing fleet which was seeking shelter and safety in the port of St. Pierre. Some thirty vessels in all had taken refuge, including twelve modern trawlers. The British were determined to prevent their return to France with their cargoes of fish, which amounted to about 20,000 tons. This, it was believed, was enough to meet half of France's annual domestic requirements of fish products and could, therefore, constitute a substantial contribution to the enemy war effort if marketed in Germany. But when the British suggested on 18 October that the Royal Canadian Navy seize and detain twelve French off-shore fishing trawlers based at St. Pierre, Skelton responded that he "did not understand the ground on which we would be warranted in taking feasible action to seize these vessels". He added: "We

23 Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland, 9 September 1940, EAD, no. 612 and Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs to Canadian Minister to the United States, 4 November 1940, EAD, no. 639, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 769-70, 802.

24 High Commissioner of Great Britain to Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 23 September 1940, EAD, no. 614 and British Foreign Secretary to Ambassador of Great Britain in the United States, 19 October 1940, EAD, no. 625, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 771-2, 786-8; Memorandum by Archibald R. Bartley, British Vice-Consul at St. Pierre and Miquelon, 16 September 1940, RG 24, vol. 11,955, file NFM 1-16-1, NA. See also Maurice Martin du Gard, *La Carte Impériale – Histoire de la France Outre-Mer, 1940-1945* (Paris, 1949), p. 227; Jean-François Muracciole, *Histoire de la France Libre* (Paris, 1996), p. 55.

25 O.D. Skelton to High Commissioner of Great Britain, 11 October 1940, EAD, no. 618, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 777-8.

are not at war with France and do not wish to create an incident that would allow others to put on our shoulders the responsibility of the outcome. There were people in London who would not hesitate to have us take the blame for the policy they were themselves devising".<sup>26</sup>

Evidently, Ottawa was irritated at the British for proposing actions that threatened to undermine Canada's achievement in securing de Bournat's de facto neutrality. Before the British could decide how to respond to the Canadian decision, many of the fishing trawlers began leaving St. Pierre and Miquelon for Vichy-controlled ports. Much to the British admiralty's annoyance, only two were intercepted by the Royal Navy. Most of the other trawlers managed to reach France, where they fell into German hands.<sup>27</sup> The situation clearly demonstrated how Canada wished to promulgate an image of non-intervention in regards to St. Pierre and Miquelon. The incident reminded Canadian statesmen of the *Émile Bertin* affair of late June 1940, when London instructed Ottawa to take "any action however strong" to prevent the French cruiser *Émile Bertin*, which carried an estimated \$300 millions in gold belonging to the Bank of France, from leaving Halifax. Fearful of "how the Americans would feel in seeing Canada firing on a French ship" and how French Canada would react to such an act, the Canadian government refused the British request; in the end, the French warship left Canada unscratched and sailed for Martinique.<sup>28</sup>

When Marshal Henri-Phillippe Pétain met with Adolf Hitler at Montoire on 24 October 1940 to discuss collaboration between Vichy France and Nazi Germany, the Allies grew more worried. They feared that France might help Germany militarily. Precautions had to be taken in regards to all French possessions, including St. Pierre and Miquelon.<sup>29</sup> As historian C.P. Stacey wrote in 1940:

Canada has no reason to wish to possess Saint-Pierre and Miquelon herself, but she has every reason to wish to prevent them from becoming bases for a possible aggressor. . . . Concern for her own security will oblige her to keep a vigilant eye upon Saint-Pierre and Miquelon.<sup>30</sup>

On 28 October 1940, Skelton requested Mackenzie King "to consider what action should be taken regarding St. Pierre and Miquelon in the event of a rupture [with Vichy France]". Mackenzie King replied that discussion should immediately be undertaken with the United States as to the "general lines of the action to be taken in the event of the Government of France adopting an actively hostile policy".<sup>31</sup>

26 O.D. Skelton to Ernest Lapointe, Acting Prime Minister of Canada, 18 October 1940, EAD, no. 622 and Memorandum from O.D. Skelton to the Mackenzie King, 21 October 1940, EAD, no. 628, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 784, 789-90.

27 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 41-50; Thomas, "Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere", p. 815.

28 Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, pp. 300-1.

29 Hytier, *Two Years of French Foreign Policy*, p. 164.

30 Stacey, *The Military Problems of Canada*, pp. 20-1.

31 Memorandum from O.D. Skelton to Mackenzie King, 28 October 1940, EAD, no. 635 and O.D. Skelton to Loring C. Christie, 30 October 1940, EAD, no. 636, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 796-8, 798-9.

Consequently, Loring Christie met with Sumner Welles in Washington on 1 November 1940 to discuss a hypothetical invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon. During their conversation, Welles mentioned that in principle he recognized "Canada's special concern regarding these islands" and also "that it would be desirable to arrive at a joint policy between Canada and the United States". He also thought that utilizing the Permanent Joint Board on Defence at some stage in the proceedings might turn out to be an excellent one. Welles added that "if the United States were to agree to an occupation of the islands by Canada and were subsequently charged with consenting to a violation of the Act of Havana, it could reasonably contend that the Act did not apply to the action taken by Canada since Canada is an American nation". As he explained: "The proper interpretation of the Act is that it applies only to transfers from a European state to a non-American state, and that it therefore does not apply to a transfer of sovereignty over St. Pierre and Miquelon to Canada, much less to a temporary occupation of the islands by Canada".<sup>32</sup> In the end, no action was undertaken against the French colony as it became clear that the Vichy regime was not yet ready to provide military assistance to the Germans. Consequently, the issue of St. Pierre and Miquelon ceased to attract the attention of the Allied powers.

In the spring of 1941, however, St. Pierre and Miquelon returned as an issue in Canadian war planning as a result of two developments. One was the intensification of the Battle of the Atlantic and the other the concessions made by the Vichy government to the Germans throughout French Africa and the Middle East. Early in 1941, German surface raiders began operating in the Northwestern Atlantic. Between January and March, for example, the battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* attacked convoys off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The arrival of the battleship *Bismarck* in the Western Atlantic in late May caused even greater concern in Allied naval circles. Adding to the problem was the increasing presence of German submarines in the region, which resulted in a dramatic rise of shipping losses. An immediate result of this was the establishment of the Newfoundland Escort Force in early May 1941 to provide greater anti-submarine protection for convoys. Based in St. John's, the warships assigned to this naval force operated under Canadian command and eventually came to include Free French vessels.<sup>33</sup>

While this occurred, Vichy France began collaborating militarily with Germany. Between April and May, for instance, the Vichy authorities allowed German troops into Syria and other French possessions, agreed to supply military equipment to General Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps* in North Africa and permitted German submarines operating in the South Atlantic limited access to the port of Dakar in French West Africa. The long-standing fears of Vichy collaboration with Nazi Germany had now become reality. In light of these developments, Canadian officials became increasingly worried over the possibility that St. Pierre and Miquelon might

32 Loring C. Christie to O.D. Skelton, 1 November 1940, EAD, no. 637, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 799-801; "The Relation of the Act and Convention of Havana Adopted at the Second Consultative Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the American Republics"; "Position of St. Pierre and Miquelon under the Act and Convention of Havana", 21 June 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

33 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 51-2; Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto, 1999), pp. 87-90.

provide enemy naval forces with information and assistance.<sup>34</sup>

The rising tensions with Vichy France began to worry the Canadian government, which decided on 16 May 1941 that a Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP] inspector should be sent to St. Pierre and Miquelon to investigate the political situation there. News of this decision agitated the American State Department, which had been misled to believe, through American newspapers, that Canada was planning to take over the islands.<sup>35</sup> Although Norman A. Robertson, Canada's new Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, clarified the situation in Washington, the government of Newfoundland remained skeptical of Canadian intentions. Anticipating an eventual Canadian military takeover of St. Pierre and Miquelon, Newfoundland began to promulgate the notion that the French islands were under its sphere of influence.<sup>36</sup> On 21 May 1941, the Governor of Newfoundland explained to Robertson that:

Geographically they [St. Pierre and Miquelon] are as much a part of this country [Newfoundland] as any other islands that surround our coast, and in this respect bear the same relation to Newfoundland as [the] Magdalen islands and Anticosti do to Canada. . . . In fact there is so little to justify control passing from Vichy to any government but that of Newfoundland. . . . Under all these circumstances we urge: (1) that before the matter of defence of St. Pierre and Miquelon are settled, this government be consulted; (2) that the Canadian government use its best endeavors to ensure that if civil control of the islands is to pass from Vichy hands, that it be entrusted to the Newfoundland government.<sup>37</sup>

In another report, the Government of Newfoundland objected to any temporary occupation of the islands by Canada or the United States "unless it is given civil control of the islands and the occupation by Canada and the United States is purely military". In other words, Newfoundland wanted Canada or the United States to invade St. Pierre and Miquelon as long as the two powers agreed to give St. John's political control of the islands' administration. Ottawa agreed that "when political, economic, defence or other requirements make intervention necessary", it would discuss the situation with the Government of Newfoundland.<sup>38</sup>

In the meantime, RCMP Inspector Oscar LaRivière was sent to St. Pierre and Miquelon on 21 May with the ostensible object of investigating, for the Canadian

34 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, p. 52; Thomas, "Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere", pp. 818-9.

35 Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson, Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, to Mackenzie King, 16 May 1941, EAD, no. 645 and Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson to Mackenzie King, 17 May 1941, EAD, no. 646, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 805-6, 806.

36 Governor of Newfoundland to Canadian Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 20 May 1941, RG 24, vol. 11,955, file NFM 1-16-1, NA.

37 Governor of Newfoundland to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 21 May 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

38 Memorandum by Escott Reid, Newfoundland Second Secretary, 23 May 1941, EAD, no. 649 and Secretary of State for External Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland, 25 May 1941, EAD, no. 650, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 809, 810.

Customs and Preventive Service, the smuggling of alcohol into Prince Edward Island, which was still under Prohibition. His real mission, however, was “to attempt to discover the general attitude of the administrator and the people of St. Pierre and to report on all other points of interests, such as . . . signs of enemy activity”.<sup>39</sup> While LaRivière “spied” in St. Pierre and Miquelon, the Canadian Joint Planning Committee issued a memorandum on 22 May 1941 urging the creation of military plans for the occupation of the islands. As the document stipulated, the object of the occupation would be to prevent the use of these islands by the enemy as a refueling, repair and rest base for submarines and aircraft, and as a center for the collection and transmission of enemy intelligence. The Joint Planning Committee recommended that the Joint Service Committee of the Atlantic Coast “be put in possession of all the information at our disposal and be ordered to prepare definite and detailed operational orders for the occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon”. It suggested that the landing force should consist of one company of infantry furnished by the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment which would be transported in two corvettes from Sydney, Nova Scotia. The Joint Planning Committee also recommended that air reconnaissance before and during the landing be emphasized.<sup>40</sup> In order that no misunderstandings emerged as a result of an eventual Canadian occupation of the French islands, Major General H.D.G. Crerar, Chief of the General Staff, clarified on 24 May 1941 that “while this would be carried out by military forces, it should not be looked at as a capture or annexation of the islands but rather their temporary occupation for the duration of the war”.<sup>41</sup>

Canadian military authorities began to prepare a secret strategic plan for the invasion of the islands on 28 May 1941.<sup>42</sup> The plan was issued by the Joint Service Committee of the Atlantic and submitted to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 11 June. Referred to as the Plan for Operation “Q”, it envisaged the landing of a small Canadian military force on the islands with aerial and naval assistance. It was to be a combined operation. The landing party was to consist of one company of infantry equipped with motorcycles and bicycles. Engineer, Signals, Medical and Army Service Corps personnel were also to be attached to the mission. The landing party was to be supported by a naval force of two corvettes and one destroyer and an aerial contingent of one bomber-reconnaissance squadron of five aircraft. The expeditionary force was to assemble in Sydney, Nova Scotia and proceed to the coastal town of St. Pierre. Aware that the islands possessed no adequate defenses other than one four-inch gun and one armed vessel, and no organized or semi-organized military force other than the local *Gendarmerie* and a number of demobilized French soldiers, Canadian military planners felt that the occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon could

39 Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, to Norman A. Robertson, 28 June 1941, EAD, no. 660, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 826-7; Joint Planning Committee, “Memorandum on Action Necessary for the Occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon”, 22 May 1941, RG 24, reel C- 8366, file 8625, NA. See also Jean-Pierre Andrieux, *St. Pierre and Miquelon – A Fragment of France in North America* (Ottawa, 1986), pp. 36-46.

40 Joint Planning Committee, “Memorandum on Action Necessary for the Occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon”.

41 Memorandum by Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, 24 May 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

42 Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 27 May 1941, RG 2, reel C-11,789, files 5, 7c, NA; Minutes of the Chief of Staff Committee, 28 May 1941, RG 24, vol. 21,813, NA.



be done with minimal force. In view of the circumstances, it was agreed that no naval or aerial bombardment would be required and that there was no necessity to complicate navigation by attempting to land under cover of darkness or use special landing crafts. However, because the Canadians were unaware of how the local population would react to a Canadian takeover, it was "considered advisable to look upon the operation as one made in an enemy territory with a possibility of hostile attitude by a proportion of the population".<sup>43</sup>

The first step of the plan was to take over the town of St. Pierre in order to neutralize the colony's administration. The principal landing places were to be the docks in the inner harbor and small beaches on the northeast side of the town. The troops were to seize the wireless transmitter station; take possession of the administrative offices, government house, police station, custom house and post office; and occupy the cable relay station, the local power plant, the telephone exchange and, finally, the cable landing. Measures were also to be undertaken against the four-inch coastal gun if it was found to be manned. The emphasis was that "these should be occupied with speed and in a definite manner with a view to paralyzing any possible resistance". In the meantime, the Royal Canadian Navy was to neutralize the armed vessel and occupy the harbor's coal wharf while air reconnaissance sorties were conducted by the Royal Canadian Air Force. Once the "vulnerable points" had been secured, the landing party was to consolidate its occupation of the entire island of St. Pierre; civilian cypher personnel were to handle the island's administration. With St. Pierre secured, Canadian troops were then to occupy the rest of the archipelago. In order to overcome the possibility of popular resistance and sabotage, the Canadian troops were to be self-contained in terms of food and ammunition. With this in mind, supplies were to consist of a "30 day reserve with 7 day partially fresh".<sup>44</sup>

A few days after this plan was submitted, RCMP Inspector LaRivière returned to Halifax and issued his report on the political situation in the islands. He believed that, although the French authorities were doing everything possible to discourage people from sympathizing with the Allied cause, close to 90 per cent of the local population were strong supporters. LaRivière's conclusion was that "the inhabitants of St. Pierre and Miquelon . . . would . . . have no objection to Canada or the United States taking over the islands for the duration of the war". LaRivière's report reinforced several letters received from St. Pierre and Miquelon residents urging Canadian intervention and promising popular support.<sup>45</sup> This situation gave Ottawa the sense that a Canadian expeditionary force would be welcomed in the islands and face no resistance whatsoever.

With this in mind, the Chiefs of Staff Committee approved the plan for the occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon on 28 June 1941. Influenced by the level of

43 "Appreciation by the Joint Service Committee, Atlantic Coast", 11 June 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

44 "Appreciation by the Joint Service Committee".

45 Free statement of Dr. M. Le Bolloch, former Chief of the Veterinary Service and Sea Fisheries in St. Pierre and Miquelon, 3 June 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625-1, NA; Inspector O. LaRivière, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to Commissioner S.T. Wood, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 15 June 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA. See also William I. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Undeclared War, 1940-1941* (New York, 1953), pp. 581-2.

pro-Allied sympathy in the islands, however, the Committee made a few minor adjustments. Because it considered that the use of a destroyer was uneconomical for such an operation, the Committee suggested that only two corvettes and one small merchant ship be employed for the purpose. It also requested that an RCMP detachment accompany the force to aid in civil administration, that the capacity of the bomber-reconnaissance squadron be dropped from five aircraft to three and that it should be borne in mind that it may be necessary to put this plan into operation at very short notice. In the end, Operation "Q" remained a closely guarded secret.<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, British and Canadian intelligence personnel became increasingly worried about the possibility that enemy activity might be taking place on the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Reports suggested that the islands' oil fuel capacity had been increased to a level much in excess of that normally used in the colony. Reinforcing these suspicions was the fact that the St. Pierre and Miquelon authorities often closed "a certain strip of coast . . . to the public either permanently or at night and during fogs". According to a former St. Pierre and Miquelon resident, this had occurred more than ten times. The natural conclusion was that submarine refueling was taking place.<sup>47</sup> RCMP Commissioner S.T. Wood added fuel to the fire on 4 August 1941 when he declared that he was almost certain that espionage was taking place on the islands. As he stated:

The immediate danger lies in the opportunities which the residents of the islands have for engaging in espionage and sabotage and I have reason to believe that there have been activities along these lines in regard to the movement of our convoys and shipping. . . . Evidence has proven certain facts in regard to the operation of the wireless stations at St. Pierre et Miquelon. The dispatch of code cablegrams and telegrams, communications with vessels at sea and their remarkable knowledge of nautical problems make it obvious that certain residents of St. Pierre et Miquelon are fully qualified to carry on espionage and sabotage along such lines.<sup>48</sup>

"We should not wait", Wood concluded "until something disastrous happens, to take over the control of the islands. . . . In the interests of our North Atlantic fleet and our armed forces, no time should be lost in taking over the control of the islands".<sup>49</sup>

With mounting evidence of Vichy France collaborating with Nazi Germany, the War Cabinet met on 13 August 1941 to consider its stand and agreed to immediately

46 Memorandum by L.S. Breadner, Air Vice-Marshal, Chief of the Air Staff, 26 June 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, RG-24, NA; Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, to Chairman, Joint Service Committee Atlantic Coast, 28 June 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA; Malcolm MacDonald, High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, to Norman Robertson, 31 July 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

47 Free statement of Dr. M. Le Bolloch, 3 June 1941; Captain E.S. Brand, Director of Naval Intelligence, to Norman A. Robertson, 26 June 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA; R.R. Tait, Assistant Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Director of Criminal Investigation, to Major L.S. Yvill, Chief Telegraph Censor, 11 July 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625-1, NA.

48 Commissioner S.T. Wood, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to Norman Robertson, 4 August 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

49 Commissioner S.T. Wood, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to Norman Robertson, 4 August 1941.

open a consulate at St. Pierre. The belief was that a Canadian presence on the islands would help monitor more closely the attitudes of the local population as well as enemy activities. There were, however, delays in the appointment of the Consul due to the Department of External Affairs' "inability to find a really suitable man for a dull and difficult post". Despite the circumstances, most politicians still favored a diplomatic approach rather than a military one. Norman A. Robertson, for example, remarked "I would be opposed to allowing . . . our own forces to occupy the islands. I do not think there would be any difficulty about the operation or any risk of casualties, but I would be very much afraid that an initiative of this sort prove a pretext for renewed . . . collaboration [on the part of Vichy]".<sup>50</sup> While the Canadian government decided in favor of a diplomatic approach, the Canadian military continued to prepare Operation "Q". As Captain E.S. Brand, Director of Naval Intelligence, indicated on 12 August 1941: "Effective control of all communications and administration is the only guarantee that St. Pierre will not prove a danger to our security, and nothing less than strong official action will remove this danger".<sup>51</sup>

The small expeditionary force (Force "Q") which was to take part in the intervention against St. Pierre and Miquelon was officially formed at Camp Debert, Nova Scotia, on 15 August under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Cook and Major Miller Marshall. It consisted of "C" company of the Lake Superior Regiment, a number of ancillary troops and six members of the RCMP, for a grand total of 194 men. To conceal the operation, rumours stipulating that Force "Q" was intended to defend Sydney in the event of a sudden German landing were deliberately circulated in order to mislead the curious and the suspicious. The real mission was repeatedly tested in the Nova Scotia countryside. According to the plan, the operation against St. Pierre and Miquelon could be initiated on six hours notice. None of the hundreds of Canadian soldiers already stationed in Newfoundland since the summer of 1940 were to be used for the invasion. The general belief was that using the colony of Newfoundland in any way would only complicate matters by getting Great Britain involved.<sup>52</sup>

On 21 August 1941, the Chiefs of Staff Committee attempted to launch Operation "Q", recommending an early occupation of the islands for the following reasons:

(A) The route of convoys lie within 100 miles of St. Pierre and Miquelon thus enabling easy observation of movements of convoys on the part of fishermen of the islands. Their observations can be reported to shore either by wireless from the vessels at sea (actual messages having been intercepted) or by the vessels periodically returning to port to make reports; (B) The wireless station at St. Pierre is in communication with Canada, the United

50 Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson to Mackenzie King, 15 August 1941, EAD, no. 672, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 838. See also Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 61-2.

51 Memorandum by Captain E.S. Brand, Director of Naval Intelligence, 12 August 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

52 "The Lake Superior Regiment Operation Instruction – Atlantic Command Test Exercise Q", 20 August 1941, in Hitsman, "St-Pierre and Miquelon during the Second World War", pp. 60-4. See also Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 61-3.

States, Martinique, Europe, Africa and Asia. Frequent communication is carried on with France; (C) The islands lie close to two important bases – the United States base at Argentia and the base at St. John’s Newfoundland; (D) Transatlantic cables are situated close to St. Pierre and it is possible for such cables to be cut by the fishing trawlers. This has occurred off the coast of the British Isles and Australia. It is also possible that cables could be tapped; (E) It is possible that a hostile submarine or other vessel could be provisioned and fueled at St. Pierre if it were able to slip past our naval patrols; (F) There is evidence of a pro-Vichy attitude on the part of the St. Pierre and Miquelon authorities.<sup>53</sup>

Although approved at a meeting of the Defence Council, the Chiefs of Staff Committee’s request was rejected by the War Cabinet on 30 August 1941 on the ground that “no action was needed at the moment”. This had to do with the recent appointment of Christopher Eberts as Canadian Consul at St. Pierre. Despite this new development, Force “Q” remained active, but was advised on 17 September 1941 that it no longer needed to be mobilized within six hours notice. Instead, it was kept on a 72 hours call.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Canada preferred diplomacy over military action.

By October 1941 there was increased awareness that cypher communications to and from the islands constituted a source of danger for Allied naval services. This coincided with the fact that the submarine war in the North Atlantic was increasingly being fought closer to Canadian home waters. In fact, Canadian naval authorities estimated that at least thirty German submarines were operating in the Northwest Atlantic, four of them near the northern entrance of the Strait of Belle Isle.<sup>55</sup> As such, there was the threat that the St. Pierre and Miquelon radio transmitter might be used to communicate vital information to German submarine commanders. After all, a letter had been intercepted by Canadian Naval Intelligence which indicated, according to a St. Pierre resident, that the authorities in the French colony had been purchasing a great deal of equipment suitable for the manufacture of radio transmitters and receivers. Causing great concern was the fact that this Frenchman, after having been abruptly ordered out of a room in a building where there appeared to be a great deal of wireless equipment being installed, had been told by a friend that “the Canadians know we are making an extension to the wireless installation, but they have no idea

53 Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Ministers, 21 August 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

54 Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Defence Council, 29 August 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA; Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Defence Council, 5 September 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA; Memorandum by Major-General Crerar, 12 September 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA; Director of Military Operations to Major General W.H.P. Elkins, Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Command, 7 September 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA. See also C. Cecil Lingard and Reginald G. Trotter, *Canada in World Affairs, September 1941 to May 1944* (Toronto, 1950), p. 124.

55 High Commissioner of Great Britain to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 21 October 1941, EAD, no. 675, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 844-5; Jay Pierrepont Moffat, American Minister to Canada, to U.S. Secretary of State, 3 November 1941, United States Diplomatic Papers [USDP], in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers 1941, Volume II* (Washington D.C., 1959), p. 540.

that it is anything like as extensive as what we are doing".<sup>56</sup>

Worried that the St. Pierre and Miquelon wireless station could be used to compromise Canadian defences, the Canadian government began contemplating the idea of sending Canadian personnel to the islands to exercise supervision and control "all outward messages from this station and to prevent the use of cypher or of any code which we are not able to read".<sup>57</sup> On 29 October, the War Cabinet approved this proposal and agreed that four civilian wireless operators be sent from Canada to St. Pierre on board a corvette or minesweeper supplied by the Royal Canadian Navy. The Canadian representatives were to arrive in the islands on 11 December and call on the local administrator to cooperate. Should the latter refuse and threaten to expel them, the representatives were given the authority to "report to the officer in charge of the corvette, who will thereupon put a landing party ashore, which will effectively dismantle all radio transmitters on the islands". The scenario required stationing a control party on the islands despite the local governor's protests.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the Canadians agreed to present Governor de Bournat with an ultimatum and to occupy the islands if it was rejected. In the end, because it was feared that such an action "might be interpreted by Vichy as an effort by Canada to take control if not possession of the islands" and that "Vichy might seek to find in the incident an excuse to turn over the French fleet to Germany as a means of protecting French colonial possessions", it was agreed that any action on Canada's part should be delayed until "we had ascertained the views of the governments of Great Britain and the United States".<sup>59</sup>

Because the Canada-United States Permanent Joint Board on Defence had unanimously agreed on 10 November that the existence on the islands of an uncontrolled and high-powered wireless transmitting station constituted a potential danger to the interests of Canada and the United States, Ottawa felt confident that Washington would support all aspects of the Canadian proposition. It was wrong. Although the United States accepted the idea of Canada sending civilian technicians

56 Memorandum of Wing Commander R.A. Logan, Director of Intelligence for A.M.A.S., 22 October 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625-1, NA.

57 Norman A. Robertson to Canadian Minister to United States, 30 October 1941, EAD, no. 677, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, p. 848; Christopher Eberts, Canada's Acting Consul at St. Pierre and Miquelon, to Norman Robertson, 2 October 1941, RG 24, vol. 5197, file 15-24-4, NA; Norman Robertson to Captain E.S. Brand, 3 October 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA; Captain E.S. Brand to Norman Robertson, 10 October 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

58 Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson to Mackenzie King, 14 November 1941, EAD, no. 682, Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson to Cabinet War Committee, 29 November 1941, EAD, no. 684 and Memorandum from Norman A. Robertson to Mackenzie King, 3 December 1941, EAD, no. 685, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 851-3, 854-6, 856-9; Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 26 November, 1941, RG 2, reel C-4654, files 6, 7c, NA; Secretary of State for External Affairs to Canadian Minister to the United States, 4 December 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA.

59 Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, 3 December 1941, EAD, no. 686, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 859-60; Secretary of State for External Affairs to Canadian Minister to the United States, 4 December 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA. See also J.W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record, Volume 1, 1939-1944* (Toronto, 1960), p. 319.

to the islands to monitor the operation of the radio station, Washington vigorously opposed any forceful attempt to take control of it.<sup>60</sup> Great Britain, on the other hand, preferred to have a Free French naval force rally St. Pierre and Miquelon. London feared that any Canadian action might lead to a possible charge of British imperialism. A Free French action seemed most satisfactory since it would involve no change of sovereignty. But for the Canadians, “this step appeared . . . to be inappropriate”. The feeling was that any brusque change in the status of the islands might create misunderstandings in Canada, anger the American government, generate more tension with Vichy France and, as a consequence, alter the position of other French colonies in the Western Hemisphere. Faced with conflicting advice from the Americans and the British, Mackenzie King decided to postpone indefinitely the projected action.<sup>61</sup>

New developments in the conduct of the war overseas reinforced Mackenzie King’s decision not to intervene in the affairs of St. Pierre and Miquelon. On the early morning of 7 December 1941, Imperial Japan attacked parts of the United States Pacific fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands and launched an important military offensive against American, British and Dutch possessions in Southeast Asia and the Southern Pacific. Among the defenders of the British possession of Hong Kong were two Canadian battalions of infantry (Force “C”): the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers. The sudden Japanese offensive in the Far East and the fact that Canadian troops were now under enemy fire at Hong Kong caught Mackenzie King and the Canadian government by surprise. The War Cabinet met early that evening and the next day Canada declared war on Japan along with Great Britain and the United States. Canada was now at war against a first-class power capable of menacing its western coastline. The St. Pierre and Miquelon threat suddenly seemed less worrisome to Ottawa.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, fearing a possible Canadian takeover, General de Gaulle ordered Admiral Émile Henri Muselier, Commander in Chief of the Free French Naval Forces, to secretly prepare the Free French warships assigned to the Newfoundland Escort Force for an eventual invasion of the islands. Clearly, de Gaulle did not appreciate the fact that foreign powers had been planning an occupation of French territory without consulting him. Foreign holdings were a pre-occupation of the Free French authorities, as they provided bases of operation, material resources, manpower and money to the movement. But, most importantly, they gave political legitimacy to the Free French cause. Thus de Gaulle was determined to protect French sovereignty

60 Memorandum from Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Canadian Prime Minister, 8 December 1941, EAD, no. 1296 and Memorandum drafted by H.H. Wrong and R. Atherton, 8 December 1941, EAD, no. 1297, in John F. Hilliker, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9* (Ottawa, 1980), p. 1629, 1630; Secretary of State for External Affairs to Canadian Minister to the United States, 4 December 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA; Memorandum of Conversation by Mr. Samuel Reber of the Division of European Affairs, 8 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 543-5. See also Milton Viorst, *Hostile Allies – FDR and Charles de Gaulle* (New York, 1965), p. 78.

61 Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 3 December 1941 EAD, no. 685 and Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, 3 December 1941, EAD, no. 686, in Murray, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 8*, pp. 856-9, 859-60.

62 Stacey, *Six Years of War*, pp. 437-91.



against foreign interests and to maintain the French Empire intact.<sup>63</sup> Although de Gaulle requested that the planned operation be kept secret, Muselier deemed it necessary to discuss the issue with Allied representatives. On 15 December 1941 Muselier visited Ottawa from Halifax, where he had arrived with some Free French naval vessels detached from the Newfoundland Escort Force. In discussions with American, British and Canadian officials, he recommended an immediate Free French occupation of the islands, arguing that such an operation would be bloodless and would remove the threat of the wireless station.<sup>64</sup>

The Americans stated quite emphatically that they were against a Free French intervention. At the time, American Rear Admiral Frederick J. Horne and Vichy French Admiral Georges Robert were in the midst of negotiating the renewal of the Robert-Greenslade Agreement of October-November 1940, which guaranteed the non-belligerency of the French West Indies naval squadron and the maintenance of the status quo with respect to Vichy possessions in the Western Hemisphere in exchange for American economic assistance to the French Caribbean. Washington made it clear that it would not “interfere with the status of French possessions in this hemisphere so long as the Germans do not secure the French fleet or have access to French territory for military operations against the Allies”.<sup>65</sup> The feeling was that a Free French invasion could jeopardize the negotiations taking place and upset the delicate balance of relations with Vichy. To counter such a danger, the American State Department proposed that Canadian radio personnel establish effective supervision of the wireless station in St. Pierre and Miquelon as long as French sovereignty be respected. The United States felt that a “limited Canadian operation confined to supervision of wireless transmissions would have fewer political repercussions than occupation of islands by Free French”. The Robert-Horne agreement was finally signed on 17 December.<sup>66</sup>

The British, on the other hand, saw a Free French occupation as most appropriate

63 Telegram from the *Comité National* to the Free French Delegation in Washington, 17 December 1941, General Charles de Gaulle Documents [CDGD], in Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre – L’Appel, 1940-1942* (Paris, 1954), pp. 492-3. See also Jacques Thobie, Gilbert Meynier, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de la France Coloniale, 1914-1990* (Paris, 1990), p. 336.

64 Memorandum from Norman Robertson to Mackenzie King, 15 December 1941, EAD, no. 1299, Dominions Secretary of State to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 15 December 1941, EAD, no. 1300, Memorandum by Minister-Counsellor, Legation in United States, 16 December 1941, EAD, no. 1301 and Memorandum from Norman Robertson to Mackenzie King, 16 December 1941, EAD, no. 1302, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1632-3, 1634, 1634-6, 1636-7; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation by the Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs, 15 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 546-7.

65 Memorandum by Minister-Counsellor, Legation in United States, 16 December 1941, EAD, no. 1305, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1639-40; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation by Ray Atherton, Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs, 16 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, p. 547. See also Baptiste, *War, Cooperation, and Conflict*, pp. 72-3; Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, pp. 161-3.

66 Memorandum from Norman Robertson to Mackenzie King, 16 December 1941, EAD, no. 1303, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, 16 December 1941, EAD, no. 1306 and Memorandum by Minister-Counsellor, Legation in United States, 19 December 1941, EAD, no. 1310, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1637-8, 1640, 1642-4.

since they felt that “the installation of Canadian radio personnel was unlikely to prove a lasting solution”. As for the Canadian government, although it believed that “any action taken should be by Canada”, it decided not to act and suggested that the United States and Great Britain agree on a solution. Canada would cooperate in the execution of any agreement reached by both powers. Giving into American objections, Muselier agreed not to go through with the mission.<sup>67</sup>

This “promise” was not upheld. Fearing that the Canadians might try to take control of the transmitting station in St. Pierre and Miquelon, de Gaulle ordered Muselier on 17 December to rally the islands as soon as possible. As he indicated: “Nous savons, de source certaine, que les canadiens ont l’intention de faire eux-mêmes la destruction du poste radio de St. Pierre. Dans ces conditions, je vous prescris de procéder au ralliement de St. Pierre et Miquelon par vos propres moyens et sans rien dire aux étrangers. Je prends l’entière responsabilité de cette opération, devenue indispensable pour conserver à la France ces possessions française”.<sup>68</sup> On 22 December 1941, Commander in Chief Muselier of the Free French Naval Forces returned to Halifax from Ottawa and ordered the crews of the corvettes *Aconit*, *Alysse* and *Mimosa*, as well as the submarine *Surcouf*, to prepare to set sail. The division left the Canadian port on 23 December with the ostensible object of sailing back to St. John’s, where they were to rejoin the Newfoundland Escort Force. However, in the midst of their journey, the Free French warships changed course and appeared off the coast of St. Pierre and Miquelon on the early morning of 24 December. The four vessels then proceeded to the port of St. Pierre, where armed sailors disembarked and took possession of all communication and government buildings. The entire operation was completed in a matter of 20 minutes without firing a single shot.<sup>69</sup> Governor de Bournat was immediately arrested and replaced by Muselier’s *aide-de-camp* Captain Alain Savary. The Free French sailors told the local population “que si les Français Libres ont débarqué, c’est pour empêcher les Américains, les Canadiens et même les Allemands d’occuper l’île et de les en chasser”. On 25 December, a plebiscite was held on the islands, in which males of 18 years and over were given choice between

67 Extract from Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, 16 December 1941, EAD, No. 1304, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1638-9; Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 18 December 1941, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA; Admiral Muselier, Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Naval Forces, to Moffat, American Minister to Canada, 17 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 550-1. See also Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation, 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill and London, 1986), p. 120.

68 General Charles de Gaulle to Admiral Émile Muselier, 17 December 1941, CDGD, General Charles de Gaulle to Admiral Émile Muselier, 18 December 1941, CDGD and Admiral Muselier to General Charles de Gaulle, 21 December 1941, CDGD, in De Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre*, pp. 493-4, 494, 495.

69 For more information about the Free French takeover of St. Pierre and Miquelon, read Andrieux, St. Pierre and Miquelon, pp. 47-53; Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941*, pp. 82-98; Louis de Villefosse, *Les Îles de la Liberté – Aventures d’un Marin de la France Libre* (Paris, 1972), pp. 111-208; Du Gard, *La Carte Impériale*, pp. 223-37; Hanna, “La Prise de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon”, pp. 369-87; Augusta Lehuene, *Un amiral dans nos îles* (St. Pierre et Miquelon, 1992), pp. 1-166; Maucière, *Sous la Flamme de Guerre*, pp. 113-32; Émile Muselier, *Marine et Résistance* (Paris, 1945), pp. 1-154; Rannie, *Saint Pierre and Miquelon*, pp. 80-102; Thomas, *The French Empire*, pp. 134-9; Dale C. Thomson, *De Gaulle et le Québec* (St. Laurent, 1990), pp. 53-78; Viorst, *Hostile Allies*, pp. 74-83; Dorothy Shipley White, *Les Origines de la Discorde: De Gaulle, la France Libre et les Alliés* (1940-1942) (Paris, 1967), pp. 327-40.

“rallying to Free France or collaborating with Axis powers”. With such a question, it came as no surprise that close to 98 per cent of the male population voted to join the Free French.<sup>70</sup> St. Pierre and Miquelon was now under Free French control.

News of Muselier’s action produced “shock” in official circles in Ottawa and enraged American Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who issued a public statement labeling the action of the “so-called Free French ships” as “arbitrary”, “contrary to the agreement of all parties concerned” and “certainly without prior knowledge or consent in any sense of the U.S. government”. Hull eventually compared the Free French takeover to Nazi and Japanese aggression and called the action “a violation of the Monroe Doctrine, a repudiation of the Good Neighbor Policy and a provocation to war in American waters between Vichy and de Gaulle”. Of greater importance for Ottawa was the fact that Hull “wished Canada to order the Free French forces away” and “restore the status quo of these islands”. Canadian diplomats were infuriated at Hull’s demand, specifying that Canada was not responsible for the Free French action. According to Jay Pierrepont Moffat, Hull’s communiqué changed official Canadian attitude from one of “helpful cooperation” to one of “most reluctant cooperation”.<sup>71</sup>

On Christmas Day, Mackenzie King left Ottawa for Washington for a long-scheduled conference with Roosevelt and Churchill. The next day he met with both leaders. Roosevelt immediately asked him where Muselier got the ships to attack the islands. The Canadian Prime Minister replied that he understood that Muselier “had come with ships of his own, and it was his own ships he had used for the purpose”. King added that Canada was “in no way responsible for the Free French occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon”. As for Churchill, although he admitted having agreed at one time to a Free French takeover of the islands, he was quick to specify that he totally opposed the present action, especially since it was done in complete secrecy and despite American warnings that no such interventions be undertaken. Churchill even stated that he was “prepared to take de Gaulle by the back of the neck and tell him he had gone too far and bring him to his senses”.<sup>72</sup>

The Americans had some reason to suspect Canadian and British complicity, as the Free French vessels involved in the action, with the exception of the submarine

70 Admiral Muselier to General Charles de Gaulle, 24 December 1941, CDGD and General Charles de Gaulle to Free French Delegation in Washington, 26 December 1941, CDGD, in De Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre*, pp. 498, 499-500; Canadian Acting Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 24 December 1941, EAD, no. 1318 and Canadian Acting Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 25 December 1941, EAD, no. 1321, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1648, 1650.

71 “Dépêche de l’agence Exchange Telegraph,” 25 December 1941, CDGD, in De Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre*, p. 499; Memorandum by Minister-Counsellor, Legation in United States, 26 December 1941, EAD, no. 1324, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1652-4; Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, to French Ambassador, 25 December 1941, USDP, Jay Pierrepont Moffat, American Minister to Canada, to Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, 25 December 1941, USDP and Memorandum of Conversation by Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, 29 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 551, 552, 562-3.

72 Memorandum by Canada’s Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 26 December 1941, EAD, no. 1325, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1655-7; William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries, 25, 26 December 1941, MG 26, J-13, fiche T-168, NA; Memorandum of Conversation by Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, 29 December 1941, USDP, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 562-3.

*Surcouf*, had been supplied by the British in early 1941. They had been loaned to the Free French to participate in the Battle of the Atlantic, but remained British property. Moreover, the Newfoundland Escort Force, to which the Free French warships belonged, was under Canadian command. The fact that Muselier's task force went straight to St. Pierre and Miquelon from a Canadian port reinforced American suspicions. In the end, both the British and Canadians refused to repudiate the Free French, fearing that this might be detrimental to the Free French movement and the Allied cause.<sup>73</sup>

In the aftermath of the invasion, the Allied powers began to fear that Vichy might send a battle fleet to St. Pierre and Miquelon to recover the colony. In particular, there was concern that Admiral Georges Robert might order the French Western Atlantic squadron based at Fort-de-France in Martinique to sail north. At the time, the Vichy naval fleet in the Caribbean consisted of the aircraft carrier *Béarn* and its load of aircraft, the cruisers *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Émile Bertin* and several other vessels including tankers, transports, armed merchant cruisers and fast attack crafts.<sup>74</sup> Fear of a Vichy retaliatory action existed as early as 24 December when Christopher Eberts, Canada's Acting Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon, asked the Canadian naval authorities "to keep him informed of the movements in North American waters of naval units of the Vichy government, especially those stationed at Martinique". Ebert added: "Admiral [Muselier] states that he does not consider it prudent to permit free movement of planes in the neighborhood in view of [the] difficulty of identification . . . unless he can be guaranteed against possible action by planes of French vessels at Martinique or by these vessels themselves".<sup>75</sup>

On 29 December Hull warned the British government that he anticipated that Admiral Robert would send a cruiser to St. Pierre and Miquelon to engage the Free French forces if they were not withdrawn. Both the British and American government believed that any attempt to restore Vichy control would be accompanied by bloodshed. In the end, the Vichy government did not attempt any counter-action.<sup>76</sup> As historian Martin Thomas noted: "It was most unlikely that any of Robert's ships . . . could have made the voyage to St. Pierre. All of them were suffering the effects of prolonged inactivity: owing to keels overgrown with barnacles and seaweed, they could only travel at half their optimum speeds and their fuel consumption on long journeys was extremely high". It was also unlikely, Thomas added, that the Vichy cruisers could have evaded detection by American naval patrols.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, in

73 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 102-3; Dziuban, *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada*, p. 160; Lingard and Trotter, *Canada in World Affairs*, p. 126.

74 Baptiste, *War, Cooperation, and Conflict*, pp. 63-4; Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, pp. 49-50; De Villefosse, *Les Îles de la Liberté*, pp. 148-52.

75 Canadian Acting Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 24 December 1941, EAD, no. 1318 and Canadian Acting Consul in St. Pierre and Miquelon to Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, 25 December 1941, EAD, no. 1320, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1648, 1649.

76 Memorandum by H. Wrong, Minister-Counsellor, Legation in United States, 29 December 1941, EAD, no. 1334 and Memorandum by Lester B. Pearson, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 29 December 1941, EAD, no. 1335, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1667-8, 1668-9.

77 Thomas, "Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere", pp. 828-9.

order to quell the possibility that the St. Pierre and Miquelon crisis would lead to war with Vichy France, the American government urged de Gaulle to restore the islands' status quo. When the Free French leader refused, Washington attempted to intimidate him by mobilizing one cruiser and two destroyers. When British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden asked de Gaulle what he would do if the American warships sailed for St. Pierre and Miquelon, de Gaulle replied that "les navires alliés s'arrêteront à la limite des eaux territoriales française" and that if they go beyond this limit, "les notres devraient tirer".<sup>78</sup> By 12 January 1942, the United States even contemplated the dispatch of a powerful task force, which included the battleship USS *Arkansas*, to St. Pierre and Miquelon in addition to exerting economic pressure if de Gaulle refused.<sup>79</sup> In the end, Roosevelt felt that the United States could not "afford to send an expedition to bomb him [Muselier] out" and decided not to intervene.<sup>80</sup>

As an alternative, Roosevelt managed to work out a compromise, which he thought would be agreeable to Vichy, the Free French, Great Britain, Canada and the United States. The Americans, British and Canadians would exercise joint supervision over the islands, which would be neutralized and demilitarized, while providing personnel to control the wireless station. Mackenzie King and Churchill agreed with the proposal.<sup>81</sup> On 22 January 1942, Churchill met with de Gaulle and discussed Roosevelt's solution. Both agreed that the islands were to remain under Free French control as long as the present administration of the islands was replaced by a consultative council. They also agreed that this council appoint American and Canadian officials to assist in the operation of the wireless station and that the Free French warships resume their normal duties in the Atlantic. In exchange, the Canadian and American governments would continue their economic assistance to the islands.<sup>82</sup>

In late January 1942 Ottawa finally decided to disband Force "Q", which had been kept operational at Camp Debert since the summer of 1941. As the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence stated on 30 December 1941: "It would now appear doubtful whether Operation "Q" will be undertaken in its present form. However, as it may be some time before all the complications in connection with the occupation of these islands by Free French forces are settled, I propose that Operation "Q" will not now be undertaken on less than seven days notice".<sup>83</sup> On 29 January two

78 De Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre*, pp. 186-7.

79 Minister to United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 12 January 1942, EAD, no. 1352, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1685-6.

80 Conn and Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, p. 163.

81 Minister to United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 12 January 1942, EAD, no. 1352, Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 13 January 1942, EAD, no. 1353, Memorandum by H. Wrong, 14 January 1942, EAD, no. 1355 and Extract from Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, 14 January 1942, EAD, no. 1356, in Hilliker, *Documents on Canadian External Relations Volume 9*, pp. 1685-6, 1686, 1687, 1688-9; Minutes of the Cabinet War Committee, 14 January 1942, RG 2, reel C-4874, files 8, 7c, NA; Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London, 1962), p. 111.

82 General Charles de Gaulle to Admiral Muselier, 22 January 1942, CDGD, in De Gaulle, *Mémoire de Guerre*, pp. 519-20; Malcolm MacDonald, Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, to Norman Robertson, 24 January 1942, RG 24, vol. 5197, file 15-24-4, NA; "St. Pierre and Miquelon – Draft Communiqué", 24 January 1942, RG 24, vol. 5197, file 15-24-4, NA.

83 Director of Military Operations to Chief of the General Staff, 30 December 1941, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

days after this proposal was implemented, the Chiefs of the General Staff concurred and decided to finally disband the unit. On 31 January the troops left Camp Debert.<sup>84</sup>

The St. Pierre and Miquelon affair officially came to an end on 2 February 1942 when Hull declared to Roosevelt “that in view of the paramount importance of furthering unity and harmony in the maximum cooperative war effort with Great Britain, Canada and the other United Nations, I recommend that further negotiations or discussions of the matter be postponed for the period of the war”.<sup>85</sup> According to historians Cecil Lingard and Reginald Trotter, Hull should be blamed for the entire crisis with the Free French: “The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair was little more than a tempest in a teapot blown to undue proportions by Mr. Hull’s wounded pride, by his determination to continue a Vichy policy of questionable merit, and by his holding to a policy that involved an inflated conception of United States hegemony in the western hemisphere”.<sup>86</sup> In the end, the Free French remained on the islands for the duration of the war.<sup>87</sup> As historian Milton Viorst put it, “de Gaulle, with three corvettes and a submarine, had thus defied the most powerful alliance in history and emerged victorious”.<sup>88</sup> The question of St. Pierre and Miquelon gradually faded into history after February 1942 as Allied forces dealt with more important issues, especially in the Far East.

In conclusion, Canada’s decision not to occupy the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon between 1940 and 1942 was guided by Ottawa’s diplomatic relations with Great Britain and the United States. While the British favored a Free French takeover, the Americans opposed any attempt by foreign nations to interfere with the affairs of European possessions in the Western Hemisphere. The Havana Conference of 1940 and the Robert-Greenslade/Robert-Horne agreements of 1940-1941 were reflections of this policy. The United States wanted to maintain the status quo in the Americas and any attempt by Canada or even Newfoundland to mingle in the affairs of St. Pierre and Miquelon was sure to be checked. Washington’s position imposed a lot of pressure on Canada and can explain, in many ways, why Ottawa became hesitant to launch a unilateral action against the French colony. It was believed in Canadian diplomatic circles that such an intervention, without American support, might cause serious diplomatic tension between Canada and the United States and jeopardize the atmosphere of cooperation. The Free French invasion of St. Pierre and Miquelon in December 1941, therefore, solved a problem that Canada wanted to correct for more than a year. As a result, it was de Gaulle and not Mackenzie King who had to explain the legitimacy of their action to the Americans. In other words, Ottawa kept its hands clean.

The Free French takeover of these islands solved what could have developed into

84 Hitsman, “St-Pierre and Miquelon during the Second World War”, p. 38.

85 Hitsman, “St-Pierre and Miquelon during the Second World War”, p. 37; Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation*, p. 137.

86 Lingard and Trotter, *Canada in World Affairs*, p. 128.

87 Christopher Eberts, Canada’s Acting Consul at St. Pierre and Miquelon, to Norman Robertson, 28 January 1942, RG 24, vol. 3914, file 1037-5-14, NA; Christopher Eberts to Norman Robertson, 19 May 1942, RG 24, vol. 5197, file 15-24-4, NA; Extract from Minutes of the 197th Meeting of Chiefs of Staff Committee, 22 December 1942, RG 24, reel C-8366, file 8625, NA.

88 Viorst, *Hostile Allies*, p. 183.



a major threat for Allied shipping. In early December 1941 the German admiralty had authorized its submarines to operate in North American waters. By early January 1942 Operation *Paukenschlag* (Drumbeat) was well underway with U-Boats sinking ships off Canadian and American shorelines.<sup>89</sup> Between January and October 1942, for example, some 30 ships were torpedoed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence alone. As historian Douglas Anglin explained: “Fortunately, by this time, St. Pierre and Miquelon were in Allied hands. It is impossible to know whether the enemy would have made any direct use of the islands if they had remained under Vichy control. The risk of his trying would, however, have increased considerably”.<sup>90</sup> The U-Boat threat, which became quite visible in early 1942, might have forced the Canadian government to act and take over control of the French colony to prevent it from being used by German submariners. In the end, the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair of 1940-1942 demonstrated how divided the Allied powers were in the early years of the Second World War, as Canada, the United States and Great Britain all struggled to come to grips with the existence of the Vichy government and with changing power relationships within the North Atlantic triangle. Ultimately, the affair provided an early example of the changing sensibilities in Canadian diplomacy brought on by the economic and military agreements made with the United States in the early stages of the war.

89 For more information on the presence of German submarines in Canadian waters, see W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, Michael Whitby, Robert H. Caldwell, William Johnston and William G.P. Rawling, *No Higher Purpose – The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, Volume II, Part 1* (St. Catharines, 2002); James W. Essex, *Victory in the St. Lawrence – Canada’s Unknown War* (Erin, 1984); Michael L. Hadley, *U-Boats against Canada: German Submarines in Canadian Waters* (Kingston, 1985); Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run – The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys* (Toronto, 1985); Marc Milner, *The U-Boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive Against Germany’s Submarines* (Toronto, 1994); Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montreal, 1998).

90 Anglin, *The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire of 1941*, pp. 130-1