

“Sailors Ashore”

A Comparative Analysis of Wartime Recreation and Leisure in Halifax and St. John’s

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Abstract

Marc Koechl

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The Second World War was a time of great upheaval in Canada, with thousands of people relocated, soldiers going overseas and the nation mobilizing for the war effort. For the people of Halifax and St. John's the impact of the war created many challenges. One of the wartime challenges for Halifax and St. John's was providing activities and entertainment for sailors coming ashore. The focus of this study is on the Atlantic coast, comparing and contrasting the participation of Halifax and St. John's in the war and analysing the onshore life of sailors from 1939 to 1945. This research will provide an analysis of Halifax and St. John's during the war years and assess how each city sought to provide recreation opportunities for naval personnel. Studying sailors ashore is one way of describing how each community responded to the naval presence and whether the attitudes of the community were reciprocated by visiting sailors.

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Preface

The cities of St. John's and Halifax during the Second World War provide the setting for this study of sailors ashore. The time frame for the analysis begins with Canadian and British entry into war in September 1939 and concludes with the V-E day riots in Halifax of May 7 and 8, 1945. Analyzing recreation provision for sailors in each city during these years will help us to better understand the general feelings of Haligonians and Newfoundlanders towards the naval presence in their communities.¹ One way of evaluating the feelings of Haligonians and Newfoundlanders towards sailors is by exploring the response of each community to the need for recreation facilities and entertainment for sailors. This study examines how sailors were perceived in the community by monitoring recreation, leisure and sporting facilities that were provided available to them. Were the responses of the two cities to the naval personnel similar? If so, how does one explain the reputation of Halifax as unfriendly and St. John's as a friendly port? James Lamb, a sailor in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) during the war and author of The Corvette Navy suggests, "oh how we hated to be sent to Halifax!...its inhabitants were indifferent to the thousands of young men from every part of Canada who crowded its old fashioned streets. There was none of the warmth and interest of St. John's to be found in Halifax."² This study considers the reasons why these port cities acquired two very different reputations.

This study is a response to the scholarly gap in the existing historiography on

¹Note: the term Newfoundlander in this study will be used in reference to the citizens of St. John's.

²James Lamb, *The Corvette Navy: True Stories from Canada's Atlantic War* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978),

sailors' recreation and leisure experiences in Halifax and St. John's. This research will examine sailors ashore from a variety of perspectives including recreation provision, competitive sport, crime, wartime threats in each city, the facilities provided and the people and organizations influencing recreation provision. Examining these issues helps to define the attitudes of each city, provides insight into the conflicts that each faced and helps reveal the true feelings of Haligonians and Newfoundlanders towards sailors.

Another way to study the relationship between sailor and community is through the conflicts that developed between them. The various conflicts that arose in each city surrounding recreation and the RCN provide the foundation of this analysis. In Halifax the clash between the community and naval guests became quite severe. Instances of violence, drunkenness, assault and property damage can be investigated through police records and illustrate some of the tensions that arose between Haligonians and sailors. Other conflicts between visitor and guest, particularly in Halifax, arose from housing shortages, excessive rents charged by landlords and the controversy surrounding the closure of naval clubs, a prime example being the Ajax Club. Exploring these antagonisms will help uncover to what degree conflict hindered the recreation experience of sailors ashore.

CHAPTER ONE

“Writing About Sailors, Community, Sport, Leisure and Recreation”

One of the most challenging aspects in writing a comprehensive history of the recreation and leisure pursuits of sailors ashore is the complex nature of the topic. The study of sailors' onshore activities in Halifax and St. John's during the Second World War creates numerous avenues for examination. There are countless connections that can be made between St. John's and Halifax with respect to sailors, recreation, leisure, sport and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Yet when you narrow this study down to its core essentials, there are three central connecting themes: sailors, community, and sport (understood broadly to include leisure and recreation). For each of these three topics one must have a clear understanding of the existing literature, and what it represents within the context of this analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate these three subjects, how they have been addressed by academics and others, what they represent individually, and how they connect to each other within this study.

Our initial focus will be upon sailors themselves. It is important to begin our analysis of sailors by examining the organization they were joining, i.e. the Royal Canadian Navy. Various aspects of the RCN will be studied including its development over the war years and what scholars have written about it. This inquiry will examine who the recruits of the RCN were. It will further examine the connections, if any, that existed between sailors and ethnicity, and the race and gender attitudes that affected the RCN. In Canada during World War Two there were numerous examples of racial, ethnic

and gender intolerance, evident in a separate spheres mentality towards women and in the internment of Japanese-Canadians. There was also racial intolerance towards Jews in Canada.³ Did this mentality towards Jews, women and immigrants permeate the RCN? Other questions to be examined include what sailors sought when in port, what recreation and leisure pursuits they enjoyed and how they felt towards various port cities. These questions will be explored to better understand naval feelings towards Halifax and St. John's. In the course of this study, reference will be made to the personal writings of RCN sailors during the war. Personal narratives of sailors recounting their war time experiences present one way to answer some of the questions that will be examined in this study. Extensive scholarly work also exists on sailors, the Navy, life at sea and military battles fought during the war.

The second topic vital to this study is the notion of community, since two port communities provide the setting for the analysis. There exists a large amount of scholarly work that focuses upon communities.⁴ Studies of villages, towns, cities, regions and

³There are numerous books which address gendered, racial and ethnic discrimination in Canada leading up to and including the Second World War. These include: Ruth Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, : *the Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986). In her book Pierson addresses the role women played in the war. Pierson argues that the activities of women were restricted to what men allowed them to do, demonstrating a separate sphere mentality operating between men and women during the war. Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988). Adachi focuses on Japanese-Canadians during the war and how they were treated by the Canadian government. He argues that Canada had no evidence to suspect Japanese-Canadians of espionage and it was out of racial prejudice that over 20,000 Japanese-Canadians were sent into internment camps and their assets auctioned off. Irving Abella, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1991). In this book Abella points out that there were strong feelings of Anti-Semitism among prominent Canadian politicians particularly the Minister of Immigration, F.C. Blair. He argues that Blair and other politicians limited the immigration of Jews into Canada who were fleeing from the Nazis in Europe, out of racial prejudice and Anti-Semitism.

⁴One example of academics examining community is seen through, Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). Fingard studies the relationships of three Canadian port communities towards merchant sailors.

nations demonstrate the complex nature and many meanings of the term. Gaining a better understanding of some of the factors that contribute to a community and the attitudes prevailing in Halifax and St. John's during the war, provides some insight into the relationship between residents and visitors in the port cities between 1939-1945. This thesis addresses the similarities and differences between Halifax and St. John's by consulting the relevant existing literature for each city.

Using a comparative analysis of two port cities provides a unique way to look at how communities operate. There are many benefits that can emerge from such comparative study. Of particular interest to this thesis is the recreation and leisure provision made by each port for RCN sailors during the war. This provides one way of monitoring the mood of the city towards the naval visitors. It helps in explaining the feelings of sailors towards the host community. And finally, it establishes some of the issues important to residents of each city. It is these issues which give each city defining characteristics that were either embraced or reviled by naval servicemen.

Sport represents the third central theme for this study. Examination of sport will begin with a definition of what it is and what it encompasses within this study. Sport history is an emerging field within academic circles, as most sport historians will attest, and is one that has been largely neglected. Reading an introduction to almost any scholarly study of sport history one finds similar words acknowledging the recent emergence of sport history, or its neglect by historians.⁵ Yet an examination of sport

⁵For examples of this see Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 8, Colin Howell, "Two Outs: Or, Yogi Berra, Sport and Maritime Historiography." *Acadiensis*, 29, 1, 2000, p. 106, and Hart Cantelon & Robert Hollands, *Leisure, Sport and Working Class Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 12.

history today finds that it has taken off in a variety of directions. One approach scholars have taken to sport history is examining its development within a specific community. Several studies connecting sport to community will be discussed in this chapter.

Scholars have tended to examine sport as contested territory. A consistent theme occurring in wartime Halifax and St. John's regarding recreation provision involving power struggles among contending groups. Identifying the source and subject of these power struggles reflects the characteristics of each city and denotes issues that were important to them. The idea of contested territory was central to the theory of cultural hegemony first proposed in the prison writings of the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci. Ian McKay offers the following description of the process of cultural hegemony. According to Gramsci

a successful class does not rule by force alone, nor just because it controls the economy. There are classes that rule mainly through coercion... An effective governing class must create (and keep recreating over and over again) consent to its rule among large numbers of people. Hegemony describes both the process of creating this consent and the (always up for negotiation) results.⁶

Those writing within this framework see the production of sporting culture as a process of perpetual conflict and negotiation. The subject of negotiation may include the exclusion or inclusion of class, ethnic, gender, or racial groups, or issues involving what, where and when sports will be played. This conflict framework not only observes the antagonisms that arise in sport, but also draws attention to the winners and the losers in sport. In any power struggle the end decision is usually agreeable to one party, while alienating

⁶Ian McKay, *The Challenge of Modernity* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), p.14.

another. The study of sport, leisure and recreation in Halifax and St. John's during the war demonstrates how conflicts arose and how they were responded to, negotiated, and resolved.

Studies in sport history have recently started to take a closer look at connections between sport and masculinity. Traditionally sport has been treated as a male activity. At one stage sport was played to increase strength and virility.⁷ Sport itself was seen as a way of creating masculinity. Spectatorship too was largely reserved for men and became a place where men could do business, drink alcohol, and gamble on the particular sporting match being played.⁸ Many of these attitudes towards sport and its connection to masculinity were evident in Halifax and St. John's during the war. Those in the RCN were part of a male-dominated profession during World War Two. In Halifax sport was used to strengthen the connection between masculinity and the RCN. This theme will be further addressed within this chapter.

The object of this chapter, then, is to address sailors, sport and community and monitor the connections that academics have made between them. Examining these topics will locate recreation and leisure activities of sailors in Halifax and St. John's during World War Two firmly within the current historiography.

Sailors

To begin this study of sailors it is important to become acquainted with the

⁷Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 22.

⁸Colin Howell in his book *Northern Sandlots*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), examines connections between masculinity and sport. More recently Varda Burtstyn has surveyed the relationship between sport culture and the building of masculinity in *The Rites of Men*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1999.

scholarly work done on the Royal Canadian Navy. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was officially formed in 1910 through an act of parliament under the Naval Service Act.⁹ It was not until the Second World War, however, that the RCN made any serious impression upon scholars. One of the earliest books published on the RCN was Stephen Leacock's Canada and the Sea. Leacock's book examined the RCN's contribution to and role in World War Two.¹⁰ Canada and the Sea examines various aspects of the RCN from its early beginnings in 1910. The purpose of the book was to provide a chronology of the events of the war, to address the extent of war production and the development of the convoy system. The final chapter deals exclusively with the merchant marine and its wartime contribution. Nowhere is there any mention of sailors' onshore activities, while Halifax is mentioned only in reference to its strategic position in the Canadian war effort.

In 1952 Gilbert Tucker produced a two-volume work entitled The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History that became the first comprehensive history of the Royal Canadian Navy.¹¹ Today this remains the most comprehensive study of the RCN. Although Tucker examined the RCN from a variety of perspectives and over time, he devoted the entire second volume to the Second World War. Tucker constructs a national narrative to explain the emergence of the RCN. The national narrative has often been employed to mark the progress, development and unfolding of the nation, an approach that has traditionally been applied by historians in the field of political and military

⁹Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History* (Toronto: Kings Printer, 1952), p. 14.

¹⁰Stephen Leacock, *Canada and the Sea* (Montreal: Alvah M. Beatty, 1943)

¹¹Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, (1952).

history. It is of no surprise, then, to find the national narrative framework applied in scholarly work pertaining to a military institution such as the RCN. Tucker's work celebrates the successes of the RCN, and tells the story of Canada's growth as a nation.

The social history of naval life is largely ignored in Tucker's work. For example, he devotes little attention to the need for recreation and its importance for the RCN. In his entire two volumes, Tucker spends only a few pages discussing the onshore activities provided by the Navy and does not discuss the relationship between the sailors and the ports they frequented. He remains focused on the political, operational and organizational development of the RCN, rather than upon the Navy's interaction with the host community.

Since Tucker, scholarly work has continued to focus on the development of the RCN as a symbol of national development and nation building.¹² Recent work on the RCN has concentrated specifically upon the Second World War. Historian Marc Milner has written extensively on the RCN, evaluating various aspects of the naval war effort in two books, North Atlantic Run and The U-Boat Hunters.¹³ In both of these, Milner focuses on the dangers faced by the RCN in combating the German sea attack, especially the U-Boat threat. His review of the RCN in North Atlantic Run is far from flattering. Milner argues that the RCN was slow to employ technological advances and in

¹²Two examples of writers studying the RCN from a nationalist perspective are James Boutilier, *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), and John Alexander Swettenham, *Canada's Atlantic War* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1979)

¹³Marc Milner, *North Atlantic Run: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Battle for the Convoys* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985)

Marc Milner, *The U-boat Hunters: The Royal Canadian Navy and the Offensive Against Germany's Submarines, 1943-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994)

encouraging industrial developments throughout the war. In his second book, Milner returns to the question of technological development. In The U-Boat Hunters he focuses on the tactics that were developed by the RCN to combat the U-Boat onslaught. Looking at particular aspects of the war effort, specifically the east coast campaign, Milner both criticized and applauded various facets of the RCN while maintaining an approach which emphasized the national narrative. This is also exemplified in his latest book, Canada's Navy, where Milner describes the RCN as an important organization, helping to create a national character and promoting stronger national identity.¹⁴ At the same time he suggests that during World War Two the RCN took its first major step towards becoming a modern Navy.

After surveying the academic work done on the RCN it becomes quite clear that the framework used for its study has primarily been that of the national narrative. Scholars have used the development of the RCN over the war years to describe the growth of Canada itself. The national narrative is not concerned with uncovering who the sailors of the RCN were; rather, its focus is upon development of the RCN as a national institution.

The tendency to write military history as an aspect of a larger national narrative, however, has been subjected to critical scrutiny in recent years. In Death So Noble, Jonathan Vance was one of the first Canadian scholars to stress the important connections between military and social history. Vance discards the nationalist approach to military history and examines the legacy of World War One from a cultural perspective. Vance

¹⁴Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1999)

acknowledges the usefulness of a national narrative framework suggesting that "...on a political level and in the realm of international recognition, there is no denying the validity of the idea..." He then goes on to point out that the Great War was not as unifying an experience as has often been assumed. "...[O]n a domestic level, historians have had to admit that the Great War was as divisive as it was unifying."¹⁵ In Death So Noble Vance looks for a new way to connect the events of 1914-1918 to later generations, investigating myth, memory and remembrance of the war. Although his focus is not on the Second World War, or the RCN per se, what is important here is the connections that he makes between cultural and military history. Like Vance's study of World War One, my investigation of sailor's recreation and leisure in Halifax and St. John's proposes new ways of examining naval military history outside of the national narrative framework.

Having spent time up to now on academic work done on the RCN, it is time to turn to sailors themselves. One way to capture the experience of sailors is through their own personal accounts. Personal narratives of RCN recruits in the war can tell us many things about the life of the sailor and can point out the people and places that were important to them. In published accounts of wartime experiences, sailors of the RCN did not generally discuss their activities ashore. Instead they tended to focus on their experiences at sea and the challenges they faced. One subject addressed in personal recollections of the war, however, were opinions held towards Halifax and St. John's by naval crews. The Corvette Navy by James Lamb offers insight into how RCN sailors felt about each of the cities. Throughout the book Lamb refers to Halifax in a derogatory

¹⁵Jonathon Vance, *Death So Noble* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), p. 10.

manner. This contrasts with his opinion that naval personnel went ashore enthusiastically in St. John's, or 'Newfyjohn' as it was nicknamed.

Lamb begins by identifying some obvious distinctions among sailors in the Canadian navy suggesting that "Canada had two navies in the Second World War. First was the Royal Canadian Navy, the big navy, the "real" navy... Canada's second navy was much different; a bunch of amateur sailors...the ships- Algerines, Corvettes, Frigates, Bangors... this was the corvette navy, the little navy."¹⁶ For sailors in the RCN, according to Lamb, one of the first differences between them was characterized by the ship they served on. Lamb reflects on the hardships of life at sea for those on the corvettes suggesting that it was often unpleasant and difficult. Life in the Corvette Navy meant dealing with overcrowding, poor lighting, rough turbulence, ice and freezing conditions and danger of U-Boat attack.¹⁷ These factors reinforced the need for the Atlantic port cities to supply an abundance of activities and opportunities for sailors coming ashore. According to Lamb, Halifax failed in its attempt, while 'Newfyjohn' succeeded. The Corvette Navy outlines the differences between Halifax and St. John's from one sailor's perspective. Lamb does not support his allegations against Halifax with documented evidence. Rather, his intent is to give the reader a feeling for life onboard the Corvettes through personal experience.

Lieutenant William Pugsley, a sailor from Canada's 'big' navy (as Lamb puts it) offers his remembrances of the war in his books Sailor Remember and Saints, Devils, and

¹⁶James Lamb, *The Corvette Navy* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978), p. 6.

¹⁷Ibid., 113.

Ordinary Seamen. Pugsley, a Lieutenant aboard the *H.M.C.S. Saguenay*, a river class destroyer and RCN warship gives a detailed description of his personal experiences in the RCN during the war. Pugsley reinforces the sentiments raised by James Lamb in The Corvette Navy. Of Halifax he writes: "Within the old "Stad" [HMCS Stadacona, Halifax] barracks were no recreational facilities at all except one small canteen where you could get drunk and outside barracks - well all you had was Halifax. Need one say more?...No matter how kind people [in Halifax] were to me personally, surely that would have been no excuse for me to fail to recount how Halifax appeared to hundreds of thousands of other ratings."¹⁸ Pugsley goes on to characterize the problems he found with Halifax during the war. "This proud and belligerent town invariably replies to the least criticism with a stream of personal abuse. It also complains continually that the rest of the country isn't doing enough for it. It's the complainingest town in the whole Dominion."¹⁹ Pugsley then criticizes the efforts made by Haligonians to provide recreation and entertainment for servicemen by using the example of the Ajax Club.

This club - as if you didn't know- was organized early in the war by Mrs. Stuart McEuen, of Montreal. The club was an instant success as far as the matelots were concerned. Unfortunately, it was equally successful in arousing the jealous fury of the Halifax women whose plans for what they were going to do for the sailors hadn't got beyond the talk stage... Part of the reason for the delay may be that the women put aside organizing a club in favour of organizing their men folk, with a view of forcing the upstart Ajax out of the picture. First a church group said they couldn't have ratings getting beer on the same street as their church...The mere thought of matelots and their six glasses of beer a night was insufferable.²⁰

¹⁸William Pugsley, *Sailor Remember* (Toronto: Collins, 1948), p. 76.

¹⁹Ibid., 54.

²⁰Ibid., 77.

This expresses the bitterness and resentment towards the city of Halifax which Pugsley and many other sailors felt. Through the Ajax conflict Pugsley addresses some of the factors that influenced Haligonians. He points out the opportunities they established for sailors and the general attitudes they held towards servicemen. Two of the attitudes influencing recreation were prohibitionist sentiment and religious fervour.

Pugsley then describes the naval sentiment towards the Ajax closing. "The matelot, as usual was the real loser, but he didn't get a chance to say what he thought. Not, that is, until V-E Day, when the ratings said a good deal. Halifax can hardly have forgotten yet how on that occasion matelots with looted liquor set up a bar on a churchyard tombstone. No sacrilege was intended, of course."²¹ The incident Pugsley is referring to is the V-E Day riots. The riots took place in Halifax May 7 and 8, 1945, destroying most of the downtown core. Looters smashed store windows, robbed stores and created havoc. The official report on the disorders calculated the damages to be

6,987 cases of beer, 1225 cases of wine, 2 cases of alcohol, and 55,392 quarts of spirits were looted for the Liquor Commission in Halifax, and 30,516 quarts of beer from Keith's Brewery of which 1,140 quarts of spirits, 10 cases of wine, and 81 cases of beer were subsequently recovered by the Commission. In Dartmouth 5,256 quarts of beer, 1,692 quarts of wine and 9,816 quarts of liquor were looted from the Commission...In that city [Halifax] 564 firms suffered damage. 2,624 pieces of plate and other glass in these premises were broken and 207 of these firms suffered from looting in some degree.²²

Sailors have often been associated with causing the riots and Pugsley's comments do not dispute that allegation.

²¹Ibid.

²²R.L. Kellock, *Report of the Halifax Disorders May 7-8 1945* (Ottawa: Edmund Cloutier, 1945), p.61.

In his books, Sailor Remember, and Saints, Devils, and Ordinary Seamen Pugsley is not interested in contrasting the recreation provision of Halifax and St. John's. In fact he does not even mention St. John's in either book. He nonetheless has much to say about the attitudes of the city towards sailors, how he felt towards Halifax, and how he saw other sailors respond to the apparent lack of activities available in Halifax. For James Lamb it was not the complaining nature of Halifax which caused sailors distress. He suggests instead that "Halifax in a word was indifference; nobody seemed to care whether you lived or died."²³ Although their complaints differ, Lamb and Pugsley echo the same resentment towards Halifax.

In 1983 editor Mack Lynch, on behalf of the Naval Officers' Association, compiled Salty Dips. This was a formal collection of stories written by sailors that brought together various aspects of a seaman's life.²⁴ Among sailors a 'salty dip' was a common phrase used to describe stories told by shipmates.²⁵ Salty Dips was written by those who lived the experiences and felt them worthy of mention. The series was so popular that three more volumes were published. This oral history of naval experiences is one way in which writing in the field has been carried out.

Salty Dips is a good example of how sailors came together to share wartime stories and illustrates how important reliving, retelling and remembering these stories were and are to the sailors who experienced them. However, most of these stories are

²³Lamb, *The Corvette Navy*, 128.

²⁴Mack Lynch, *Salty Dips* (Ottawa: Ottawa Branch, Naval Officers' Associations of Canada, 1983)

²⁵Ibid.,

about adventures at sea and do not discuss sailors' activities ashore. There are no anecdotes in the Salty Dips collection which focus directly on Halifax or St. John's.

Uncovering who sailors were is a difficult process. There is little in the writings of sailors which address racial or ethnic questions. One area that is addressed through personal narratives is the gender separation in the navy. The gendered nature of the RCN is an important issue to consider. Women were not allowed to join the RCN; it was strictly for men. In 1940 the Canadian government created the Woman's Royal Canadian Navy (WRCN) allowing women access to naval service through a sister organization to the RCN. In 1983 Rosamond "Fiddy" Greer, a WRCN or WREN recruit, wrote Girls of the King's Navy. The book focusses on the experiences of WRENS in the war. Her conclusions regarding Halifax were consistent with that of most male sailors. States Fiddy, "My first impression of the city [Halifax] was that it was indeed a dreary place. First impressions are often proven inaccurate; but the longer I remained in Halifax the more astute that first impression proved to be."²⁶ Greer goes on to tell of her experiences and those of her fellow WRENS during the war. For two years she was stationed at HMCS Stadacona in Halifax and tells several stories about her time spent there. Getting into Halifax for the WRENS was rare because, according to Greer, "the only way we could get through the Stadacona Wren Gate without a special pass was in a 'Liberty Boat'... Just how difficult it was to pass Liberty Boat inspection (it was never easy) depended upon which O.D.D. happened to be on duty at the time."²⁷ This quote suggests

²⁶Rosamond Greer, *Girls of the Kings Navy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p.51.

²⁷Ibid., p.53.

that even though there were WRENS at HMCS Stadacona, it was primarily male sailors who were able to get into the city.

Greer gives the reader a good sense of life of the WRENS at the naval base, but goes into little depth discussing onshore activities in Halifax. Still she reinforces the claim, made by male sailors, that Halifax was an uninviting city for any sailor coming to port. Greer does tell us that WRENS were in both Halifax and St. John's. She does not go into great depth concerning the St. John's contingent, mentioning only that "WRENS were stationed at HMCS Avalon in St. John's."²⁸ Although women did participate in the Canadian naval war effort as WRENS, this was a separate group from the male RCN sailors. The majority of sailors in the combined war at sea for Canada was overwhelmingly male with nearly 100,000 men volunteering, opposed to 6,600 WRENS.²⁹

Military service in the RCN was not the only option open to men looking to participate in the war effort. Another way of defining who sailors in the war were is by examining the alternatives that recruits had to joining the RCN. Some of the latest accounts of wartime experiences have been written by sailors who served on merchant vessels or convoy ships. In 1997 Doug Fraser a sailor during the war aboard a merchant vessel published Postwar Casualty: Canada's Merchant Navy. One goal of Fraser's book was to illuminate life aboard merchant ships. In his foreword Fraser writes: "This book has been written as a personal commentary and response to a half a century of neglect of

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.56.

²⁹Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 275.

Canadians who served at sea during the Second World War as merchant marines.”³⁰

According to Fraser, the efforts of the merchant navy during World War Two have gone largely unnoticed and unappreciated in Canada, and this is the “casualty” that he refers to in the title of his book. The merchant marine have always been treated by the Canadian government as a separate entity from the RCN. The role of the merchant marine navy during the war was to transport exports and imports between countries.³¹ Besides addressing the neglect of the merchant navy, Fraser spends a considerable amount of time discussing life in Halifax. There are two chapters which focus on Halifax in Postwar Casualty entitled ‘Home port, old city’ and ‘Halifax, May 7, 1945’. In his first chapter on Halifax ‘Home port, old city’ Fraser speaks briefly about the activities of the merchant marine in Halifax, and discusses the history of Halifax and its legacy as a seaport community. In his second chapter ‘Halifax, May 7, 1945’, Fraser addresses the V-E day riots in Halifax. Fraser defends the city and blames the RCN naval ratings for their actions and behaviour throughout the riots. “The Halifax riots represented a sad chapter in the history of the Royal Canadian Navy,” he writes, “but even more shameful are continuing efforts to blame the City of Halifax and its citizens for their heartless attitude toward the naval personnel.”³² Fraser gives credit to Haligonians for their wartime efforts for sailors. For some, Fraser’s condemnation of the RCN activities in the V-E day riots and support for what Haligonians offered sailors is one way of creating distance between

³⁰Doug Fraser, *Postwar Casualty: Canada's Merchant Navy* (Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1997), p. 2.

³¹Ibid., 15.

³²Ibid., 84.

the actions of the RCN and the merchant marine sailors during the war in Halifax. Fraser is vague when he discusses the role of the merchant marine in the Halifax riots but clearly suggests that it was primarily the RCN sailors who were responsible for causing the disturbances. Postwar Casualty helps bring to light the crucial work done by the merchant marine sailors during the war and creates further complexity to the task of defining who sailors were during World War Two.

The analysis of sailors to this point has reviewed who recruits of the RCN were during the war. What follows is an examination of the things that were important to sailors ashore. There were two necessities for most ratings while in port; alcohol and women. Few sources address these two aspects of naval life directly, but sailors did through song. In 1979 Anthony Hopkins collected popular songs among Canadian sailors during the war in his book, Songs from the Front and Rear: Canadian Servicemen's Songs of the Second World War. Hopkins' book is a collection of songs, marches and lyrics gathered from all three Canadian services the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. Sailors used song to convey their feelings about the people, places and things that were important to them including women and liquor.

Hopkins arranges his table of contents in Songs from the Front and Rear around the issues he believed were important to servicemen. The chapters he includes are "1. Songs for working up a thirst, 2. Songs from local units and ships, 3. Songs for fighting Canadians, 4. Songs of military discontent, 5. Songs of military hierarchy, 6. Songs of cynicism and disillusionment, 7. Songs of fear and death, 8. Relationships between men and women, 9. Sex, society and immorality, 10. Outrageous, humorous and exaggerated

songs.”³³ Of particular interest is the first chapter in Hopkin’s book, songs for working up a thirst. There are several reasons that might explain why Hopkin’s devoted his first chapter to the drinking songs of sailors. One reason Hopkins placed his chapter concerning alcohol first is because for most ratings this was the first order of business once ashore. For most sailors something was missing if a cold beer, or alcoholic beverage, was not somehow included in their onshore activities.³⁴ The inseparable ties between RCN sailors and alcohol is abundantly clear through the closure of the Ajax Club. The closure of the Ajax club in Halifax denied alcohol to servicemen and fueled anger in almost every RCN sailor toward the city. The V-E day riots also illustrate the importance of liquor to sailors. Much of the looting in the riots occurred at liquor commissions and at the breweries in Halifax.

Female companionship was another important pursuit of sailors ashore. Hopkins understood this and included a chapter in his book on relationships between men and women. Songs written about women by sailors were often lewd and concentrated on sexuality. Most included sexual innuendo, foul and derogatory language. This is abundantly clear in the song North Atlantic Squadron. A few lyrics from the song discuss Newfoundland as follows:

In Newfoundland when it got hot,
We used to fornicate a lot,
Only the fools would be pulling their tools,
In the North Atlantic Squadron...

³³ Anthony Hopkins, *Songs from the Front and Rear* (Edmonton: Hurtig Press, 1977)

³⁴ Ibid., 15.

The night we went to Newfoundland
 We came ashore with tool in hand,
 Fucked each slut in the Caribou Hut
 In the North Atlantic Squadron...³⁵

The North Atlantic Squadron points out several important details about the sailors of the RCN during the war. The lyrics themselves, although vulgar and derogatory, make an important statement about the attitudes of servicemen towards Newfoundlanders during the war. As well, it defines sailor feelings about women! The fact that St. John's and the Caribou Hut are mentioned suggests it was in the forefront of sailors minds. By making reference to Newfoundland and establishments located there the sailors were, in their own way, remembering enjoyable times which they had there. The lyrics to the song are unquestionably rude but when reading them one must remember that many of the servicemen who were composing and singing these songs were teenagers away from home for the first time and facing a difficult transition into adulthood through wartime experience. For many sailors the war experience served as their transition from childhood to adulthood, bringing with it an added focus on sexuality. With the transition into adulthood also came an increased desire to have sexual relationships with women. The North Atlantic Squadron addresses relationships between RCN sailors and women. Very few scholars have tackled the subject of sexual encounters among servicemen during the war. Hopkins comments on the types of girls that sailors found in each city:

In the town [St. John's] there were dances, parties, all organized and a few phone calls could bring in as many girls as the occasion needed - not prostitutes, but girls who didn't think badly of sailors. In Halifax...The city

³⁵Ibid., 53-55.

itself, despite tens of thousands of sailors, soldiers and airmen always stationed there, acted as if they were not there. Prices were constantly high, entertainment and recreation facilities always inadequate, brothels virtually nonexistent and in Halifax, apparently, neither nice girls nor their parents loved a sailor very much at all.³⁶

Hopkins makes a clear distinction between the 'nice girls' in St. John's who would provide a good time for sailors through companionship, opposed to girls in Halifax who 'didn't love a sailor very much at all'. Hopkins also mentions the limited brothels in Halifax, while not addressing the issue in St. John's. The relationship between women and sailors of the RCN has not been addressed in either scholarly works or personal narratives of ratings. James Lamb also briefly discusses the relationship between sailors and prostitution in The Corvette Navy. Lamb suggests:

European navies, older and wiser, provided brothels, carefully supervised and medically inspected...the Americans provided dances and entertainment and thousands of pretty, respectable girls... But in Halifax, the conventional morality of people living conventional lives could neither countenance a licensed brothel nor comprehend its need; and the means and will to provide alternatives such as was done by Mainguy with dances and other distractions in Newfyjohn seemed totally lacking. The result was that whores, too old or diseased to earn a living on the pavements of other Canadian cities, hustled a brisk and profitable trade on the streets of downtown Halifax... Private enterprise hastened to fill the void left by official indifference; an enterprising businessman opened a discreet brothel in a big house on Barrington Street, staffed it with a lot of pretty French girls and did so well he opened a branch in Dartmouth.³⁷

Lamb is quite frank in discussing the sexual morality of each city involved. Women in St. John's understood that sailors coming ashore would want both female companionship in their recreation and leisure activities and many sailors would also seek out a sexual

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁷Lamb, *The Corvette Navy*, 54.

relationship as well. Sailors coming into Halifax were told of its reputation as a sexual disease ridden city. The reputation of Halifax among sailors was supported by the yearly reports of the Nova Scotia Health Department. During the war years the reports of venereal disease and deaths from syphilis in the city rose steadily (See as figure 1). When sailors came into port in Halifax, the brothels in Dartmouth and Barrington Street were well known and frequented.

Through this brief analysis of who sailors were during the Second World War several points are clear. Sailors in general during the war were primarily male. All sailors of the RCN were male. Women were eventually allowed access to the naval duty, but it was through a separate organization to the RCN. The divisions among sailors along ethnic or religious lines are not clearly addressed in the writings of sailors or scholars to date, but other distinctions among RCN sailors are made. Sailors saw themselves in relation to rank and vessel. The rank of the sailor was an important way for sailors to identify who they were and position themselves in relation to other ratings. This is particularly evident in relation to many of the clubs established ashore that were strictly for officers only, such as the Crows Nest in St. John's, to be addressed later in this chapter. A second differentiation among sailors was the type of vessels that they served on. A certain camaraderie was formed among sailors of corvettes, or battleships, or the merchant marine. The vessel an RCN sailor served on was another way of identifying who he was. Lastly, sailors had specific needs while ashore that they sought out in their recreation activities, these being alcohol and female relationships. These two factors consistently dictated how enjoyable a sailor's time ashore would be.

Community

community: 1 : a unified body of individuals: as a : STATE, COMMONWEALTH

b :

the people with common interests living in a particular area; broadly : the area itself, the problems of a large community c : an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location d : a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society, a community of retired persons e : a group linked by a common policy f : a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests , the international community g : a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society the academic community

2 : society at large

3 a : joint ownership or participation ³⁸

This definition of community taken from Merriam-Webster's dictionary illustrates the complexities involved in clarifying what a community is. Communities exist as nations, regions, provinces, municipalities, townships, counties, cities, villages, towns and organizations to name a few. One consistent measure found in defining community is finding a common characteristic among a group of people whether it be social, geographic, cultural, political, or economic. For the use of this study, however, the geographic distinctions between Halifax and St. John's will be used to define each community.

One way of defining each community is through a comparison of how similar and dissimilar these cities were to each other. To begin a comparison of St. John's and Halifax it is noteworthy to point out that they are from the same geographic region, the North Atlantic or what is presently referred to as Atlantic Canada. Until recently the study of the Maritime region has been greatly marginalised by Canadian historians, and

³⁸“Merriam-Websters Colligate Dictionary” Available: <http://www.webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>. 10 September 2003.

sport history within the territory has been practically non-existent.³⁹ It is the East coast region that provides the backdrop to this study of sailors ashore during World War Two. Sharing the same region was not the only commonality between Halifax and St. John's during the war. Both cities were fighting for the Allied cause against the Nazis in Europe. This common characteristic brought the two cities close together, as they both experienced the pains and horrors associated with war, such as the threat of enemy attack, the day-to-day sacrifices wartime demanded, and the death of loved ones serving in the forces.

There were many differences between Halifax and St. John's. One distinction between Halifax and St. John's was the countries they belonged to. Halifax was part of the Dominion of Canada and St. John's a British colony. The allegiance of each city was reflected in their sporting traditions. Haligonians and Newfoundlanders had very different sporting interests. A glance at the sporting section of the St. John's Telegram, for instance, indicates that there was a strong emphasis on soccer, sailing and bowling in St. John's that in part reflected British influence. The Halifax Chronicle sporting page paid greater attention to basketball, hockey and baseball, sports that were North American in origin. The emphasis on these particular sports might also be a reflection of the climate in each city. The temperature in Halifax is more moderate and less extreme than the windy, freezing temperatures often faced in St. John's during the winter. With differing climates Newfoundlanders might have chosen to participate in activities such as bowling that

³⁹For an assessment of Maritime Historiography see Colin Howell. "Two Outs; Or, Yogi Berra, Sport and Maritime Historiography" *Acadiensis* 29,1, 2000, pp. 106-121.

allowed them to be indoors. Besides sport and climate, geography creates another distinction between Halifax and St. John's. Halifax is part of the mainland of Canada, while St. John's is located on the island of Newfoundland, with no connections to the mainland except for the ferry. Sporting teams based out of Halifax experienced greater movement throughout the Maritime region, playing games in Cape Breton, the Annapolis Valley, St. John, New Brunswick and elsewhere. In St. John's there was little travel across the island for competitive teams. Almost all games were played in the city. This is evident from an examination of the sporting pages of the St. John's Telegram and the Halifax Chronicle.

There was also a difference in the treatment of naval personnel in each city. This is made clear in the writings of sailors, as well as in the attitudes present in each city towards the RCN. Sailors pointed out the differences in Halifax and St. John's through more than just words. The V-E day riots represented a clear difference between the two ports of Halifax and St. John's. The riots, in part, represented how sailors felt towards Halifax. Stanley Redman, in his book Open Gangway offered a first hand account of the events of May 7 and May 8, 1945. In it Redman tries to downplay the role of naval ratings during the riots.⁴⁰ Open Gangway came in response to the formal inquiry that was held into the riots. The commission established to investigate the riots was conducted by R.L. Kellock. Kellock published his findings in A Report on the Halifax Disorders May 7-8, 1945 in the same year. The report condemned the naval ratings as the chief promoters of

⁴⁰Stanley Redman, *Open Gangway* (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1981), p. 145.

the riots.⁴¹ Neither Redman nor Kellock were interested in getting to the root of the problem; instead they are caught up in allocating blame.

Stephen Kimber's recent work, Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs,⁴² offers wonderful insight into some of the root causes for the outbreak of the riots.⁴³ Kimber starts out by establishing that the book is not "intended as an academic history" but rather is a "story about what life was like in Halifax during the Second World War, told as much as possible from the viewpoints of those who lived it."⁴⁴ Following a chronological order beginning with 1939, the book accurately portrays various perspectives of wartime Halifax told through several people's lives. Kimber chose to re-tell stories from people of all walks of life including Harold Masterman, a young British child who escaped the London bombings and was a five year old refugee in Halifax; Eric Dennis, a reporter for the Halifax Herald; H.B. Jefferson, a censor during the war for the media while also recording entry and exiting of ships to port; Admiral Leonard Murray, commander of the RCN fleet on the East Coast; Dorothy Hendsbee, one of Canada's first female welders and participant in the war effort on the home front; Desmond Piers, Captain of the *Restigouche* during the war; and several other individuals. Although spending time on each character's own life in Halifax, Kimber constantly reminds the reader of the naval presence in the city and focusses on the connections each person had with ratings. He emphasizes the impact of the riots that occurred in a colourful and dramatic light,

⁴¹R.L. Kellock, *Report on the Halifax Disorders* (Ottawa: 1945), p. 59.

⁴²The term 'Slackers' was used by RCN sailors during the war in reference to the city of Halifax.

⁴³Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War* (Canada: Anchor Canada, 2003)

⁴⁴Ibid., 1.

bringing to life the danger, fear and destruction that was caused on May 7 and 8, 1945. Kimber leaves little doubt that ratings were the chief promoters of the riots and the primary cause of the riots. Kimber's book provides a thorough description of wartime Halifax and suggests many factors that prompted sailors to riot, including overpopulation, poor planning of the V-E Day celebrations, and the Ajax controversy. However, Kimber is not concerned with other cities, such as St. John's, and what they did to make servicemen enjoy their stays.

Anthony Hopkins in his book Songs from the Front and the Rear also addresses the riots through the song, "The Battle of Halifax." The lyrics of the song clearly indicate the contempt ratings had for the city and their desire to get revenge. (See figure 2).

Hopkins summarizes the sentiments of sailors as follows:

The riots of Halifax had been promised in the hearts of thousands for years: "when this is over, boy, watch out!" And when the war was over, there was hell to pay for Halifax. The reasons for the hostility are well documented in histories of the war and any question about Halifax brings an instant response from North Atlantic sailors, usually expressed in terms of the difference between Halifax and St. John's.⁴⁵

Hopkins describes the sentiments of most sailors towards Halifax. He criticized the 'unpreparedness' of Halifax and its uncaring nature towards the naval presence. At the same time Hopkins extols the friendly atmosphere associated with St. John's. Few historians challenge the fact that naval ratings participated in the V-E day riots in Halifax and also played a significant role causing havoc in the downtown streets.

Comparing and contrasting the communities of Halifax and St. John's is but one

⁴⁵Hopkins, *Songs from the Front and Rear*, 100.

way of understanding each port. A survey of sailors ashore in Halifax would not be complete without examining the works of Judith Fingard. Fingard's book Jack In Port, was the first to compare the relationship between sailors and various port cities in Canada. Fingard explores the connection between sailors' in Halifax, St. John and Quebec City beginning in the mid-19th century. In Jack in Port she spends a chapter tracing out the preoccupations of sailors' onshore activities. Fingard points out that "[i]n Canadian historical literature the merchant sailor has received little notice. His life and work do not readily conform to the models and theories favoured by social historians."⁴⁶ Fingard was first to notice and address the void left by historians concerning the lives of sailors and their relationship to port communities through their onshore activities.

In her second book, The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax, Fingard focuses specifically on Halifax. This book examines the social transformation and development of Halifax during the Victorian period, between 1850-1900. Fingard focuses specifically on the social underclass in Halifax and reconstructs the lives of repeat criminal offenders in the city.⁴⁷ Fingard continues to map out some of the broader characteristics of Halifax during this period emphasizing its distinct class divisions, its prohibitionist mentality and religious fervour. "With the activist churches, temperance advocates, civic reformers and military authorities ranged against the underclass" she writes, "its members frequently found themselves arraigned in the dock on charges of drunkenness, liquor licence

⁴⁶Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 3.

⁴⁷Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake: Pottersfield Press, 1989), p. 17.

violation, prostitution or vagrancy.”⁴⁸ During World War Two Halifax retained many of the traits described in The Dark Side of Victorian Halifax. It was sailors who became Fingard’s ‘underclass’ in Halifax during the war years. It was the sailors who frequented local taverns, created a drain on housing, crowded the streets and visited brothels. All of this was done under the disapproving gaze of the righteous upper crust of Halifax that Fingard designates as “activist churches, temperance advocates and civic reformers.”

The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax helps explain the early roots of some of the long-standing attitudes held by righteous Haligonians towards the ‘underclass’. The book defines the community of Halifax as divided along social, religious and moral lines. These divisions were felt by visiting sailors who were perceived as an ‘underclass’ because of their interest in women and liquor. Many of these same attitudes are discussed within the works of Pugsley and Lamb and indicate an elitist mentality among influential Haligonians, a prudish attitude towards alcohol consumption and a deep sense of religiosity. These attitudes surfaced in Halifax in the decisions that were made regarding recreation provision for sailors. The closure of the Ajax club was one example of how Haligonians displayed and acted upon these attitudes.

Another way of defining community is through the institutions and organizations that are part of it. Scholarly connections have been made between sailors in Halifax and the establishments they frequented. For sailors in Halifax one of the establishments that helped to define the city was the Ajax Club. In his M.A. thesis, The Ajax Affair, Jay White traces the history of the Ajax club’s existence in Halifax, from its opening in 1940

⁴⁸Ibid., 28.

to its closure early in 1942.⁴⁹ White discusses a variety of issues pertaining to wartime Halifax and the military presence there. These issues include rising population, increased military personnel in port and the lack of provisions for sailors in the city.⁵⁰ The Ajax Affair focuses on the relationship between sailors, Halifax and the Ajax club itself, emphasizing the attitudes of the city towards alcohol and prohibition. White suggests that “...while Jack was a hero at sea, his proclivity for beverage alcohol made him an adversary ashore...when sailors drank they often did bad things: they fought, destroyed property, accosted females and became unmanageable and boisterous.”⁵¹ White’s study focuses on the Ajax dispute connecting it to religious growth and urban conflict in Halifax. The Ajax Affair also draws attention to the rising numbers of servicemen coming to Halifax during the war years, as well as the consistent failure of the city to provide adequate services to meet the demand.

White went on to write Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War as his doctoral dissertation in 1995.⁵² This study focussed more broadly on the city of Halifax during the Second World War. White examines the urban development, spread and growth of Halifax during the Second World War. One issue that White addresses is the overcrowding experienced in Halifax throughout the war. The city exploded from a pre-war population of 60,000, to almost 107,000 after the second year of war. This figure

⁴⁹Jay White, *The Ajax Affair* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1986), p. 3.

⁵⁰Ibid., 3.

⁵¹Ibid., 51.

⁵²Jay White, *Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War* (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, McMaster University, Ottawa, 1995)

does not include the military personnel, who were a temporary population boost to the city. St. John's population remained consistent throughout the war, remaining within a population range between 55,000 to 65,000. St. John's did not experience the rapid population boom that was experienced in Halifax. The population figures for each city are outlined in figure 3. Conscripted City delves deeply into the urban spread of Halifax, looking at statistics, demographics and the physical development of the port.

Graham Metson's collection of photographs, quotations and stories on Halifax during the war in An East Coast Port: Halifax at War 1939-1945 presents a visual representation of the city during the war.⁵³ Much of the book emphasizes the naval activities within Halifax from an industrial perspective. For example, Metson examines the development of convoys, ship production, ship building procedures and statistics. He does spend some time examining particular onshore activities of sailors, however. Metson includes some photographs of servicemen ice skating, at a RCN formal dance and enjoying a sing-song, but he does not include an analysis of the activities.⁵⁴ Metson's pictures also highlight the effects of the V-E Day riots in Halifax, creating a powerful image. These pictures bring to life the disorder and destruction caused in Halifax during the riots. When viewing Metson's images, one is visually transported to Halifax on May 7-8, 1945 and placed in the middle of the chaos occurring in the downtown streets.

In 1943, several years prior to the V-E Day riots, William Borrett produced the first in a series of books entitled Tales Told Under the Old Town Clock. In the books

⁵³Graham Metson, *An East Coast Port* (Toronto: McGraw, 1981)

⁵⁴Ibid., 16.

Borrett celebrated the success of Halifax as a port city and surveyed the seaport legacy of the city. The books gave no indication of any friction or troubles that existed between sailors and Halifax. Upon opening any book in the collection, a note on the first page reads: "A series of broadcast talks designed to make us familiar with our City and Province and to revive memories of bygone days and events which have made Nova Scotia, Canada's most storied Province."⁵⁵ The anthology of books reflected on various incidents in the history of Halifax such as the natural disasters in 1869, the explosion of 1917 and leads up to the military presence in the city during the second world war.⁵⁶ Although the books offer valuable insight, they cover a wide time frame and deal mostly with stories and memories about Halifax as opposed to documented fact. As well they do not address any of the tensions that existed between Haligonians and sailors.

Within the study of the Maritime region there has been a considerable amount of scholarly work done on Halifax. What follows is an analysis of the academic work done on the community of St. John's and its connection to sailors and sport. One author to examine St. John's and its wartime effort was Peter Neary in his book, Newfoundland 1929-1949. His intent was to examine issues of politics, economics and foreign policy between 1929 and 1949 in Newfoundland.⁵⁷ Neary measures the widespread growth and development of the American forces in St. John's that began during the war, and the various bases which they raised across the Island. The bases built by the American forces

⁵⁵William Borrett, *East Coast Port and Other Tales Told Under the Old Town Clock* (Halifax: The Imperial Publishing Company Limited, 1943), p.1. See References for the complete listing of the series.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁷Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic: 1929-1949* (Kingston: McGill University Press, 1988), p.21.

included Fort Pepperall in St. John's, a naval base in Argentia and an Air Force base in Gander.

One aspect that defined the military community in St. John's during the war was the large presence of American servicemen. Capturing this aspect of St. John's, John Cardoulis penned A Friendly Invasion: The American Military in Newfoundland 1940-1990. Cardoulis, an American soldier stationed in Newfoundland during the war, outlines the military development of the Americans in Newfoundland. Cardoulis emphasizes military operations and touches briefly on recreational activities.⁵⁸ Cardoulis followed up his first book with a sequel, A Friendly Invasion II. This focused on the American soldiers in Newfoundland after the war and the life of American military personnel there.⁵⁹ The second book offers another glimpse at the city of St. John's and examines the rapport American servicemen had with the port.

In 1989 authors Tony Murphy and Paul Kenny produced War at our Doorstep: St John's During World War Two, An Album that captured the community of St. John's during the war. This book was a collection of pictures and captions that brought to life many of the wartime events occurring in St. John's, such as the Knights of Columbus fire of December 12, 1942. It also depicts military life in the city such as the parades, the socializing of sailors, and the naval presence at the harbour.⁶⁰ Although Murphy and

⁵⁸John Cardoulis, *A Friendly Invasion: The American Military in Newfoundland, 1940-1990* (St. John's, Nfld. : Breakwater, 1990), p. 15.

⁵⁹John Cardoulis, *A Friendly Invasion II : A Personal Touch* (St. John's, Nfld. : Creative Publishers, 1993), p. 6.

⁶⁰Tony Murphy, and Paul Kenny, *The War at Our Doorsteps* (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publishers, 1989), p. 43.

Kenny give a general impression of St. John's during World War Two, there is little written analysis on the activities of servicemen while in the city.

As in Halifax, there were distinctive institutions, organizations and clubs in St. John's that helped to identify and characterize the community. In St. John's one of these clubs for sailors ashore was the Caribou Hut. Margaret Duley's book entitled The Caribou Hut, examines the hostel that was built during the war to provide sleeping quarters and recreational facilities for servicemen. Duley, in a very informal, highly romanticized and poetic style, describes the activities of the club. The book contains few citations and is more concerned with providing a colourful and anecdotal description of the club. Duley's focus is on presenting a colourful description of Newfoundlanders in St. John's at the time, instead of presenting an academic analysis.⁶¹

Another institution that characterized the community of St. John's and received notoriety among sailors was the Crows Nest. The Crows Nest was established in 1942 as an officer's club on Duckworth Street. The Crows Nest was famous among sailors for the 59 steep, winding steps one had to walk to enter into the bar. To this day the Crows Nest is visited by naval personnel coming into port.⁶² In 1982, marking its 40th anniversary, Harvey Bishop published, The Crows Nest, that describes its founding as a pub for sailors and explores its history.⁶³ The primary focus of the book is on the development and symbolic importance of the Crows Nest. There is a general consensus among officers that

⁶¹Margaret Duley, *The Caribou Hut* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), p. 7.

⁶²Harvey Bishop, *The Crows Nest* (St. John's: Crows Nest Board of Directors, 1982), p.1.

⁶³Ibid., 1.

the Crows Nest is a significant icon that distinguishes St. John's from any other port in the world even to this day.

It is not always the institutions, but sometimes the tragedies, that define community. One disaster to receive attention in St. John's was the fire at the Knights of Columbus hut on December 12, 1942. A royal commission into the fire was conducted by the Honourable Brian Dunfield, who in 1943 submitted his report, Destruction by Fire of the Knights of Columbus Hostel, St. John's. The K of C hut, an affectionate nickname for the building was a "sleeping, eating and recreation centre for service men."⁶⁴ Casualties of the fire included 19 civilians, 5 merchant navy, 17 RCN and RN sailors and another 7 presumed dead, 22 Newfoundland militia, 7 Canadian Army and 15 RCAF, 99 in total.⁶⁵ On the night of the fire there was a dance at the hut with more than 350 people attending. The fire began on the second floor of the hut and was caused by faulty wiring.⁶⁶ There was a tremendous outpouring of grief and emotion to the families of the victims of the blaze by Newfoundlanders. In the same year John Jones published, The K of C Hostel Disaster.⁶⁷ This was a book of poems in remembrance of the victims of the fire and the tragedy it brought. Again in 1977 many businesses in the community came together and published a book of remembrance for the victims. The book itself was filled with poems, anecdotes and stories from some of the mothers of the victims commemorating their lost

⁶⁴Brian Dunfield, *Destruction by Fire of the Knights of Columbus Hostel, St. John's: Report of Honorable Mr. Justice Brian Dunfield* (St. John's: Robinson and Co. Ltd, 1943), p. 1

⁶⁵Ibid., 29.

⁶⁶Ibid., 29.

⁶⁷John Jones, *The K of C Hostel Disaster* (St. John's, 1943)

children.⁶⁸

This tragedy came about due to improper building protocols that in part resulted from an over-anxious desire of Newfoundlanders to present a facility for servicemen in the city. The official report suggests that in their rush to provide recreation facilities and accommodations for ratings, Newfoundlanders overlooked some of the safety issues involved with the construction of the building.⁶⁹ The unfolding of this calamity suggests a different attitude in St. John's from that of Halifax. Newfoundlanders were gracious hosts to sailors, understanding the important role servicemen played in fighting the Nazis. As well, the people of St. John's understood that by accommodating sailors while in port, the sailors would in turn help the city when it was needed. In return for the hospitality showed by the city, sailors did their best to help out and protect the city from any adversity it faced. The K of C blaze itself claimed many servicemen from each of the three services. The men who perished gave their lives so that others could escape the burning building and live. For most Newfoundlanders the men of the RCN did their part to protect the city against adversity and in return deserved to have adequate facilities and hospitable accommodation.

Sport

To begin any discussion of sport it is essential to have a clear understanding of what is meant by the term. Academics have defined sport using both narrow and extensive parameters. In his most recent book, Blood, Sweat, and Cheers, sport historian

⁶⁸Herb Wells, *Forgotten Heros: The Knights of Columbus Fire* (St. John's : Regal Promotions, 1977)

⁶⁹Dunsfield, *The Destruction by Fire of the Knights of Columbus Hostel*, 5.

Colin Howell employed a broad definition of sport that included “any game, contest, or competitive leisure pursuit that involves physical activity...this includes organized play as well as organized competitive games.”⁷⁰ The study of sailors’ recreation and leisure habits ashore in Halifax and St. John’s encompasses a wide array of activities and pursuits that demands that a broad definition of sport be used. However, a significant part of this study examines highly organized sporting games with established rules, such as hockey, baseball, soccer, bowling, etc. The term competitive sport will be used in reference to these formal sporting activities.

Having defined the parameters of sport for this study it is possible to turn attention to academic works that connect sport to the issues relevant to sailors and community. One way sport has been examined by historians is by focussing on a single community. For example, Roy Rosenzweig’s book, Eight Hours for What We Will, studies the recreational patterns of the working class in Worcester, Massachusetts between 1870-1920. Rosenzweig defends a community approach noting that “[n]ational studies face the danger of distorting or misrepresenting discrete local and ethnic patterns... a community study offers the best opportunity for capturing workers’ lives in all their complexity.”⁷¹ The study of sailors ashore in two Atlantic communities follows the advice of Rosenzweig, evaluating recreation and leisure provision at a local level in order to uncover the ‘discrete local patterns’ in each. Rosenzweig recognizes the limitations to a study of community stating that “there is no such thing as an ‘ideal-typical’ American

⁷⁰Colin Howell *Blood, Sweat and Cheers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 5.

⁷¹Roy Rozenweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 3.

community.”⁷² Like any American community there is no ‘ideal-typical’ Canadian community; but the study of recreation provided to sailors in Halifax and St. John’s illustrates local differences within a specific region. A comparative study of this nature also provides two contrasting examples of how communities responded differently to the wartime demand for sport.

In 1978 John McFarland examined the connection between military and sport in Nova Scotia in his doctoral dissertation, A History of the Role Played by the Military in the Development of Competitive Sport in Nova Scotia 1930-1969. McFarland spends a chapter studying sport in the major military bases in Nova Scotia during the war years. The list of bases includes Halifax, Truro, Yarmouth, Sydney, Kentville, Greenwood, Shelburne and Digby.⁷³ McFarland only focuses on competitive sport and does not consider other forms of recreation and leisure among military personnel. McFarland’s study reveals a scholarly interest in examining the connections between the military and the development of competitive sport in a particular region, dating back to the late 1970s.

Until recently academic literature has spent little time analysing the relationship between sport and military life during the war years. In a recent issue of the Journal of Sport History, however Steve Bullock penned an article entitled “Playing for their Nation: The American Military and Baseball During World War II”. Bullock stresses the importance that the game of baseball played in maintaining a healthy army. “Throughout World War II, [American] military leaders utilized baseball to improve morale, prepare

⁷²Ibid., p. 3.

⁷³John McFarland, *A History of the Role Played by the Military in the development of Competitive Sport in Nova Scotia 1930-1969* (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Springfield College, 1978), p. 3.

for the rigors of combat and raise funds for the war effort.”⁷⁴ Bullock’s article suggests that historians have not forgotten about the connections between sport and military history. It also establishes that there is more research to be done investigating that relationship. A brief glimpse into academic work on the relationships between sport, RCN sailors and Atlantic communities also suggests that there is much research to be done. This study of sailors ashore draws important connections linking military to sport and sport to community.

Another link between sport and military is plainly obvious by looking at “Jack” himself.⁷⁵ As noted earlier, all sailors in the RCN were male and this fact played a tremendous influence in recreation pursuits of sailors seen especially through the naval desire for women and liquor. Sport historians have only recently started to seriously examine the relationship between sport and masculinity. In 1996 scholars John Nauright and Timothy Chandler published Making Men, a book that observed the relationship between sport and masculinity. In the introduction Nauright and Chandler point out, “we still do not understand the relationship between masculinity and sport well enough.”⁷⁶ To date there has been no study focussing on the connections between masculinity and sport in the RCN during the war, or at any other time.

Most recently Varda Burstyn, in The Rites of Men, analysed the relationship

⁷⁴Steve Bullock, “Playing for their nation” *Journal of Sport History* (Spring 2000), p. 67-85.

⁷⁵The term “Jack” is used in reference to sailors.

⁷⁶John Nauright, & Timothy Chandler, *Making Men: Ruby and Masculine Identity* (London: Frank Cass Ltd., 1996), p. 1.

between sport culture and the development of the masculine identity.⁷⁷ In her book Burstyn argues that “sport has become the great masculine secular religion of our era... it plays a profound and usually invisible role in our interpersonal, work, and political lives.”⁷⁸ Burstyn’s book focuses on the present day influences of sport on masculinity. The study of the RCN, an all male organization and the recreation and sporting pursuits of ratings ashore also draws close connection between sport and the making of a masculine identity. One way of marking the transition from boy to man in the RCN was through sport. As noted earlier, the leisure activities of men in the RCN often included women and alcohol, two pursuits that are generally connected to adulthood. The pursuit of women and liquor among servicemen defined and reinforced their masculine identity and marked their transition from boy to man. Jim Lynch, a policeman in St. John’s during the war suggests “boys of the Navy [RCN] I don’t think wanted any lasting relationship, they just wanted it [sex].”⁷⁹ For sailors ashore intercourse was an important recreational activity that in part defined the transition from youth to man. Lynch also addresses liquor in the sailors lives,

One of the things I found with the RCN was that most were from Western Canada, the Prairies, Saskatchewan. And most of them from Western Canada were young men joining the navy, first time taking their drinks. They were on this dangerous Newfiejohn-Derry run. They would be out probably for one to two months. And they would get back to port, and just want to get liquored up.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1999)

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, xi.

⁷⁹Jim Lynch, *Interview* (RNC Constabulary. St. John’s Newfoundland. April 10, 2001)

⁸⁰*Ibid.*.

Besides engaging in a discussion on alcohol, Lynch acknowledges the significance it played in the development of masculinity among sailors. The role of alcohol is constantly addressed in the story of sailors ashore in Halifax and St. John's during the war. In St. John's it was establishments such as the Crows Nest and the wet canteen at naval dockyards that welcomed sailors ashore. In Halifax it was the closure of drinking establishments like the Ajax club that in part caused anxiety for sailors there. For many sailors of the RCN masculinity was defined by how many drinks one could handle and the number of women by one's side.

Drawing from the work of Antonio Gramsci, sport historians have analysed sport as contested territory. Scholars refer to contested territory as the continual negotiation that occurs within sport in a variety of circumstances including spectatorship, race, gender and the use of recreational space to name a few. The contested nature of sport also includes power struggles that develop with its production. It focuses on those who have power to make decisions and those who do not. Some of the questions that these power struggles strive to resolve include, who will play the sport, and how and when the sport will be played. In his book, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, Bruce Kidd illustrates the contested nature of sport when he writes about baseball in the United States. "Canadian players were so good, during the 19th century" writes Kidd, "that the US congress was persuaded to keep them out through the Alien Contract Labour Act of 1855."⁸¹ Kidd's example suggests that those in power, in this case the U.S. congress, used their authority to bar Canadian participation in baseball. This decision affected both baseball players in

⁸¹Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1996), p. 24.

the United States and in Canada.

Sport provision in Halifax and St. John's during the war was also highly contested. As we will see each city had issues that cultivated power struggles between citizen and sailor. This study observes the negotiation and conflict over the provisions that were made in each city. It also considers the decisions that were made and what these decisions meant for sailors ashore.

This chapter has presented an overview of the three central themes involved in this study; sailors, sport and community, placing each within the academic work which has been achieved thus far. Clearly, there exists a gap in current scholarly work connecting the cities of St. John's and Halifax during World War Two specifically with regards to the recreation and leisure opportunities each provided visiting RCN sailors. Historians have, in a variety of ways tackled one or more of these themes, but to date no study has attempted to connect them as this study proposes.

What follows is a closer examination of each city, Halifax and St. John's. The following chapters will measure the reaction each city had to RCN sailors during the war, the provisions each made, the hardships each faced and the relationships that developed between citizen and sailor.

CHAPTER TWO

“Struggles in ‘Slackers’: Sailors Ashore in Wartime Halifax”

The purpose of this chapter is threefold; to examine the relationship between Haligonians and sailors, to investigate the activities that were made available to servicemen, and to analyse naval reactions to the city. In the first chapter it was pointed out that Halifax was not a favourite port of sailors; in fact most thought it unfriendly. A second purpose here is to make sense of why sailors became so disenchanted with the city of Halifax. This chapter will examine several ways that Haligonians and sailors interacted with each other during the war, the activities Halifax provided to sailors, the population explosion in Halifax, overcrowding in the city and the moral and religious influences within the city. This analysis will suggest that the city of Halifax was out of touch with the needs of sailors and did not supply adequate facilities or activities that would lead to an enjoyable stay onshore. In many ways Haligonians tried to prohibit sailors from partaking in many of their favourite pastimes. What most sailors wanted was female companionship, alcohol, and recreation and leisure opportunities. Halifax was able to provide a wide variety of recreation and leisure activities for sailors as this chapter will attest. It rarely, however, would allow ‘proper’ women to associate with sailors. Nor was alcohol made easily accessible. Haligonians were not interested in the needs of sailors; they had their own troubles and interests at heart. The irony here is that servicemen accounted for a large part of the troubles in the city. The influx of military personnel led to the population explosion. Most residents were more interested in developing quick

solutions to the problems than in reaching out and understanding what was actually desired by ratings. Haligonians did not take an active interest in working with the RCN to solve the problems of the city. There was no partnership between sailor and citizen as in St. John's. For many in Halifax, sailors were considered as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

This does not mean that Haligonians did not care about the RCN ratings coming to port. The evidence indicates quite the contrary. The city offered many activities for sailors ashore. However, from the sailors' perspective they were the wrong sorts of activities. Alcoholic beverages were not made readily available to crews there. The most serious conflict between citizen and sailor in Halifax during the war centred on the sale of liquor at a sailors' pub known as the Ajax Club. Its eventual closure would gain national and international attention. There were constant power struggles between those who took a liberal stance concerning sailors and drink and those who were only happy if alcohol was banned for all servicemen. Throughout the war years there was constant conflict between those with the interests of sailors in mind and those defending a 'moral position'. Decisions usually favoured those who were temperance-minded. Some sailors considered the Ajax closure as a symbol of an uncaring city, and a smoldering flame that eventually sparked the V-E day riots several years later. It is not the intention of this chapter to pinpoint the causes of the Halifax Riots of May 7 and 8, 1945, but rather to consider the factors leading up to and fuelling the outbreak. The Ajax closure certainly was one of them.

The population explosion in Halifax was another cause for friction between host

and visitor. The rapid growth quickly led to housing shortages, which increased stress levels on both resident and sailor. Haligonians watched as their once quiet, port city grew more than 80% causing “empty store shelves... and increasing lineups for everything from necessity to pleasure.”⁸² For naval personnel the constant fear of sleeping on the streets wore on their emotional psyche and did not help to make their stay in the city enjoyable. For those servicemen in Halifax unlucky enough to find the available hostels full, the only option to sleeping outdoors was to pay excessively high rent to greedy landlords. Rent gouging did not help matters or encourage a friendly atmosphere between sailors and Haligonians.

At the same time, the RCN sailor was romanticized as ever watchful and strong, a diligent protector of humanity, standing for all that was proper and respectable and shrugging off the evils of weaker men.⁸³ Citizens saw women and liquor in sailors’ lives as the evils that they needed to avoid in order to remain ‘ever watchful’. One way a virile image of the sailor was to be displayed was through competitive sport. Competitive sport was aggressively promoted in wartime Halifax. RCN teams received continuous media attention and were eligible to play in any city league running. In 1942 the Navy League recreation centre opened in Halifax, providing large fields for competitive sports like baseball and rugby. All of these actions, it was thought, promoted stronger, tougher sailors who were developing their masculinity through dignified means, rather than turning to the evils of liquor and “dissolute” female companionship.

⁸²Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pig* (Canada, Anchor Canada, 2003), pp.84 &117.

⁸³*Halifax Chronicle*, September 10, 1939, p. 3.

The emphasis on sport did not alienate sailors from Halifax, but intolerance regarding alcohol and female companionship did. Sailors found enjoyment by participating in sport as players and spectators, but this was only one way to recreate. After an enjoyable game of hockey many sailors really just wanted a female to talk to and a cold beer or alcoholic beverage to enjoy. For servicemen this signalled true masculinity. Most ratings ashore did not see themselves in the same light as Haligonians did. Navy men wanted respite from being the defenders of Canadian waters and there is little doubt that every sailor needed such a break for his own peace of mind. Haligonians were only willing to offer certain modes of recreation, however, and these did not include alcohol or women.

In May 1945 Halifax was ravaged by looters and rioters, the eventual result of the troubled relationship between citizen and sailor in the port city. It is important, however, to understand the positive steps that Haligonians took with regards to recreation provision for sailors between 1939-1945 as well as the things they did wrong. There is no doubt that by the end of the war sailors in Halifax were unhappy. This chapter will show that Haligonians were simply out of touch with the actual needs of sailors and adhered to a false idea of the sailor as a source of their own problems.

The Strategic Importance of Halifax

Prior to the beginning of World War Two Halifax was well on its way to becoming the primary Canadian naval port on the east coast. Geography and strong infrastructure were two factors that propelled the port city into this leading role. Because of its location the city provided a harbour that was accessible year round. These were

important factors influencing the RCN when it chose Halifax as the principal east coast naval base.⁸⁴ The jutting coastline of Halifax and the surrounding region offered additional protection for the RCN. The Department of National Defense (DND) took these factors into consideration in making HMCS Stadacona the primary naval base on the east coast. Despite offering protective cover, however, the jutting land also made navigation for ships difficult. It was the wayward navigation of two ships in the Halifax harbour, the *SS Imo* and *SS Mont Blanc* that caused a serious explosion in 1917 killing more than 2000 people.⁸⁵ The configuration of the coastline did not stop development, and by 1945 naval infrastructure was built up all along the Halifax shoreline. (See figure 4.)

The geographic position of Halifax provided a natural protection against enemy attack. The measurements of the harbor indicate a four mile inlet, with the narrowest width sixteen hundred yards wide. Water levels in some sections of the harbour were as low as thirty feet making it almost impossible for any attacking ships unfamiliar to the area to pass. The harbor was also a very compact total area of sixteen square miles.⁸⁶ The geographic proximity of Halifax to larger American ports along the eastern seaboard such as New York and Boston made it a useful port for Canada. Halifax quickly became an important stop and transfer point for American and British allied sailors during the war. (See figure 5). Halifax would be able to quickly add to transports and convoys making

⁸⁴Ibid., 105.

⁸⁵Michael Bird, *The Town That Died : The True Story of the Greatest Man-Made Explosion Before Hiroshima* (New York : Putnam, 1963), p. 13.

⁸⁶Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 103.

their way overseas from these North American cities. Convoys from the United States could meet in Halifax and then make their way from the Canadian city to England. Halifax was also close enough to make convoy connections with St. John's. The Jefferson log, commissioned during the war to track the movement of military, private and commercial ships in and out of the Halifax harbour between 1940-1943, suggests that, "during the war years 56,780 ships entered and cleared Halifax. This was an average of 26 ships per day."⁸⁷ The log contains ship names, dates and even the times of entry into the harbour. The 30 volume collection set helps us to understand the never ending flow of ships, both military and commercial, arriving and departing from Halifax on a daily basis. The public was continually informed of vessel movements into and out of the Harbour by the local newspaper, The Halifax Chronicle. It featured a daily column entitled "Along the Waterfront", usually in the back pages where it would briefly outline all the ships which were currently docked at the harbor. A typical report would read, "M. & L. Coaster II. The schooner M.&L. II Captain Earnest arrived yesterday from Lunenburg docking at Pickford and Blacks with fish for export and a load of cargo for DeWolf's for Lunenburg. In addition: 9 vessels, 5 schooners, 3 motor vessels and 1 tugboat came into port."⁸⁸ It was common practice to list the name of the boat, the captain and to provide a brief word about the ship or crew. This practice carried on throughout the war years and helps reveal the diverse activities taking place in the port.

Halifax also became a significant port because of strong military infrastructure

⁸⁷The H.B. Jefferson Collection. *PANS*. MG 1, volume #485-515.

⁸⁸*Halifax Chronicle*, September 7, 1940, p. 13.

that was developed there during the early war years. Not only did Halifax cater to the military needs of the RCN, but it sported an army barracks and an air force base across the harbour in Dartmouth. Loading and unloading facilities met the needs of the merchant navy in the port as well. Not only was Halifax crucial for international transports with the United States and Britain, it was the central point along the eastern seaboard in Canada for various shipping and transport activities, including convoys.⁸⁹ The city was able to quickly transport goods to and from the harbour using the railways that ran to the harbour. It was by rail that goods received from ships were transported across the Maritimes to the rest of Canada.

Haligonians quickly came to realize the strategic naval importance of the city and saw that because of the growth in infrastructure, it was better equipped for war in 1939 than it had been in 1914. On January 1, 1941 The Chronicle featured a two page article discussing harbour improvements since the last war. The celebratory article began with these comments, "We may be devoutly thankful, that within this Dominion the port of Halifax is of such immense value to the Allied cause... with developments such as Deepwater Terminals; Well Laid Out Harbour; Grain Handling; Cold Storage Terminal; Cold Storage Annex; and Auxiliary Services."⁹⁰ A second article written in the same paper discussed the efforts of the military to guard against enemy attack. The headline read: "Halifax fortress well prepared to cope with sea attack: Port defenses are stronger than ever." The article praised "the unprecedented development of the fighting services

⁸⁹Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, p. 106.

⁹⁰*Halifax Chronicle*, January 1, 1941, p. 2.

in the Halifax fortress” which it believed “ was one of the outstanding achievements of the war year 1940.”⁹¹ The article went on to discuss the increased manpower at the waterfront ‘fortress’ and the formation of new protection units that included a sea attack unit, a searchlight battery unit, an artillery unit, the Halifax Rifles, and the P.E.I. Highlanders.⁹² With this considerable influx of military personnel, shortages in accommodations were severe. “So great has been the overflow of personnel that the department found it imperative to find additional accommodation and leased a part of the provincial exhibition property which has been converted into a suitable barracks.”⁹³ Although Halifax was well prepared for the influx of ships into its harbour throughout the war, it was not prepared for the increased number of servicemen entering the city. Nor was the city prepared for the problems that these extra men seeking entertainment would bring.

Halifax and the Housing Crisis

As the war dragged on and the number of servicemen entering the city continued to increase, housing in Halifax was at a premium. The number of rooms available for servicemen did not meet the need of sailors in Halifax. The result was that many sailors and military personnel were forced to take refuge in the streets or pay outrageous prices for hotels or private rooms for rent. Stephen Kimber writes about the housing in wartime Halifax suggesting that “[i]n August 1939, just before the war began, the complainant

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

rented a one room apartment for \$21.70 a month. By June 1940, less than a year later, the rate jumped nearly 30 percent to \$27.50.”⁹⁴ City council quickly recognized this deficiency and tried to correct it by providing sleeping and recreational accommodation for members of the service.⁹⁵ Plans to house the influx of sailors were swiftly developed by the city. On February 14, 1940 Halifax city council issued a statement granting tax exemptions to the YMCA, Salvation Army, St. Marks Church, Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation, Knights of Columbus and North End Services Canteen.⁹⁶ These organizations all were key in providing accommodations and entertainment for servicemen in the interim. It was at this desperate point that the Red Cross of Canada stated it would donate money towards the building of a hostel in Halifax. The Halifax Chronicle reported upon a \$16,000 donation promised by the organization “to provide hostel facilities for navy and merchant marine sailors in Halifax.”⁹⁷ The Red Cross donation was matched by a contribution from Halifax City Council of \$15,000. Unfortunately, even the task of building suitable quarters for servicemen met with disagreement. The Chronicle quoted Premier Angus McDonald of Nova Scotia as saying:

Many soldiers, sailors and members of the Royal Air Force in Halifax at present time are in need of accommodation. It is the feeling of many citizens including officers commanding these forces that some facilities should be provided those men. Y.M.C.A. and various church organizations

⁹⁴Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs*, 117.

⁹⁵Box 65, (Feb 14, 1940), *PANS* (RG 35-102 (1B))

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷*Halifax Chronicle*, November 17, 1939, p. 12.

are doing their utmost, but accommodations are still inadequate.⁹⁸

Although money had been given to build new facilities in Halifax for housing, the city already had a Navy League building that was being used by the military as a planning centre. This quickly sparked public controversy. The front page headline of November 18, 1939 read, "Use Navy League's Building as Planned: Built as Hostel, Why not use it? Public Opinion Demands!" The article went on to ask, "[i]s a club or hostel needed for the soldiers and sailors who will be in Halifax during the war? Public opinion answers - yes. Is there any need to discuss erecting or purchasing a hostel when there is in Halifax a building like that of the Navy League? Opinion thundering - No."⁹⁹ According to The Chronicle there was sufficient housing available and to spend money on increased accommodation was not necessary. This mentality clearly depicts the limited understanding that Haligonians had of the serious housing shortages faced by the RCN. The Navy club that was built during the First World War was designed at a cost of \$357,000 to accommodate 200 people. It was built with fireproof walls of brick and stone.¹⁰⁰ Another report in the Chronicle suggested that if space in the Navy building was maximized there would be enough room for 400 servicemen,

Navy league officials say that by converting various spaces into dormitories...the building could accommodate 400 with a reading room, games room, a space for dancing and other facilities. If necessary the theater could be dispensed with...making accommodations for at least an

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁹ *Halifax Chronicle*, November 18, 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.

additional 200 men, without interfering with recreational facilities.¹⁰¹

The Halifax Chronicle continued the anti-building crusade with a follow-up article on November 23, inserting a large photo of the Navy League building with the caption, "This is the house that "Jack" built."¹⁰² The paper also published a letter sent from the Council of Social Agencies to the mayor, W.E. Donovan, stating that it was the unanimous opinion of the 54 social agencies, services, clubs and church groups participating that

the Navy League Building which was designed for this particular purpose, which is fireproof with all the essential dormitories, recreation rooms and washroom facilities should be used as a hostel for housing servicemen and that the Eastern Air Command for which the building was taken over by the government should secure office accommodation elsewhere.¹⁰³

Immediately following the headline came a rebuttal asserting heavy resistance to the spending of public funds on hostels for the servicemen from the military services in the city.¹⁰⁴

By the end of 1939 there was a severe housing shortage in Halifax. Instead of banding together to address the problem, disagreements, complaints and arguments ensued. Decisions on how to solve the problem were difficult to make due to intense public outcry and the opinion that there was enough accommodation available and money

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰²*Halifax Chronicle*, November 23, 1939, p. 5.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴*Halifax Chronicle*, November 24, 1939, p. 12.

should not be spent. After only four months of war, Halifax was awash with conflicts over the location, funding and number of hostels to be built. These conflicts were resolved for a time on December 4, 1939 at a meeting of the city Board of Trade. The decision was taken that two hostels, able to lodge a total of 550 men would be built.¹⁰⁵ The following day the Chronicle reported, "The first hostel will be operated by the Y.M.C.A. in the present Halifax Ladies College building on Barrington St., with minimum sleeping quarter for 350 men. The second will be operated by the Salvation Army, in a building as yet unnamed, with sleeping quarters for 200-250 men."¹⁰⁶ Neither hostel would have a wet canteen, allowing military personnel to purchase alcohol. The Navy League building would not be used as a hostel, since the Air Force had stepped forward and claimed the building for its military operations.¹⁰⁷ The article went on to discuss the sources of funding for the projects, listing the provincial government at \$25,000, the Red Cross at \$25,000, the City of Halifax at \$15,000, and the Canadian Legion at \$33,600, as the primary benefactors.¹⁰⁸

Although the Salvation Army did not have a particular site in mind, they had several guiding principles for the hostel. These included:

1. To rent a building on a year's lease for the duration of the war with sleeping facilities for 200 men at 25 to 50 cents per night.
2. To operate a dry canteen.
3. To maintain a lounge and writing room with a library.

¹⁰⁵ *Halifax Chronicle*, December 5, 1939, p.1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

4. To conduct recreational activities for men of the services
5. To provide entertainment, music and songs etc. for the men.¹⁰⁹

Heated debate continued to surround the Salvation Army hostel. Discontent arose over site location, the failure to provide a wet canteen and the management of the hostel itself. Although the Knights of Columbus (K of C) offered to sell the Salvation Army a hall located on Hollis Street for the sum of \$25,000, many members of the Salvation Army were interested in other locations such as a site on Argyle Street. Eventually, the Argyle Street location was chosen for a hostel. Conflict also arose over the question of a wet canteen in the hostel. The K of C hall was already equipped with facilities to provide liquor to servicemen. Members of the Salvation Army were divided over the operation of a wet canteen. Number 4 of the Salvation Army principles suggested that there should only be a dry canteen. Of course, the access to liquor was very important for servicemen coming to port. For Haligonians, however, it became an issue in a moral debate. In the end the hostel would remain dry and thus send yet another message from citizens to visiting sailors that they were now in a city of high moral fibre!

Still, debates continued regarding the Salvation Army hostel, especially over how the hostel would be run. There was an offer of \$50,000 by investors in Montreal to run the hostel as a private enterprise. It was eventually decided that the hostel would remain in the care of the organization.¹¹⁰ The Salvation Army officially opened its War Service Center on January 3, 1940 in Wolverine Hall, at 220 Argyle Street. The opening

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 1 - 2.

¹¹⁰ *Halifax Chronicle*, December 4, 1939, p. 4.

ceremony of the hostel included “song, dance and speeches by ranking officers of each of the services”.¹¹¹

The Salvation Army, or Army Hostel was managed by Adjunct Ford and offered 216 beds. The hostel had a games room that included ping pong tables, jig saw puzzles, billiards and other games as well as a gymnasium equipped for badminton, boxing, basketball and a bowling alley.¹¹² The Salvation Army now had in place quarters for servicemen. But all of its facilities were to be dry.

On February 1, 1940 a headline appeared in The Halifax Chronicle celebrating the achievements of the city in providing accommodation and recreation for servicemen ashore. “Sailors Don’t Talk Shop on Shore Leave” summed up the contributions of Halifax in making sailors comfortable at this early point in the war. The city had two hostels and three canteens in operation for sailors.¹¹³ These services were “established since the outbreak of war, for those in the Allied service during their time off duty.”¹¹⁴ The paper recognized the contributions made by Haligonians in forming a Citizens War Services Committee. This organization worked in conjunction with national groups such as the Knights of Columbus, the Red Cross and the Canadian Legion to set up hostels and canteens for military use in the city.¹¹⁵ Although Haligonians did their best in providing quarters, recreational activities and sporting facilities for servicemen, the overwhelming

¹¹¹Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴*Halifax Chronicle*, February 1, 1940, p.4.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

numbers of servicemen flooding into the city would soon take up all rooms, leading to shortages. Haligonians, however, failed in providing the two most important things on the minds of sailors ashore; women and liquor.

The Y.M.C.A. Hostel

The Y.M.C.A. hostel, or "Y" located at 264 Barrington Street opened on December 3, 1939 with a maximum occupancy of 310 persons, and hopes to expand its capacity in the future. The hut offered a variety of services including hot showers, beds, a games room, library and recreation facility.¹¹⁶ The club was an instant success among military personnel. In its first two months of operation 10,000 servicemen used the facilities. Statistics indicate that it was primarily naval ratings using the hostel. The official report on military usage suggested that "from December 8, 1939 to January 7, 1940, 4,445 men have slept there; 3025 from the navy, 198 from the army, 273 from the merchant marine and 65 from the air force."¹¹⁷ The numbers given by the Y.M.C.A are a good indication of the number of servicemen stopping in Halifax. In fact after examining RCN numbers, it is clear that Halifax had the highest number of naval ratings in all of Canada. (See figure 6.)

The "Y" offered servicemen organized entertainment such as concerts, recitals and sing-a-longs.¹¹⁸ These concert performances were presented twice during the week and every Sunday afternoon after religious obligations were met in the morning. The

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

concerts were put into full swing just six days after the hostel's official opening.¹¹⁹ The first concert was "widely attended and greatly enjoyed."¹²⁰ Many Haligonians would assist in running these dry concerts that were an integral part of on-shore experience for sailors. Throughout the war the "Y" hostel continued its concerts for the sailors. The performances would often take the form of variety shows, including sailor participation.¹²¹ Most concerts were hosted by church groups, charitable bodies and youth organizations in Halifax. The groups participating in the concerts included the Boy Scouts, the Kiwanis, the cadets and the alumni group.¹²² Most churches within the community took turns providing concerts. A headline on February 29, 1940 in the Halifax Chronicle read "Synagogue Group presents concert."¹²³ The concerts were performed by various groups and church denominations in Halifax and were seen as an appropriate way for sailors to have good, clean fun. In most circumstances this was not the only type of fun that sailors were looking for. Besides hosting concerts, the "Y" also housed a gymnasium for servicemen. Similar to the Army hut, the "Y" gym was equipped for badminton, boxing and basketball.¹²⁴

As the war lingered on, military personnel continued to land in the city. Even with both the "Y" and Army hostels in full operation there were still great shortages in

¹¹⁹ *Halifax Chronicle*, February 9 1940, p. 12.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* January 11, 1940, p.12.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* March 10, 1940, p.12.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.* February, 27, 1940, p. 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

accommodations for servicemen. On January 1, 1941 The Chronicle ran an article headlined “Ever changing personnel at wartime hostel” which addressed some of the problems faced by the “Y” hostel. Overcrowding was a continuing problem for the hostel. Even with putting two men to a cot, “with a capacity of 600, the biggest night saw 715 men given accommodation, over 70 men sleeping on mattresses on the auditorium floor... it was every man for himself.”¹²⁵ Accompanying the article in the Chronicle was a photograph depicting the overcrowding of servicemen at the hostel.

By 1942 the population of Halifax had exploded to more than 95,000 citizens. This was an increase of more than 30,000 from its population in 1939. Population numbers would continue to rise in Halifax for the next couple of years. As the population in Halifax grew steadily, so did the problems caused by insufficient housing. Excessive rents were becoming more and more frequent, rooms were impossible to find and hotels were charging incredible sums for one night’s accommodation. This population influx into Halifax affected citizen and sailor alike. For those who had been living in the city prior to 1939, the increased pressure on services made them feel extremely resentful toward the transient military personnel who appeared to be the primary cause for filling up streets and making life congested and crowded. Sailors coming to port felt less and less appreciated. Sailors entering the port city were now considered a nuisance only making the streets and congestion worse. Yet the problems continued to mount for servicemen entering the city. There was simply no room. In a meeting with Mayor Donovan on December 14, 1940, Colonel DesRosiers of the Canadian Forces suggested

¹²⁵*Halifax Chronicle*, January 1, 1940, p. 3.

that servicemen were bearing the brunt of the housing shortages. “[F]our to five hundred nightly need accommodation beyond the capacity of existing hostels. This demand will increase to a total required accommodation of one thousand nightly beyond present capacity.”¹²⁶ From this meeting it was decided that the city armories would be used in an emergency role to provide shelter for servicemen. Blankets, floor space and restroom facilities would be provided. It was estimated that between 400-500 men could be serviced in the facility.¹²⁷

By 1941 the housing shortages were even more severe for citizen and sailor alike. With an increase in population of 30,000, rent gouging became second nature to landlords who sought any way to skim money from the throngs of the people within the city. Eric Hutton, a visiting journalist to Halifax from Toronto, gives a first timer’s impression of the city in 1941.

Arrived in Halifax, you will be asked by the taxi driver please to share a cab with two or three others, if you don't mind. He doesn't mind in the least because he collects full fare from each passenger. Much of the time it is simply impossible to get a taxi at all...Greeting you at the hotel is a look of weary regret from the room clerk. He holds up a two inch thick stack of wires and letters of reservations. Perhaps in two or three days... However it turns out that he can let you have a bed... you are escorted to a large ground floor room, once the ladies lounge, now occupied by a score of beds. This dormitory is popularly - or unpopularly known as the 'dog house' or 'bull pen'. It costs 2.25 a night to join the chorus of snores.¹²⁸

Hutton is vivid in his description of the city and the lack of available rooms. He also points out the liberties taken by taxi drivers amidst the difficult situation Halifax was

¹²⁶*PANS*, RG 35-102 (3B) Vol 55 #11., December 14, 1940

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸Eric Hutton, *PANS* (MG1, Vol #485, #13, 1940)

facing. In an letter to his editor, Hutton discusses the incredible prices charged for rent by landlords in Halifax,

The Halifax housing shortage has become a blueprint for inflation. Here is a necessity of life for which the demand exceeds the supply. Consequently, rents charged no longer have any bearing on value received...A sample: In Toronto, no landlord would have dared ask more than \$20 a month. In Halifax, it was "worth" \$60. This predicament has made the natives here quite hostile¹²⁹

A frustrated Mayor Donovan did not turn a blind eye to the housing crisis in Halifax. Instead he fueled local animosity towards the services by stating that "the housing problem is acute... [due primarily to the] influx of military men and civilians - and especially their wives and families."¹³⁰ The frustrated and accusatory words of the mayor did not foster positive citizen and sailor relationships within the city, but set out to weaken the ties that were already loosening between them. Donovan made a scape-goat of sailors and servicemen, identifying them as the primary reason for the influx of citizens in the city.

Overcrowding in Halifax remained a problem throughout the war. With Donovan's comments identifying military personnel within the city as the chief source of the problem, tensions between citizen and sailor were heightened. Overcrowding caused bitterness not only for ratings coming to Halifax, but also among members of the community towards the transient military populations invading their busy city. For many sailors the crowded streets, hostels, clubs, restaurants, movie theaters, shopping stores,

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

trams, taxi cabs, did little to help relieve the stresses of an intense war at sea. Besides dealing with persistent overcrowding, the generally detached attitude displayed towards naval ratings by many Haligonians only heightened tensions between them. Many Haligonians viewed the sailor population as a burden on their city. Those in the city valuing the naval presence then made sure that the boys were not tempted by the fairer sex or the bottle. By late 1940 the relationship between citizen and sailor was deteriorating. Sailors worn out by long voyages and stressful moments at sea came to an un-caring, overcrowded port city filled with citizens who seemed more willing to blame them for causing congestion than offering them support and encouragement for their efforts abroad. At this point in the war neither citizen nor sailor was comfortable with the situation in Halifax.

The Ajax Controversy

In December 1940, a reprieve from wartime stresses came to sailors with the opening of the Ajax Club. The Ajax club offered various hospitalities, entertainment and liquor. However, many in Halifax opposed the sale of alcohol and would successfully lobby to close the club down. The animosity that developed between citizen and sailor in Halifax due to the subsequent closure of the Ajax Club is another indicator that Haligonians were out of touch with the needs and desires of naval ratings. The Ajax Club was officially opened in Halifax December 6, 1940, by Mrs. Janet McEuen.¹³¹ According to an article in the Montreal Standard, its mission was to entertain sailors of the RCN and Allied navies throughout the war years. Located on 34 Tobin Street the building was a

¹³¹*Halifax Chronicle*, December 6, 1940, p.11.

large, Victorian mansion with a “beautifully walled garden.”¹³² The Ajax was opened with support from community, military and religious leaders including Sir Gerald Campbell K.C.M.G., high commissioner for the United Kingdom, who officiated the opening along with Rear Admiral J.C. Hamilton (RN) and Commodore G.C. Jones (RCN).¹³³

The Montreal Gazette gave a comprehensive account of the building, describing it as having

[a] large hall at one end of which is a cloak room where all coats must be hung on entering. There is a mess for ratings and one for petty officers. Beer and soft drinks are not sold for cash, but on a ticket system. Tickets are purchased at the desk and turned in for beverages, or can be refunded. On the second floor are two cheery dining rooms which accommodate 100 at a sitting, divided by a spotless kitchen... there is a games room wherein is installed a ping pong table, dart boards and various table games. The library has more than 2000 volumes... Magazines are available and writing materials are supplied to guests... The club can accommodate 450 at a time and has a turnover rate of 1000 to 1200 visitors between 6 pm and midnight and 9 am to 1 am seven days a week... This summer the sponsors of the club plan to build deck tennis courts and an 18 hole putting green and vegetable gardens on the large plot of land behind the building.¹³⁴

The club even secured the donation of a black station wagon from a donor in Montreal.

The ‘cabby’, as it was called, was used to taxi the men back to their ship in the morning.¹³⁵

The Ajax club was a perfect place for sailors to go relax and enjoy each others’

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³*PANS* (Micro: Misc: Societies: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

¹³⁴*Montreal Gazette*, April 23, 1941

¹³⁵Ibid.

company. However many Haligonians, particularly those from the religious sector, had serious concerns about the Club serving liquor to servicemen. On January 19, 1942 Mrs. McEuen received a notice from the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission rejecting her liquor licence application for 1942. The cancellation was due in part to "representations from Fort Massey United Church."¹³⁶ Fort Massey United Church was located across the street from the Ajax Club. Janet McEuen was able to secure a temporary liquor license to operate the club on a day to day basis, but the license issued had an expiry date of February 23, 1942.¹³⁷ Not all Haligonians supported the protests of Fort Massey Church. Judson Conrad, Halifax Chief of Police, sent the following letter to Mrs McEuen.

Dear Madam: Recently it has been brought to my attention that the Ajax Club situated on Tobin St. was no longer in operation and closed for some time past. I feel that I am justified in writing you as Chairman of this club, pointing out that in my opinion this is a regrettable fact. This club from all accounts that I have received was run above reproach and was of the utmost importance to the lives of our visiting naval men while on shore leave. It has been of great importance in solving the recreation facilities at the disposal of these men and in my opinion its closing will be keenly felt.¹³⁸

Mrs. McEuen also received letters from high ranking naval officers and from Mayor Donovan expressing similar sentiments. Although support to keep the club running was heard, those in favour of closing the club were especially vocal. In a letter to the editor of the Chronicle, a Mrs. M. Bragg of Halifax wrote:

If the Hon. A.S. MacMillan is to "blame" for canceling the beer license at

¹³⁶ *Halifax Herald*, "Navy Minister Accepted, then refused gift of Ajax club, is statement", February 28, 1942. see *PANS*, (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

the Ajax club, I say three cheers for the Premier MacMillan. If the Fort Massey church is to "blame" ... then three cheers for the church also. We should be thankful for at least one public leader who has respect enough for himself and this church to uphold its principles. The president of the club should have the heartfelt sympathy of every true Canadian woman, especially mothers of the lads in the fighting forces. Is this being loyal to the mothers whose sons have left good homes where they have never seen liquor, much less tasted it? Any woman who knows so little about real homes, real religion, real patriotism and real victory certainly needs pity... our women should be working to deliver the boys from the liquor appetite rather than specializing in teaching that which leads to debauchery and crime.¹³⁹

For Mrs. Bragg naval ratings did not need exposure to the 'liquor appetite', and the closure of the club would bring 'heartfelt sympathy from every true Canadian woman'. For members of the Fort Massey congregation the issue was simply the consumption of beer and liquor at the club and its close proximity to the church. Bearing this in mind, Mrs. McEuen offered a proposal to the church that included closing the entrance to the club situated across from the church. Mrs. McEuen stated that this solution would, "in effect isolate the Ajax Club from Tobin Street and divert its present entrance on that thoroughfare, to a new entrance from Kent St."¹⁴⁰ She also proposed to build a large fence in order to "shield the club entirely from Tobin street and the street itself would be put out of bounds for men of the navy."¹⁴¹ The fence that would provide division between club and church proposed by Mrs. McEuen was a close parallel to the social division between the religious community and servicemen in Halifax. Massey Church could not tolerate what they believed to be the lewd behavior of the ratings and their consumption of

¹³⁹ *Halifax Herald*, March 14, 1942

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

alcohol, and there would be no compromise. On March 14, 1942 Mrs. McEuen capitulated, noting that “the believers in total abstinence have won a major victory in destroying the Ajax club.”¹⁴² She went on to describe the failure of her proposal, “Invitations from the club executive to members of the House of Assembly and the members of Fort Massey church brought an attendance that filled the main lounge. Among these there was only one House member, none from the church’s kirk session and only a corporal’s guard of the church membership.”¹⁴³

The Fort Massey church was not the only source of religious opposition to the Ajax club in Halifax. On February 9, 1942 the West End Baptist church of Halifax publicly supported the efforts of Fort Massey Church and its pastor Rev. Gerald Rogers. “Gordon Vincent, pastor [West End Baptist] circulated a petition at last evening’s service to support the stand of Fort Massey Church. The petition was well supported by the congregation.”¹⁴⁴ The United Church for the Diocese of Halifax also stood behind Fort Massey in its opposition to the Ajax.¹⁴⁵ In addition, the Capitol City Lodge attacked the sale of liquor at the Ajax. On February 12, 1942 the club formally went on record stating that it “was opposed to the sale of intoxicating liquor to men of the services and passed a resolution commending the Rev. Gerald Rogers of his recent action in connection with the Ajax Club”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴*Halifax Herald*, “Give support in sale issue”, February 9, 1942. See *PANS*, (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., February 12, 1942

McEuen's Ajax club was officially closed April 8, 1942 and the house on 34 Tobin Street was sold to the Norwegian Government.¹⁴⁷ The Ajax would be converted into a sailors' club for Norse seamen the following year.¹⁴⁸ The outrage of naval ratings and servicemen was considerable. An article written at the time of the closure summed up the ratings' frustration with the loss of the lodge.

The Ajax club is no more and thus ends one of the most controversial issues in the history of this port...today the club's door is closed to the navies - their home away from home as they called it, it is no more. Their club is smashed on the altar of petty politics - a glaring example of retrogression. It has now been recognized that the sailors must have a wet canteen but they shall not have an AJAX club."¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the Canadian Veteran had harsh words for those influential in the closure of the Ajax.

It is hard to find any words other than "despicable" and "contemptible" to apply to the actions of those who were responsible for the withdrawal of the beer license of the Ajax club in Halifax ...Now because of the narrow, bigoted intolerance of a few "holier than thous" who object to a sailor drinking a bottle of beer within a hundred yards of their sanctimonious noses... The men ...must seek another haven in Halifax, a city notoriously ill provided with places where a man can drink his glass of beer in comfort and decency.¹⁵⁰

The club quickly gained national attention. In March, 1942 the Ontario Provincial Command of army and navy veterans in Canada published The Case of the Ajax Club, a

¹⁴⁷*The Halifax Chronicle*, May 2, 1942 " Charter of hospitality fund of much discussed club has been canceled." *PANS*, (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

¹⁴⁸*Might City Directory: 1944 Halifax* (Yellow Pages: Clubs).

¹⁴⁹ "Battle of Ajax Club ends." *PANS* (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

¹⁵⁰"The Canadian Veteran.:The Ajax club." *PANS* (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

pamphlet outlining the various factors at work in the Ajax closure. It also expressed much of the bitterness felt by the naval community. "Prohibitionists Responsible...this venomous assault upon the rights of the defenders of liberty is evident in the whole conduct of their operations... to resort to attain their purely selfish ambitions to utilize Any charge based on Any fabrication to justify their argument."¹⁵¹ The Ontario Provincial Command continued its verbal attack on the prohibitionists in Halifax, commenting that "the huge sums contributed by donors to the Ajax Club have been poured into the sea at the whim of a prohibitionist, at a time when the need for dollars is urgent."¹⁵² The pamphlet finally went on to discuss the actions of Fort Massey Church recalling Mrs. McEuen's opening of the club and the initial agreement with Fort Massey Church. Problems arose only after the Ajax Club was opened, and with the appointment of Rev. Gerald Rogers as the new pastor of the church.¹⁵³ The pamphlet, issued by the Ontario Provincial Command of the Navy, highlighted the bitterness and indignation felt by servicemen in Ontario which was a mirror reflection of the sentiments of ratings in Halifax.

The Ajax controversy was not strictly a military issue or limited to Haligonians. It quickly gained attention in mainstream magazines. Time Magazine reported on the closure of the club noting that "...most Haligonians are proud of their Ajax Club. In 14 months 250,000 ratings in from the North Atlantic have found warmth, comradeship, books to read, cheap beer... But across the street is Fort Massey United Church and last

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.6.

week the church made trouble. The Ajax Club could not renew its Liquor license.”¹⁵⁴

The Ajax affair dramatized the inhospitality of a city which sailors disliked and became part of the folklore of an ‘unfriendly and holier than thou Halifax’. After the Ajax closure many sailors were critical and skeptical of any efforts by Haligonians to provide any opportunity for leisure and recreation. The argument used by the church was that the men protecting the nation must have their wits about them at all times and should not be exposed to the evils of liquor. Of course, this was not the only reason for wanting the club closed. The congregation of the church could not stand a drinking establishment so close at hand. The successful efforts of the church to shut down the Ajax suggest both a class divide and an uneasiness among the civilian population with sailors. If sailors wanted to drink, it would have to be done elsewhere, ‘hidden’ and ‘shielded’ from a proper, up-standing community. This crusade by the social and religious elite fueled the bitterness of sailors towards the city, an animosity that would eventually spill over in the V-E Day riots several years later.

Other Religious Elements in Halifax

The actions of Haligonians in response to the Ajax Club suggest a strong commitment to traditional morality. It was thought temperate servicemen would be ever vigilant in their battle against the enemy and not experience clouded judgement at a critical moment in combat. The influence of Fort Massey Church in the closure of the club is an indication of the political clout exercised by the religious community in Halifax during the war. This extended to the Lord’s Day Act. The Act stated that throughout the

¹⁵⁴*Time Magazine*, March 9, 1942. *PANS* (Micro: Misc: Ajax club: Halifax, #14653)

war Sunday shopping and entertainment was prohibited. As servicemen poured into port in need of recreation on a seven-day a week basis, serious controversy accompanied the Lord's Day Act. On February 9, 1940 The Halifax Chronicle reported on a "Mass meeting to be held Sunday." The meeting brought ministers, priests and parishioners from churches across Halifax to debate the issue of Sunday entertainment for servicemen.¹⁵⁵ This was the first of several meetings to occur over the year. In November 1940 a headline in The Halifax Chronicle read "Preacher speaks out against Sunday entertainment for servicemen." The Chronicle revealed how several clergy members in Halifax had gathered together and finally decided that "Sunday entertainment for servicemen was acceptable but there was to be no commercialization."¹⁵⁶

It did not take the visiting servicemen long to exploit the newly-amended Sunday entertainment by-law. On January 13, 1941 The Chronicle featured a large picture of sailors lined up at the Oxford movie theater with the headline "Sunday show has capacity crowd."¹⁵⁷ Of course, Sabbatarianism was not directed exclusively towards sailors. On May 14, 1940 a storekeeper was charged with violating the Lords Day Act.¹⁵⁸ The facts of the case suggested that "a twenty-year old man was charged with selling his father one loaf of bread, two cans of dinner, half a dozen eggs and half a pint of cream from his store on Sunday March 31, 1940."¹⁵⁹ This case suggests the serious opposition to

¹⁵⁵ Halifax Chronicle, February 9, 1940, p. 12.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., November 27, 1940, p.11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., January 3, 1941, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., May 14, 1940, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

commerce on Sunday. Although the law was finally amended, it came with great difficulty. Religious elements in Halifax were averse to change and focused on the letter of the sacred law. Priests and ministers were intent on upholding the standards of the church; they had little concern for the pursuits of sailors or their interests.

The Navy League

The failure of Haligonians to cater to the needs and pursuits of sailors did not occur in all facets of life in the city. As mentioned earlier, Haligonians took great pains to provide sport and recreation facilities for the RCN. Another notable achievement in Halifax was the establishment of the Navy League organization. The Navy League was established in Canada at the turn of the century to serve as a booster club promoting the naval aspects of the British Empire in Canada. By 1941 the Navy League expanded its mandate, providing additional services for the sailors in Canadian communities. On August 1, 1942 the Navy League in Halifax opened the Navy League Recreation Center.¹⁶⁰ The project was set in motion earlier in the year when the Navy Club, under the direction of its president R.A. Major, submitted a proposal to the Wanderers Club of Halifax asking for some of their lands to build a recreation facility for servicemen.¹⁶¹ In exchange for leasing the property, the Navy League agreed to build a recreation facility on the Wanderers ground property, replacing the one that had been burned by fire in 1940. The deal included, “a lease of the Wanderer's Grounds (except the Bowling Greens, which are to be retained and carried on by the club) for the duration of the war and six

¹⁶⁰David Gibson, *PANS* (RG35-102(3B) vol 7 #55)

¹⁶¹Ibid.

months thereafter.”¹⁶² The Wanderers Athletic Grounds were donated and the recreation center was built on site.¹⁶³ The building was 50 feet by 150 feet and built on the basement of the old facility that had been destroyed by fire. The primary objective of the recreation center was “to provide facilities affording open air activities such as games and exercises under the direction of specially trained supervisors.”¹⁶⁴ The amenities offered in the building included showers, baths, dressing rooms, lounge rooms, games rooms and a canteen. The outdoor facilities included “a quarter mile track, football, soccer and rugby field and a clubhouse and locker area.”¹⁶⁵

The estimated cost of the entire project was \$30,000 for construction and furnishings, and the entire sum was covered by the Navy League.¹⁶⁶ The program for opening ceremony to the Navy League Recreation Center extended appreciation to various clubs in Halifax helping in the war effort. The list included The Anzac Club, the YMCA Hostel, the Salvation Army, the Knights of Columbus Hut, the North End Services, the Canadian Legion, the Atlantic House, the Soldiers Christian Association, the Wings Club in the Nova Scotian Hotel, the C.L.A. club and the Flying Angel clubs sponsored by the Church of England in Halifax.¹⁶⁷ The opening ceremony on August 1, 1942 was hosted by the premier of Nova Scotia, Angus L. MacDonald. There were a

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵*Halifax Chronicle*, August 3, 1942, p. 6.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Gibson, *Official Opening of the Navy League Recreation Center*, 12.

variety of activities performed by all three services, mostly involving sporting events. Some of the festivities included a gun drill by the RCN, a pageant by the Army, Navy, and Air Force as well as an inter-service Maritime track and field championship involving the Navy, Army and Air Force”¹⁶⁸

Highlighting the festivities of the facility in the evening was the baseball game between the all star Navy team from Toronto and the Halifax Navy.¹⁶⁹ Prior to the game came the most anticipated event scheduled, an appearance by George Herman Ruth. “Babe” Ruth was to be a key part of the celebration, but it was unknown just exactly what he would be doing. Just before game time Babe Ruth stepped onto the field in normal dress, then a relief pitcher for the Navy team, Aukie Titus, stepped up to the mound and threw some pitches for the Bambino to hit. After taking some pitches from Titus and being unable to hit any over the fence, the Babe then brought out a dozen autographed baseballs and hit them out to a full stadium of anxious fans.¹⁷⁰ The Navy League recreation center was a place that servicemen thoroughly enjoyed gathering to participate in sporting pursuits from baseball to hockey and it would remain in operation for the duration of the war.

The Navy League flourished throughout the war years and on July 12, 1944 submitted a proposal to city council for an increase in its facilities.

The Navy League's experience in providing morale building recreation and entertainment for men and women of the services during the past four

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 10.

¹⁶⁹Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 197.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 197.

years has demonstrated that the first choice in entertainment for service personnel is dancing. This is proven by the fact that the Windsor St. Forum attracts approximately 4,000 servicemen and women weekly for dancing during the hot summer season.¹⁷¹

The application suggested that dancing was more popular than skating or hockey. The proposal asked for a free land donation from the city, promising in return to “erect and equip a building at an estimated cost of \$100,000 and re-lease to the Navy League of Canada who will operate it day and night in the interests of service people for the duration of the war and as long thereafter as there are sufficient service personnel based in or near Halifax.”¹⁷² At this late point in the war there was still a shortage of recreation facilities in Halifax for service personnel. The Navy League argued that “the need for the increased recreation facilities this new building will provide is endorsed by senior officers of the Navy, Army and Air Force and the wartime administrator for Eastern Ports who has made a special study of the situation.”¹⁷³

Prior to the recreation center being built, the Navy League established the Allied Merchant Seamen's Club. On July 3, 1941 the Navy League's plans for the building were set in motion with a submission to city council entitled “Facts in connection with application for the construction of a new Navy League Building for housing of the merchant Navy.” The cost of purchasing and furnishing the building was estimated at

¹⁷¹“Facts concerning the Navy League of Canada's application for leasing city property on Sackville St.” *PANS*, RG-35-102 (3B) vol 7, #54.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid.

\$200,000.¹⁷⁴ A building on Hollis street was chosen, but there were immediate safety issues, such as the need for installing sprinkler systems throughout the building.¹⁷⁵ By 1942 the building was operational. Mayor Donovan noted that the Navy League Merchant Seaman's house, "accommodates torpedo victims and others. They have accommodation normally for 368 men, but in an emergency they can accommodate 600, by placing beds and equipment in the concert hall and library."¹⁷⁶ The Navy League also had other buildings in Halifax which served a variety of purposes. Figures 7 and 8 trace the development of these buildings, along with those of the other main organizations functioning in Halifax during the war.

Naval Sporting Pursuits

Sport in wartime Halifax increased in importance as the war continued. Sporting activity provided a common link among sailors. Almost every naval rating knew how to shoot a puck, hit a baseball, or pass the soccer ball. Team sports in particular were encouraged by naval command throughout the war in order to bring sailors closer together and to improve morale. A report submitted to the National Adjunct-General's office December 11, 1943 by Captain Ian Eisenhardt of the Auxiliary Services spoke of the importance of sport in a series of questions and answers.

Q. 1. What are the Navy and Air Force doing?

A.1. The Navy and Air Force are conducting a physical training and recreation program consisting of exercises, sports and games similar to the ones in the Army. Equipment and facilities used for the is training are

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., July 2, 1941

¹⁷⁶Ibid., W.E. Donovan to Mrs. Macklen, Toronto February 5, 1943.

available to their personnel for an after-training sports program.

Q.2. What do their programs cost?

A. 2. The Navy spends approximately \$3.00 per man per year on the sporting goods alone, not including facilities or heavy gymnasium equipment. Requests for facilities and special pieces of equipment are considered on their merit. The Air Force allows stations with up to 800 personnel \$500 per year and Stations with physical recreation facilities. Requests for special features are considered individually.¹⁷⁷

This naval report helps to quantify the amount of money the RCN was willing to invest in recreation and sporting facilities for servicemen. During the war years when spending was carefully monitored, the RCN was able to find the money in its budget, an amount of \$3.00 per man, for recreation and sporting activity. This suggests the perceived value placed on sport by the military. The development of recreation facilities in Halifax also had the support of Rear Admiral L.W. Murray, the Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian North West Atlantic for most of the war. In a letter to the Secretary of Naval Command, Murray expressed his feelings about sporting opportunities in Halifax.

The purpose of sports organization is to give opportunity for games and recreation to the maximum number of officers and men.

The process of development is from the smaller unit upwards i.e.

I) Friendly matches arranged whenever possible when grounds are available.

II) Competitions - part of the ship; to Inter Ship; to Port; to Command; to Navy; to Inter-service...

There are ships that will get games one way or another by continually asking other ships, army, air force, or civilians, or anyone who has a ground, to play them. And there are ships without such an officer who will get few games, whatever facilities are available. The base officer should

¹⁷⁷Ian Eisenhardt, *Report on Navy and Air Force Physical Training & Recreation Program submitted to the Adjunct-General's Office*. See McFarland. *A History of Military Sport in Nova Scotia*, 45.

visit ships under a) and b) require the help of a Base officer to allot grounds, arrange equipment when necessary etc. the Base officer should visit ships under b) stimulate interest and encourage them in raising teams.¹⁷⁸

From the early stages of war till its conclusion in 1946 sport was strongly encouraged by naval command. The construction and development of recreation facilities at Stadacona, the rise in newspaper reports on naval sporting teams, the support of outside organizations such as professional teams competing against the Navy, and the Navy League's sporting facilities at the Wanderers Grounds all testified to the importance of sport to service personnel.

Haligonians also supported the naval interest in sport through local media. By mid 1940 sporting coverage in the city figured prominently in the sporting section of The Halifax Chronicle. There were several reasons for this, but the most obvious would be the continuation of the war. It became increasingly apparent that there would be no quick end to the conflict. Once this was accepted, seamen began to form into a variety of sporting teams, with the assistance of naval command and the citizens of Halifax.

There was great progress made in sport development during the war years in Halifax. In a federal report December 22, 1943 on "Sports Organization in the Halifax Dockyards and its Outports", Captain J.D. Drentice of the RCN expressed his satisfaction with the extensive facilities provided in the dockyard gymnasium in Halifax. He also felt that it was made widely available and accessible to sailors coming off their ships. "In addition to all sporting games, there is a rest room fitted with a library table,

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 209.

writing tables, chairs and a piano.” The recommendations made in the report by Drentice were aimed at increasing the numbers of on-site training staff to assist sailors in their activities. “Eight [staff] in number, five are required each morning to contact ships in harbour to arrange games. The three remaining are in charge of the Physical and Recreational training office, the Gymnasium, sports gear and the rest room.”¹⁷⁹ Drentice found facilities in the Halifax dockyard to be in good order but found the outports in Nova Scotia were deficient. Ports which Drentice found in need of improvement included Shelburne, Liverpool, Pictou and Lunenburg.¹⁸⁰ Drentice defended the importance of sport in the smaller outports of Nova Scotia. In “each of these places the ships’ personnel desire and are in need of organized sport, as there is nothing else to do and it is necessary for their health and morale.”¹⁸¹

Given the RCN’s emphasis on sporting activity throughout the war, it is important to measure its acceptance among the ratings. A quick observation suggests that sailors participated widely in the sporting programs offered by Naval command, both as spectators and players. These sporting contests were also enjoyed by citizens of Halifax as well. In 1940 the RCN established the Royal Canadian School of Physical and Recreational Training, using the Halifax Dockyard gymnasium as its operating compound.¹⁸² By 1941 the inadequacies of the small facilities at HMCS Stadacona in

¹⁷⁹J.D. Drentice”. Sports Organization Halifax Dockyards and Outports”. See McFarland, *Military Sport in Nova Scotia*, 218.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 220.

catering to RCN recreation needs became apparent. Plans were drafted to build a recreation facility for naval men at Stadacona. In September 1943 the Halifax Mail wrote, “when stories of growth are told, none is more striking than that of the rapid progress of the naval establishment, HMCS Stadacona and the pronounced changes it has made and will make yet in the ever changing features of Halifax”¹⁸³ The changes referred to involved primarily the physical training center. The building included, “a huge gymnasium, elevated track, squash courts, swimming pool and change rooms.”¹⁸⁴

The development of military sport in Halifax was also facilitated by local newspaper coverage. The coverage helped to connect two elements of the community in most cases at odds, the sailors and civvies. It also popularized sport in its headlines, making local heroes out of the sailors who excelled at the sport. Although reports were brief, a typical report would usually disclose the sport, who was playing, and where the game would be. For example, “[Canadian] Sailors to play contest Saturday against United States Navy at the Wanderers Grounds. The band of the RCN will be on hand to render music. The game is scheduled for 3.”¹⁸⁵ The Chronicle often listed the RCN ratings playing for the squad. “U.S. Navy defeated by 10-9 score in an 11 inning thriller at Wanderer’s grounds. Terrific hitting features match. Box score includes RCN batting order; Arnott 2B, Rowland CF, Little 3B, Hanlon LF, Whalen RF, Burchell 1B, Vickers SS, White C, Dayley P, Parker P.”¹⁸⁶ Media coverage in Halifax in part helped to bring

¹⁸³*The Halifax Mail*, September 23, 1943, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴McFarland, *Military Sport in Nova Scotia*, 87.

¹⁸⁵*The Halifax Chronicle*, September 13, 1940, p. 7.

¹⁸⁶*Halifax Chronicle*, September 16, 1940, p. 7.

civilian and military elements closer together in the form of spectators. In many circumstances servicemen and citizen would gather together to watch a sporting contest. It also created a fan base in the community for teams from the services, as well as developing all-star players, both military and civilian, on specific teams. The Navy had competitive teams representing them in every major sport,

In the 40's with the outbreak of World War II, the military began to swell to enormous proportions and as a result, competitive sport was one of the greatest outlets for the forces, particularly around the Halifax and Dartmouth area. The army, navy and air force received in their ranks many outstanding Canadian athletes in almost every major sport. It was a tremendous boom for sport fans and players alike, because during those war years they had the opportunity to see many of Canada's "National Sport Heroes" of the time. During the war years it is fairly safe to say that the services went all out to keep personnel involved in sport at all levels and at almost any sport they desired.¹⁸⁷

Ratings had a large number of organized teams against which they could play when coming to Halifax. Games were played among professional, junior, university and inter-service teams in any number of sports. In 1942 Halifax opened up the City Baseball League to teams from each of the three services. The Navy won their opening game 5-0 on May 26th with 4,000 fans in attendance.¹⁸⁸ The Navy would in fact win the City Championship in 1942, beating the Halifax Cardinals 4 - 2 in a seven game series. From this point the Navy team went on to beat the Cape Breton Dominion Hawks and the Springhill Fencebusters to win the Nova Scotia championship, earning the right to

¹⁸⁷McFarland, *Military Sport in Nova Scotia*, Excerpt from a letter by Tom Sweet of Sport Nova Scotia., p.

¹⁸⁸*Halifax Chronicle*, April 2, 1942, p. 7.

represent the province in the Maritime Championships. The Navy proceeded to beat Saint John three games to one in a five game series.¹⁸⁹ The Navy team would repeat as Maritime champions the following year defeating Yarmouth in the provincial finals and Saint John in three straight games for the second year running.¹⁹⁰ As well as fielding a senior team, the Navy also had a junior team in 1942 which fared well in the provincial league. The junior Navy team beat Truro and Moncton to win the Maritime junior title that year.¹⁹¹

Rugby was another popular sport for ratings to play while in Halifax. In 1941 the RCN and Halifax Wanderers put together rugby teams to play competitively against Saint Mary's, Dalhousie and Acadia universities.¹⁹² Like baseball, there was a junior team for the RCN, playing lower skilled university teams as well. Rugby was a popular sport for servicemen in Halifax. Canadian football was introduced in the early 1940's as well. Naval ratings did not pick this game up as quickly. It was not until 1942 that a small league of four teams was formed in Halifax, three of which were made up of naval men.¹⁹³ As expected it was a navy team which took the football championship in 1942.

Many ratings enjoyed participating in basketball. Until 1943 the primary site for basketball games was the YMCA gym in Halifax. Halifax hosted two basketball leagues, the Senior League and the Intermediate League. The Army and Navy had representation

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, October 1, 1942, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰*Halifax Chronicle*, October 8, 1943, p. 7.

¹⁹¹McFarland, *Military Sport in Nova Scotia*, 56.

¹⁹²*Halifax Chronicle*, September 23 1941, p. 5.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, October 10, 1942, p. 7.

in both. The Senior League included Dalhousie, Eastern Air Command, Navy, "Y" Depot, Army and St. Andrew's.¹⁹⁴ Although basketball was not as popular as some of the other sports, the Navy still had several teams competing in basketball leagues. The senior team, under coach Jack Thomas captured the 1943 Maritime Crown, defeating Moncton RCAF 84-83.¹⁹⁵ The Navy went on to the all-Canadian finals, only to lose against the Morristown Sailors with consecutive losses in a series in Ottawa.¹⁹⁶

Hockey was one of the most popular sports played by sailors. As early as the 1940-41 hockey season all three services entered teams at all levels in Halifax. The Navy sported the best team by far. The Chronicle gave an idea of the superiority of the Navy club. "Navy team running away from other clubs, unbeaten in six" said a January, 1941 headline.¹⁹⁷ Although the Navy had numerous men participating in junior, intermediate and senior leagues as well as in pick-up leagues at the base, it was the senior hockey squad that received the most attention. The exciting competition in the senior league began to draw large crowds of civilians and military personnel. Discussing an important game played at Halifax in 1943 between the Navy and other services, The Chronicle reported that "the navy and air force played to two sellout crowds in splitting a pair of games, with the navy beating the air force 6-4 in overtime and the air force winning the return encounter 5-3."¹⁹⁸ The senior Navy team would end up losing in 1943 to the Air

¹⁹⁴ *Halifax Chronicle*, November 12, 1942, p. 7.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 12, 1943, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶ *Halifax Chronicle*, April 17, 1943, p. 7.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, January 25, 1941, p. 7.

¹⁹⁸ *Halifax Chronicle*, February 10, 1943, p. 5.

Force for the city championship, while the intermediate team beat out the Antigonish Bulldogs to win the provincial crown.¹⁹⁹

Sport was one of the few evident successes one can find when investigating the relationship between citizen and sailor in Halifax. It was the one area that sailors were given the opportunity to do what they wanted. Haligonians prohibited servicemen access to the drink and made meeting local females in port difficult. They did, however, help sport to flourish. As we have seen, there were a wide array of sports open to the RCN in Halifax. These contests were widely attended by sailor and citizen alike and promoted a friendly feeling between two normally distant groups. The development of recreation facilities was fostered from both the military and local sides. Media and press releases in the Halifax Chronicle promoted sporting competitions. Sport was the one clear success story involving servicemen and Haligonians during the war years.

Conclusion

Although Haligonians were successful in delivering sport to RCN sailors, they failed in other ways to provide what ratings sought out while at port. Haligonians held naval ratings to a high moral standard because these were the 'boys' protecting them from the enemy. Many citizens felt that sailors should not partake of any activity that might affect their judgement, especially events involving liquor or female companionship. This was often at odds with what sailors desired when landing in port. Servicemen were emotionally drained from their responsibilities for protecting North America. Once in port they wanted to have a cold pint and a female to talk to. Most were not interested in

¹⁹⁹Ibid., March 8, 1943, p. 7.

the higher moral standard Haligonians wished to impose upon them.

The population explosion in Halifax served as well to escalate tensions and exhaust the patience of citizen and sailor alike. Haligonians blamed servicemen for the overcrowding in the city, while servicemen often found themselves in Halifax without accommodation or paying exorbitant rent prices. Coupled with this sailors would often receive ugly stares and comments from locals who were themselves feeling the pressures of overcrowding! The population explosion did not help in any way to encourage a positive relationship between citizen and sailor.

Then there was the closure of the Ajax Club. Despite the efforts of Mrs. Janet McEuen to keep the club's doors open and to serve liquor to ratings, religious groups in the city gathered together and collectively lobbied to have the club shut down. When the club was eventually closed due to the pressures from religious groups in the city, most servicemen became fed up with the attitude of Haligonians. It would only be a matter of time until the riots of May 7 and 8 1945 would spill into the streets of the city with many naval and military looters partaking in the chaos.

CHAPTER THREE

“Happy in ‘Newfyjohn’: Sailors Ashore in Wartime St. John’s”

The following chapter examines the reaction of Newfoundlanders to the naval presence ashore. It examines what activities and promotions were available to sailors within the city of St. John’s, the accommodation and recreational facilities offered to servicemen, and the dangers faced by the city during the war. Examining these issues will point out that Newfoundlanders were in touch with the recreation and leisure needs of sailors, and offered a hospitable environment to naval ratings despite the wartime problems the city faced. Because of the positive attitude of Newfoundlanders towards the RCN, sailors reciprocated with honest gratitude toward the port city. Despite the threat of enemy attack, rampant contagious disease, and a string of terrible fires affecting a large part of the city, the people of St. John’s were able to look beyond the troubles that they faced and unite with ratings in fighting a common enemy both overseas and at home. Both citizen and sailor in St. John’s had a focus on victory overseas, but considerable attention was given to providing proper facilities and entertainment for the military personnel in the port. Newfoundlanders realized that the only way to victory would be to work with the men of the RCN, not against them. This is a constant theme, seen time and again through many examples.

The port of St. John’s, Newfoundland lies 585 miles Northeast of Halifax.²⁰⁰

With a geographic position resting between Halifax and England it did not take long for

²⁰⁰Lieut. S. Keate, *The Evening Telegram* (V-E Day Supplement)

the Allied powers to realize the strategic importance of Newfoundland. The colony was seen as “guardian of the St. Lawrence Waterway and ‘halfway house’ for the long convoy lanes to the mother country [England].”²⁰¹ The city of St. John’s played a crucial role in the battle of the Atlantic. John Leblanc, wartime correspondent for the St. John’s Telegram wrote that, “[a]lways there seemed to be a convoy waiting... it was the job of the ships based here to take over the convoys for the next leg of the eastward voyage from Halifax. Stationed here too were the seagoing riot squads of the RCN whose job was to prowl the Atlantic unattached to any convoy, just on the hunt for trouble.”²⁰² Likewise, Lieut. S. Keate of the RCN wrote that “ships battered by enemy action and Atlantic gales could put in for repairs; here they could refuel and fresh replacements for crews be found; ... here escort groups could go gallantly forth under the traditional order to seek out and engage the enemy.”²⁰³ Both Newfoundlanders and the RCN understood the significant role the city played during the war.

The island of Newfoundland was a part of the British empire and officially entered the war on September 3, 1939 when Britain declared war against Nazi Germany. For many living in St. John’s the real war did not come until January 25, 1941. On this date 2000 American servicemen arrived in the city aboard the Edmund B. Alexander, a converted German liner.²⁰⁴ It quickly became clear that the city was not prepared for war.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²John Leblanc, “St. John’s was Front Line Base in Battle of Atlantic” St. John’s Telegram, May, 7, 1945, V-E Day Supplement.

²⁰³Keate, *The Evening Telegram* (V-E Day Supplement)

²⁰⁴David Facey-Crowther, *Newfiejohn: Garrison Town* (St. John’s: Museum Lecture Series, 1995)

One serious problem facing the city was the small size of the harbour, measuring approximately 700 yards across and 2100 yards long.²⁰⁵ The space that was available was used by the merchant navy. Harbour space was reduced further in 1940 when Britain lent the United States 1,000 feet along the waterfront. In addition, the jetties and wharves that existed had been constructed for commercial use and were not suitable for the navy.²⁰⁶ There was one dry dock that was used constantly by merchant ships. Lastly, the harbour did not have the proper equipment to fix mechanical problems aboard naval vessels.

Like Halifax, St. John's was ill-prepared at first to accommodate the overflow of sailors and military personnel coming into port. "The city itself", writes Gilbert Tucker, "could not provide sufficient accommodation for offices, storage, or barracks; and neither materials nor equipment for construction were available locally."²⁰⁷ In 1941 it was clear that construction and renovations were essential for the harbour. Plans were quickly drafted to construct an RCN naval base to provide facilities for sixty vessels.²⁰⁸ Figure 9 depicts the RCN naval buildings constructed in St. John's during the war.²⁰⁹ In an attempt to free up more space at the harbour the RCN sent the Georgian, renamed Avalon II, to St. John's for use as a floating barracks.²¹⁰ Although St. John's was not prepared for the war in 1939 or even in 1941, by the end of the war it had been transformed into an

²⁰⁵ Gilbert Tucker, *Naval Service of Canada*, 192.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 192.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 192.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 193.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 202.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 193.

adequate and efficient port city.

As the war dragged on, traffic at the once inefficient harbour began to reach extreme levels. Figure 10 illustrates the rising number of military vessels visiting the port each year during the war.²¹¹ With increasing numbers of vessels coming to port greater protection of the harbour and city was needed. One solution was the formation of the Newfoundland Regiment or the Newfoundland Defense Force. The Newfoundland Regiment was enacted with the declaration of World War Two on September 3, 1939.²¹² One of its primary tasks was to guard important communication cables, along with important infrastructure facilities. Sites falling under the protection of the Newfoundland Regiment included the radio station at Mount Pearl, the Imperial Oil Company situated on the harbour, the dry docks, and the city water supply located at Windsor Lake.²¹³ The Regiment also set up a guard at Bell Island and at Cape Spear, two small towns along the coast just outside of St. John's.²¹⁴ These posts were used as lookout points to quickly identify incoming enemy subs that were often reported circling close to the harbour. Telegram journalist John Leblanc wrote: "Even among the civilian population, there was a feeling of the compelling urgency with the war at sea. In St. John's they knew the war was knocking at the harbour gates...There was the knowledge that enemy torpedoes had

²¹¹Ibid., 203.

²¹²E.P. Kendall, "The Newfoundland Regiment", *The Military Gazette*, Vol.60 (Ottawa, August, 1945), p.

6.

²¹³Ibid., 7.

²¹⁴Ibid., 7.

exploded against the very rocks of the harbour mouth.”²¹⁵ Allan Fraser, a noted historian during the war, tells us that:

Immediately upon the declaration of War, the Newfoundland Government decided that since St. John’s Harbour was an exposed anchorage, prompt measures should be taken to protect the entrance through the Narrows by means of a net... In accordance with the suggestion, a three inch jack stay carrying a one inch wire net, two hundred and forty feet long, eighteen feet deep and with a mesh ten feet by six feet was manufactured with all possible dispatch.²¹⁶

Despite the threat of a U-Boat attack, Newfoundlanders were forthcoming in the opportunities that they provided for RCN sailors coming ashore. Newfoundlanders realized that the RCN was in their city to protect them from the U-Boat threat. There was an understanding between citizen and sailor in St. John’s that suggested each would do their part to make the other as comfortable as possible. The people of St. John’s understood the needs and the recreation and leisure pursuits of sailors while in port. Newfoundlanders had few problems with sailors pursuing local women and grabbing a beer while in port. As well the St. John’s War Services Association, Knights of Columbus, Salvation Army and several other organizations stepped up their efforts to provide hostels and recreation centers for RCN ratings. Unlike Halifaxians, Newfoundlanders had a clear understanding of the needs of sailors.

Still, there may have been ulterior motives behind the perceived amiability of Newfoundlanders towards sailors. In January 1941 the Edmund Alexander arrived in St.

²¹⁵John Leblanc, “St. John’s was Front Line Base in Battle of Atlantic” St. John’s Telegram. May 7, 1945, V-E Day Supplement.

²¹⁶Allan Fraser, *History of Newfoundland and its Ports in the Second World War* (St. John’s, 1946), p. 62.

John's carrying over 2000 American servicemen. Americans were perceived by Newfoundlanders as possessing money and wealth. According to Jim Lynch, "the girls went towards the Americans rather than Canadians, they followed the money."²¹⁷ It appears that many Newfoundland families wanted local girls to marry American servicemen, and indeed many American military personnel married local St. John's women.²¹⁸ For Newfoundlanders, marriage between local girls and American servicemen promised economic stability for the family. If there was any concern about this, it was mostly from local bachelors in St. John's who perceived the Americans in the city as a threat for advancing on the females they were pursuing. Wayne Johnston found that even the young Joey Smallwood expressed these sentiments. "I [Smallwood] sulked about St. John's ... watching all the robust servicemen walking arm in arm with local girls. The absurd image of a whole generation of Newfoundland men stranded for life in bachelorhood because the Yanks had stolen their girls away flashed through my mind...it was absurd to resent them for it."²¹⁹ Whatever the motivation might have been behind the friendly attitude of Newfoundlanders, there was nonetheless a strong camaraderie struck between residents and sailors in the city.

One reason for the cordial friendship between sailor and citizen in St. John's was the local tolerance of the sailors' interest in liquor and female companionship. Liquor restrictions and concerns about protecting local women from the visiting RCN did not exist in St. John's to the extent they did in Halifax. Newfoundlanders understood that

²¹⁷ Jim Lynch, *Interview* (RNC Constabulary, St. John's Newfoundland, April 10, 2001).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Wayne Johnston, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (Ontario: Vintage Canada, 1999), p. 395.

these were important elements in naval life and offered less resistance to the sailors' desire for a cold pint and a female companion in port. "Black Horse Beer" reads an ad in the Telegram "It's good to get back too!"²²⁰ This half page ad depicts two military men smiling and making merry with two full pints of Black Horse beer. Sailors knew they would have little problem finding a cold brew when coming to St. John's and this made the stay there much more pleasant. As Jim Lynch suggests,

I don't think there was a family in St. John's that didn't have family overseas. I don't think there was any resentment here in St. John's at all [towards sailors desire for female companionship while in port]... we [Newfoundlanders] had all sorts of things set up for sailors. This was a garrison town during the war you know. There were all kinds of people coming here during the war. We had liquor for them, we gave them cigarettes, we tried to provide the things they wanted.²²¹

Although Newfoundlanders understood the needs of sailors, they also found it important to maintain a community spirit separate from servicemen. This is particularly evident on local sporting grounds where the city struggled to maintain sporting traditions it had practiced prior to the war. During the war the RCN was kept at arm's length from many of the city leagues, the very opposite of the situation in Halifax. The city hockey league, for example, refused to allow a superior RCN team to participate. As for baseball, it had not been played in St. John's to any great extent. When the avid, baseball-playing American military came to the city, baseball games became more frequent, and for several years after the war baseball would be extremely popular in the city. Still when a baseball game was played in St. John's by American servicemen early in the war, the

²²⁰*The St. John's Telegram*, December 28, 1945, p. 10.

²²¹Lynch. *Interview*, April 10, 2001.

local paper gave it sparse coverage.²²² In St. John's during the war there was an obvious divide between the sporting pursuits of sailors and Newfoundlanders. What followed over the war years was a slow and perpetual negotiation over what leagues military personnel could participate in, what sports would be played and what sports received local media attention. The relationship between sailors, competitive sport and Newfoundlanders demonstrates a desire of the community to maintain the integrity of its own sporting institutions. Even by the end of the war, St. John's had made only limited advances towards accepting the competitive sports brought to the island by American and Canadian servicemen.

In many other ways, however, St. John's adjusted and adapted itself to the influx of military personnel and the demands it placed upon the city. When war broke out in 1939, St. John's was not prepared for the thousands of servicemen who would arrive there over the duration. It did not take long for Newfoundlanders to realize their shortcomings and work to alleviate the problems caused by the influx of servicemen. The formation of the St. John's War Services Association was one organization that was set up to deal with wartime dislocations. The St. John's War Services Association (SJWSA) was officially incorporated January 3, 1941 although the group began meeting in October 1940. The group met twice a month to discuss problems, plan events, and take care of administrative duties. The SJWSA was broken down into several distinct committees and at each meeting an executive of each committee would present any needs,

²²²A glance at the sporting section of the *St. John's Telegram* over the war years indicates little coverage given to baseball games played by military personnel.

developments, or proposals for change to the group. The committees and those in charge included: the social committee - W.D. Edwards; the house committee - James MacIntyre; the financial committee- H.R. Brookes; public relations - H.D. Macgillivray; and the entertainment committee -T.H. O'Neill. The president of the SJWSA was W. Thistle, the vice president Canon Howitt.²²³ Of the five committees set up within the SJWSA, three were specifically geared towards providing for the needs of the sailors. These included the house committee, the entertainment committee, and the social committee. The formation of these three committees reflects the primary objectives of the SJWSA. The purpose of the SJWSA was to co-ordinate the "provision of billets in private homes for troops who might be granted weekend leave in St. John's and the establishment of a hostel for men of all branches of the services where overnight accommodation and meals could be provided, and where arrangements could be made for their entertainment and comfort."²²⁴ The aims of the SJWSA suggest the importance that Newfoundlanders placed upon appropriate accommodation and entertainment for sailors ashore. The community was quick to step forward and give their time and accommodations to servicemen in the city.

The SJWSA made their biggest contribution to ratings by providing the Caribou Hut, a hostel and recreation facility. The construction and development of the Caribou Hut was not without controversy, however. During its regular meeting on November 25, 1940 the SJWSA encountered its first obstacle to providing the club. Captain Peters, the

²²³St. Johns War Service Association (SJWSA), Minutes 1940-45, Caribou Hut, YMCA, *PANL* (MG637)

²²⁴*Ibid.*, October 2, 1940

representative for the troops attended the meeting and suggested that the SJWSA turn over building the hostel to the YMCA.

Capt. Peters, in charge of all welfare work among the troops stated that as Auxiliary War Services Officer for NFLD he had recommended to his HQ in Ottawa that the YMCA be asked to supply a civilian manager for the hostel and to pay his salary and he thought that there was a reasonable probability of the YMCA agreeing to do this.²²⁵

Captain Peters felt that the YMCA would provide better accommodations and facilities for the troops in St. John's than the still developing SJWSA. However, the members of the club had their own ideas. They wanted to control their own facilities and wanted it to run without outside interference. This became all clear at the following meeting

December 7, 1940:

Mr. Thistle stated he believed that if the YMCA came here they would want to run the hostel in the name of their organization. He did not think that dual control was possible. Mrs Holmes said that she felt if the hostel were run in the name of the YMCA it would be difficult to obtain local support and it would be better if it could be an all NFLD effort.²²⁶

The members of the SJWSA wanted to do their part in providing facilities and recreation opportunities for sailors. Having a national organization like the YMCA in control would have given them less opportunity to provide the activities that they wanted to provide.

The SJWSA's rejection of the YMCA bid on the hostel was a positive one for sailors.

The SJWSA officially opened the Caribou Hut December 23, 1940.²²⁷ Still, the YMCA wanted to run a hostel in St. John's, and so in 1941 it opened the Red Triangle Club for servicemen. The decision of the SJWSA executive to retain ownership of providing a

²²⁵*Ibid.*, November 25, 1940

²²⁶*Ibid.*, December 7, 1940

²²⁷*St. John's Telegram*, December 24, 1940, p. 1.

hostel for sailors thus had not deterred the YMCA and the result was two hostels for sailors in St. John's.

The Caribou Hut was furnished to provide a variety of activities for ratings. These included a gymnasium, a games room for ping pong and other activities, a bowling alley, a swimming pool, a reading and writing room equipped with thousands of donated books and writing supplies, showers, and a canteen where sailors could purchase an affordable meal.²²⁸ After the hostel opened in December 1940, the SJWSA entertainment committee wasted no time seeking out entertainment for servicemen at the Caribou Hut. The entertainment committee arranged for live music to be played as well as setting up weekly dances for the servicemen:

Mr. O'Neill reporting for the entertainment committee advised that he and Mr. Macpherson had visited the American troopship and met Lieut. Hahe, the recreation officer to arrange for a show to be put on by the US soldiers on every second Wednesday [at the Caribou Hut] commencing February 5 [1941]... the possibility of obtaining a dance orchestra from among the members of the American army band was also mentioned... There was some discussion regarding the running of dances in the hostel and it was brought to the attention of the executive that there was no committee charged with the responsibility of such entertainment. It was moved by Miss Wilson that Mrs Holmes be appointed convenor of a special sub committee of the entertainment committee to look after dances and also Sunday suppers provided for the soldiers.²²⁹

Providing activities for the servicemen was a taxing job for the entertainment committee, and before long difficulties arose in providing original forms of recreation for sailors. In a SJWSA meeting in March 1941, Mr. Macpherson, head of the entertainment committee, asked the other members to brainstorm new ideas of entertainment. Creative ideas and

²²⁸SJWSA, *Operating the Caribou Hut Annual Report for Year 1943* (St. John's, 1944), PANL (MG. 637)

²²⁹SJWSA, Minutes 1940-1945. February 4, 1941(Caribou Hut, YMCA), PANL (MG.637)

suggestions for servicemen included plays, card nights, sing-songs, live radio broadcasts, and summer activities. The SJWSA also turned to other groups within the community such as the IODE (Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire) and the military itself for aid in providing recreation for servicemen.

Mr. Macpherson reported that the entertainment committee were experiencing difficulty in securing new entertainments and that suggestions from members of the executive would be welcomed. Mrs. Holmes suggested that a game of mixed bridge might prove successful and pointed out that an artillery draft would probably broadcast from the hut some evening next week. It was suggested that the NFLD militia might put on a concert at the hut some evening. Capt. Peters suggested that Canadian HQ will probably have a play ready for presentation in about six weeks. Mr. Macpherson said that the IODE ladies auxiliary planned to offer some form of entertainment and that Cap.O Grady had also promised to help. Canon Howitt enquired regarding the views of the executive on summer activities. It was generally felt that some sports programme would be necessary, but that the canteen, swimming pool, reading and writing rooms and bowling alleys in the hut would continue to be used. Capt. Peters said that an outdoors sports committee would be very useful.²³⁰

The actions of the SJWSA executive demonstrates the wide array of activities afforded to servicemen in St. John's. By March 1941 the SJWSA, and Captain Peters in particular, were already anticipating summer activities for sailors and wanted a special committee set up just for this. Summer sports and a variety of other activities were organized for sailors by the SJWSA on a yearly basis. The summer events run by the SJWSA consistently met with great success. In the SJWSA meeting on July 20, 1943, Mr. Macpherson reported that "hospitality registration bureau is being carried on successfully by a group of ladies. Picnics for the men are being considered. Several tea dances have been held and have

²³⁰Ibid., March 4, 1941

proved popular.”²³¹ The constant search for new and improved activities for ratings by the SJWSA continued on during the war.

Planning activities for the Caribou Hut was only part of the responsibilities taken on by the SJWSA. Another objective of the organization was to create stronger links between the servicemen in port and the community of St. John's. One way it accomplished this was through a community program that asked Newfoundlanders to open their homes to sailors in port and treat them to a home cooked meal and a night's accommodation. The SJWSA acted as a liaison between the community and Navy to set up a billeting service. The billeting service started in January 1941, just after the opening of the Caribou Hut. During the January meeting Canon Howitt reported that “in February they expected to make arrangements to place 20 men from the airport in private homes in St. Johns for a long weekend leave over Easter.”²³² The billeting service met with great success within St. John's. It did not take long for Newfoundlanders to embrace and quickly offer their homes and supper tables to needy servicemen while in port. By September 1941 an independent group of ladies from within the community came forward and offered to help establish a placement bureau for servicemen within St. John's. “A group of ladies were considering offering their services to establish contact between the men of the services and the homes of St. John's,” reported Mr. Macpherson at the September meeting of the SJWSA. “They proposed to set up a bureau in the building through which meals in private homes, motor drives in the country and any other

²³¹ *Ibid.*, July 20, 1943

²³² *Ibid.*, January 31, 1941

private hospitality might be extended to the men.”²³³

The SJWSA began in St. John's with two purposes: establishing a hostel and running a billeting service for servicemen. Both initiatives gained quick success, but by 1943 problems began to arise at the Caribou Hut. Drunkenness among sailors was becoming an increasing problem and forced the SJWSA to temporarily stop its weekly dances at the Caribou Hut.

Mr. Smith reported that the increasing amount of drunkenness among men of the forces had made it necessary for the management to discontinue dances in the hut on Saturday nights until further notice. A movie show will be given instead of the usual Saturday dances. Mr. Smith reported that both in the Caribou Hut and elsewhere drunkenness has been on the increase over weekends, despite the best efforts of the staff of the huts to keep the matter in hand. The only way that order could be maintained was to discontinue the dance programmes on Saturday nights. The motion was passed.²³⁴

Newfoundlanders were willing to allow sailors access to alcohol, but there was clearly a limit to how much was appropriate. In February 1943 servicemen in St. John's were drinking more than the SJWSA and community of St. John's would accept. Temporarily revoking the Saturday night dance was one way that the SJWSA enforced disciplinary action on ratings in the city. Even then, dances were replaced with movies. After several weeks the dances were resumed, but more problems arose. Public drunkenness of sailors continued to be a problem, but this time it was the merchant marine that was causing a majority of the disturbances. The issue of drunkenness at the Caribou Hut was the main topic of discussion at the SJWSA meeting July 20, 1943.

²³³Ibid., September 30, 1941

²³⁴Ibid., February 16, 1943

[t]he report noted that the merchant seamen continued to create a lot of trouble at regular club dances by bringing beer into the hut and by trying to gain admission while under the influence of liquor... Mr. Mclean stated that only one civilian policeman is on duty at the dances and that it is extremely difficult to handle merchant seamen who come across the street when the merchant seaman's club has been closed and are not in fit condition to be admitted to the hut.²³⁵

The executives of the SJWSA were not only worried about the drunken behaviour of the merchant marine, they were also worried about safety issues at the club. With only one policeman on duty any outbreaks among sailors would be difficult to control. The SJWSA had no problem with the consumption of alcohol until it infringed upon safety issues or caused inebriation of sailors that led to inappropriate behaviour. It was only at this point, when the actions of sailors became dangerous, that liquor consumption was frowned upon.

Although problems did arise for the SJWSA in the provision of recreation for sailors, the initiatives of the organization met with immediate and lasting success. Over a nine day period beginning in September 1941, over 600 men were served the early breakfast that the hostel ran.²³⁶ The numbers of sailors attending activities at the Caribou Hut rose steadily over the war years. In its annual report for 1944 the SJWSA included statistics comparing sailor attendance for various activities held at the Caribou Hut between 1942 and 1943. Numbers of participants increased in every category but three. The complete statistical report is given in Figure 11.²³⁷

²³⁵Ibid., July 20, 1943

²³⁶Ibid., September 30, 1941

²³⁷St. John's War Service Association, *Operating the Caribou Hut Annual Reports for 1943* (St. John's.

Servicemen in the city were vocal in their gratitude to the SJWSA for its efforts during the war. In June 1941 the SJWSA received two letters from servicemen in the city. Canon Howitt reported that “[o]ne was from a soldier of the Victoria Rifles and the other from battery 'd' 52nd coastal artillery U.S. army both expressing appreciation for the facilities provided by the hut.”²³⁸ Servicemen also expressed appreciation to the SJWSA for the V-E day celebrations that were provided. The activities provided by the SJWSA included movies, dances, sing-songs ‘in every suitable hostel’. As well the wet canteens were to remain open, allowing servicemen access to liquor.²³⁹ The success of the V-E day celebrations among sailors was noted at the SJWSA meeting of May 22, 1945. “[A] letter from Commodore Taylor was read expressing his thanks to the Caribou Hut for entertainment provided for the armed services during the V-E day celebration. Canon Howitt remarked on the orderly way in which the celebration was carried out in the city of St. John’s, as compared with other places.”²⁴⁰ Canon Howitt’s remarks at the meeting were made in acknowledgement of sailors’ good behaviour in St. John’s compared to the riots that occurred in Halifax. Although sailors caused some trouble and minor disturbances in St. John’s, they loved the port and appreciated the work done for them by the SJWSA. Despite occasional minor troubles, the success of the SJWSA, the Caribou Hut and the billeting service among sailors in St. John’s is undeniable.

The SJWSA was not the only organization in St. John’s providing accommodation

²³⁸St. Johns War Service Association, Minutes 1940-1945, June 10, 1941, Caribou Hut, YMCA, *PANL*.
MG637

²³⁹*Ibid.*, April 17, 1945

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, May 22, 1945

and entertainment facilities for sailors. The YMCA also opened and operated the Red Triangle Hostel near the railway station on Water Street.²⁴¹ On August 21, 1941, the Canadian YMCA war services began work on the Red Triangle by sending an application to St. John's city hall asking permission to build an army hostel on Marine Parade Road.²⁴² This was followed by an explanatory letter by Mr. Donald McPhail, the Atlantic Area Secretary for the YMCA, outlining the purpose of the club, listing general construction procedures and including the amenities it would include.²⁴³ The Red Triangle was officially opened for business January 9, 1942.²⁴⁴

Likewise the Knights of Columbus in St. John's also opened a Hostel for servicemen coming to port. The first hut operated by the Knights was located on Harvey Road but was destroyed by fire in December 1942. A second hut was built on St. Clare Avenue.²⁴⁵ The fire at the K of C Hut on Harvey road will be discussed later in this chapter. The Red Triangle and K of C hostels were open to all servicemen and were heavily frequented by the RCN. This fact is evident through various news reports published in the St. John's Telegram that consistently described 'large numbers in attendance' when referring to the hostels.²⁴⁶ Although some concerts and various activities were run for servicemen at the K of C and Red Triangle hostels, it was the Caribou Hut

²⁴¹Facey-Crowther, *Lecture*, 1996.

²⁴²St. John's City Council, *Minutes*, August 21, 1941, p. 481.

²⁴³*The St. John's Telegram*, September 4, 1941, p. 489.

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, January 9, 1942, p. 3.

²⁴⁵*Ibid.*, December 17, 1941, p. 5. & February 23, 1943., p.3.

²⁴⁶*The St. John's Telegram* "Christmas at the K of C Hostel," January 2, 1945, p.2. & "Activities at the Red Triangle," April 22, 1943, p. 12.

that ran the majority of programs for sailors ashore. This was due primarily to the SJWSA whose focus was running the Caribou Hut and billeting service. Neither the Red Triangle nor Knights of Columbus hostels had the extensive volunteer networks compared to the SJWSA.

The Caribou Hut, the Red Triangle, and the Knights of Columbus hostels were not the only establishments set up in St. John's that catered to the needs of naval personnel. Pubs and restaurants were established for specific groups of sailors. There was the Merchant Navy Club for seamen located on Water street, the Terra Nova Club located on Flower Hill, the Merchant Navy Officers Club located on Cochrane street, the Captain's Room located on East Water street and the Crows Nest Officers Club located on Water Street.²⁴⁷ Each club was set up for specific ranks of naval crews. Captains and Officers would frequent those clubs that were established for them, such as the Merchant Navy Officers Club, the Captain's Room and the Crows Nest, while lower ranking seamen would patronize the Merchant Navy Club and the Terra Nova Club. The understood and accepted separation of ranks for recreation and leisure pursuits did not bother petty sailor or officer. For most it was an opportunity to relax with friends who were primarily of the same rank. The division of officer and crew also allowed each to blow off steam and complain about the other in a way that was inappropriate while at sea.

One of the most popular wartime clubs among the officers of naval crews in St. John's was the Crows Nest. Any trip to St. John's would have been incomplete without at least one stop at the Crows Nest. The Crows Nest was opened January 27, 1942 through

²⁴⁷Facey-Crowther, *Lecture*, 1996.

the generosity of Colonel Leonard Outerbridge who offered the fourth floor of his warehouse building to Captain Mainguy, the Allied commander in St. John's, for the purposes of an officers club.²⁴⁸ The Crows Nest was renowned for the 59 steps that it took to climb up to the bar. Another distinguishing factor was Captain Mainguy's suggestion that any officers visiting the Crows Nest should bring with them a crest of the ship they represented. To this day the Crows Nest receives a token visit from most officers coming to St. John's. A visit to the club today takes one back to the war years, climbing the 59 steps, walking into the bar itself, with its low ceilings, seeing each wall covered with ship's crests and, standing in one corner, a periscope that, as Crows Nest legend suggests, was taken from a German sub and anchored in the bar. W.L. Nicholson, a Newfoundland historian, described the Crows Nest as "a place in the city where the corvette drivers could buy a cheering tot of hot rum and a plate of ham and eggs at Navy prices, take down their hair in bibulous arguments about the wolf packs, sing raucous verses of 'The North Atlantic Squadron' and perhaps warm the seat of their Number 5's in front of a blazing hearth."²⁴⁹ For many officers the Crows Nest provided great entertainment and respite from the war raging outside the narrows. The Crows Nest to this day remains an important landmark among RCN crews, and defines and identifies the city St. John's just as it did during the war.

U.S. and Canadian military personnel in St. John's also provided various opportunities and facilities for the use of sailor and citizen alike. In 1941 American

²⁴⁸The Crows Nest: Queens Beach St. John's Newfoundland, *Pamphlet* (St. John's: Long Brothers).

²⁴⁹W.L. Nicholson *More Fighting Newfoundlanders*, p. 511. Taken from David Facey-Crowther *Museum Lecture Series* (St. John's, 1995), p. 10.

engineers, with approval from British, Canadian and American governments, began surveying land in St. John's for a suitable space to construct military bases and facilities that would house personnel stationed there in the future. It was decided that the area around Quidi Vidi Lake, known as Pleasantville was a suitable place for an American Army barracks. The base was named Fort Pepperrall after Sir William Pepperrall an American Colonel who gallantly captured Louisburg in 1745 with only 100 small vessels.²⁵⁰ Construction of Fort Pepperrall began when troops came in January 1941; it was completed by December of the same year.²⁵¹ The base itself comprised a total of 191 acres and offered a variety of facilities including a movie theater, recreation center, chapel, bakery, laundry, and outdoor sports facilities.²⁵² Fort Pepperrall is another example of how St. John's offered itself in any way it could to the war effort, and to the servicemen coming to port. St. John's city council was extremely co-operative with any requests the builders of Fort Pepperrall presented to them. Council had no objections allowing for local water and power to be used at Pepperrall. As well, city council sent local engineers to mark out and install fire hydrants for the base.²⁵³ Even with the American troops stationed in St. John's there was an instant sense of appreciation and friendliness demonstrated by Newfoundlanders. This appreciation was reciprocated by the American troops at Fort Pepperrall. One way the American troops demonstrated their appreciation was by opening up their sports fields to the public. As well, American military personnel offered assistance

²⁵⁰Peter Henderson, *Guarding the Gates* (St. John's, Hawk Publishing, 1992), p.29.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*, 31.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, p.27.

²⁵³St. John's City Council, *Minutes* January 26, 1942, p. 24, & April 6, 1942, p. 106.

with the planning and carrying out of the annual Quidi Vidi Lake Regatta held by the city. The help of the American military with the annual Regatta held in St. John's made the first regatta held there after the American arrival the largest in St. John's history. A report from the Telegram suggests, "The crowds at the Regatta were estimated to be the largest in the history of the century-old-plus oar classic. Service personnel of the United States, Royal Canadian Army, Royal Navy, and the Newfoundland Militia mingled with men of the Free French Navy and civilians. This first World War II Regatta proved to be a highlight of Regatta history."²⁵⁴ The recreation complex and sporting facilities at Fort Pepperrall were available to sailors of the RCN and Newfoundlanders.

The RCN personnel stationed at the Avalon II during the war also did their part to introduce visiting sailors to the city. Lieutenant D.C. Miller R.C.N.V.R. produced the St. John's Naval Guide Book to acquaint sailors with important establishments in St. John's.

In his introduction Miller states:

This Guide Book is designed to acquaint all Seagoing Officers and men with the port of St. John's, and contains in brief an outline of the base organizations and facilities of the city in general. It is hoped that it will help all to become more familiar with the advantages the port has to offer, and that in some small way, it may serve in making their visit here more pleasurable.²⁵⁵

In the booklet Miller compiled a comprehensive list of the available sport facilities, clubs, camps, accommodations, restaurants, theaters, transportation connections, department and clothing stores, drug stores, libraries, schools and churches within St. John's. With each topic Miller gives as much information as possible including details on prices, schedules,

²⁵⁴Quoted in Peter Henderson, *Guarding the Gates* (St. John's: Hawk Publishing., 1992), p.34.

²⁵⁵D.C. Miller, *St. John's Naval Guide Book* (St. John's: RCN. Undated)

phone numbers, important contacts, addresses and capacity. The St. John's Naval Guide Book was a type of tour book for St. John's that was geared towards sailors' interests and activities. The booklet also provides a glimpse into the recreation and leisure opportunities open to sailors while in St. John's.

Miller wasted no time addressing the topics most important to the majority of sailors, alcohol and women. In his section entitled "Purchase of Licker (or spirits, whichever you prefer)" Miller outlines the proper procedure for the purchase of alcohol and location of liquor stores.

A permit must first be obtained from the Customs Building on Duckworth Street (Marked "Q" on plan). There are four Liquor Commission Stores. One at the top of McBride's Hill on Duckworth Street (where wardroom stores may be replenished), one opposite the War Memorial on Duckworth Street, one on Water Street, opposite the Caribou Hut, one on Springdale Street, opposite H.M.C. Dockyard.²⁵⁶

Miller understood the importance of liquor to sailors and through the handbook he outlined the proper procedure to obtain it and detailed directions to liquor outlets. In his directions Miller also considered the fact that most sailors were not familiar with the city and gave directions by utilizing popular landmarks familiar to sailors such as the Caribou Hut and the Dockyard.

Miller took into account that many sailors sought out female companionship when in port. In the section 'Who's Bored?' Miller writes "A warm welcome is assured to all Naval Officers wishing to avail themselves to the hospitality and home life offered by some of the citizens of St. John's. Call at "The Tourist Bureau" ("0" on plan), 339 Duckworth Street (top of McBrides Hill) - Miss. Peg. Gooden will provide necessary

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 16.

information. P.S. This is a date bureau!”²⁵⁷ This was the same service that was offered by the ladies within the SJWSA. Here Miller appreciates the fact that for most sailors having women close by was one way of relaxing from the horrors of war raging outside of the narrows. There was no attempt to condemn sailors for desiring female companionship; rather it was encouraged in a healthy and appropriate way. Miller continues the encouragement when he adds, “every Friday night at Fort William Officers’ Mess and all sea-going Officers are cordially invited - in fact - they are expected to attend - A nominal fee of \$1.00 is charged per Officer - All ladies are admitted free of charge.”²⁵⁸ Reading between the lines, Miller suggests that female companions for servicemen were available and that contact between the sexes was promoted. The attitude in St. John’s towards liquor and women was much less contested than in Halifax. In St. John’s there were not the same restrictive measures in place for sailors desiring liquor. Women were not kept from the sailors in St. John’s as they were in Halifax. In St. John’s there were the ‘nice girls’, as James Lamb calls them, who provided companionship for RCN, while in Halifax there were the brothels established by wealthy businessmen to make profit. Newfoundlanders had a better understanding for the needs and pursuits of sailors ashore than did Haligonians, and did their best to provide ratings with what they wanted, namely female companionship and liquor. Newfoundlanders chose to work with servicemen in the city, while Haligonians chose to resist and offer only what they deemed to be appropriate.

To say that St. John’s promoted opportunities for sailors to have female

²⁵⁷Ibid., p. 15.

²⁵⁸Ibid., p. 15.

companionship or liquor does not mean that no emphasis was placed on religion and moral values. Miller includes a section of his booklet titled, 'Who's Righteous?' and in it covers a variety of denominations including the Church of England, the United Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Salvation Army and the Church of Christian Science.²⁵⁹ For each denomination, Miller gives the location of churches in the city, the times for each service and even the times for confessions at the Catholic Church.²⁶⁰ As well, the SJWSA in their activity respected the lenten season.

Miller also addresses the sports in the city and is very thorough in his approach to the availability of sports in the St. John's. He includes information on rugby, baseball, softball, cricket, hockey, tennis, swimming, squash, golf, hunting, fishing, badminton, bowling, billiards, table tennis, gymnastics, skiing, basketball and cycling.²⁶¹ Although all of these sports were available to sailors in St. John's, they were primarily played among sailors themselves. As we have seen, competitive sport in St. John's is one way that Newfoundlanders separated themselves from the visiting RCN. Unlike the Halifax Chronicle, the local media in St. John's, particularly during the early years of the war, covered RCN sporting competitions only sparsely. The St. John's Telegram rarely printed articles discussing the sporting activities of RCN; instead it chose to cover the activities of local teams. Coupled with this, RCN sporting teams in a variety of sports were rarely admitted into city leagues. An examination of the various competitive leagues in the city demonstrates the limited participation of RCN teams. Local hockey, baseball and other

²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 20.

²⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 20-1

²⁶¹Ibid., pp. 9 -10.

sporting leagues kept a fair distance from the RCN, forcing the military to create their own leagues.

The division between military and community sport was clearly evident in the sporting section of the St. John's Telegram. One annual feature of the Telegram was to recap the sporting year in review. Its "year in review" was a report listing all local sporting teams from St. John's in a variety of sports. Until 1942 there was no mention of any RCN or military team. In 1943 however, the Inter-Service League was established in St. John's for ice hockey. The RCN team would win this championship in its first year. 1943 was also the first year that the Telegram reported on the Army Softball League that had been inaugurated a few years before. Local teams did not participate in the military leagues. In hockey there was the Western championship and Caribou leagues that were exclusive of any service team. These leagues continued throughout the war years.

It was not until April, 1944 that Canadian servicemen started up a softball league for the combined services. As the Telegram reported, "keeping in line with the well established slogan "Keep Fit" Canadian officers on active service in St. John's are inaugurating their softball competitions next Monday night."²⁶² There was no mention of any city team participating in the service league within the article. In Halifax, residents chose to provide a variety sporting activities and opportunities for sailors while ashore, in Newfoundland residents chose to keep sport further detached from the military. However Newfoundlanders were quick to provide numerous leisure opportunities for ratings ashore, such as dances, movies and drinking establishments.

²⁶² *St. John's Telegram*, April 18, 1944, p.14.

One explanation for the division of city and military teams may have been the different levels of skill of community and service teams. Teams from the services usually brought a skill level much superior to the local teams in St. John's. This is seen time and again in the headlines of the Telegram and is most obvious when examining the RCN hockey team. In 1944 the RCN team was invited to participate in an exhibition series with local teams from St. John's. A headline on February 5, 1944 states "Navy Boys Maintain Unbroken Record."²⁶³ The Telegram reported that "the RCN team downed St. Bon's by a score of 11-4. The navy on their success last night went through the series without a defeat."²⁶⁴ Clearly the RCN ice hockey team was superior to any team in St. John's. Further in the same article, the Telegram mentioned that "[o]n Wednesday night ice permitting, the first game of the championship series will take place between St. Bon's and Royals."²⁶⁵ Although the RCN were a far superior team, they were obviously not allowed to participate in the championship series in St. John's and compete for the Boyle Cup.

One year later the RCN ice hockey team became the object of discontent for many St. John's sports enthusiasts. The controversy surrounded an exhibition game played between the RCN team and city champions St. Bon's on March 3, 1945. A headline from the Telegram reads "RCN down St. Bon's 10-2 in third meeting: Navy refuse to play without own referee in control"²⁶⁶ The article went on to describe the RCN's refusal to play in the game without a referee of their own choosing.

²⁶³ *St. John's Telegram*, February 5, 1944, p.14.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶⁶ *St. John's Telegram*, March 3, 1945, p.14.

The game featured something new when the Navy team refused to play without having their own referees in control, despite the fact that two independent refs, both members of the visiting Gander Air-force team were on the ice. After the game was delayed 25 minutes, the airmen were withdrawn on the Navy's insistence and finally started at 9:10 with Cleary and Jamison [of the RCN] in charge. Needless to say the fans were keen observers of the referee controversy, and throughout the ensuing sixty minutes loudly voiced their disapproval in no uncertain terms and tones.²⁶⁷

Both the Telegram and hockey fans of St. John's expressed disappointment and displeasure with the actions of the RCN team. The controversy continued until finally four days later a letter to the editor written by a Navy man was printed in the Telegram, under the heading "Explains Navy's Stand In Recent Controversy."

I would like very much to state, for the benefit of hockey fans throughout Newfoundland, that the public has not been informed of the true facts... there are a few points, that if stated clearly would lead to the clearing up of a very unpleasant situation. Many sarcastic comments have been passed in the last few days which would have been entirely unnecessary had the public a true picture of the situation.²⁶⁸

The letter is highly critical of newspaper reports concerning the March 5th hockey game.

The article goes on to explain what really did happen and defended the actions of the Navy team. The letter concludes with the following comment.

In conclusion we'd like to stress that this letter was not written to reopen old wounds or to cause any further dissension. We only feel that we were justified in our attitude and if the facts had been properly presented to the public a lot of hard feeling could have been avoided. In the Navy's eyes this episode is closed and it is sincerely hoped that business will still carry on at the same stand and with the same hospitality which has been evident since our arrival here. The Canadians have won many friends in Newfoundland and would like to keep them; but we would appreciate it if we received a fair trial before being condemned. Many thanks for the

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 14.

²⁶⁸Ibid., p.14.

space in your paper.²⁶⁹

The conclusion of the letter directly addresses the feelings of RCN sailors towards Newfoundlanders. The only harsh words within the letter focussed on the issue of erroneous reporting of the game itself. The final sentence in the article illustrates the enormous gratitude that RCN ratings had for Newfoundlanders.

A notable exception to the separation of local and military sport was the annual Quidi Vidi regatta race. The race was extremely popular in St. John's. There were several regattas held each year in various locations all over Newfoundland, but the main event was the Quidi Vidi Lake Regatta. Many teams competed in the competition, and the race always drew large crowds. It was one of the most important sporting events of the year in St. John's. The Telegram captured the excitement of the 1944 race as follows,

No more conclusive evidence that the event continues to appeal to and thrill the populace today as it did over one hundred and twenty years ago could be given than the regular attendance of thousands at Newfoundland's greatest sporting fete. Long before the race took place a large crowd had already arrived and a stream of people continued throughout the morning swelling the attendance to immense proportions. By mid-morning, the banks and slopes to the pond were densely populated. Army, Navy and Air force were very largely represented together with many of the woman's forces. The regatta was a unique experience but to all it can be safely said it was a thoroughly enjoyable one.²⁷⁰

A variety of races were run under 4 oared races, and 6 oared races. There were four boats available to all teams. The boats were identical except for their names, Royalist,

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ "Regatta is outstanding success" *The St. John's Telegram*, August 4, 1944, p.10.

Buttercup, Red Cross, and Freedom.²⁷¹ Teams were broken into heats by affiliations. The heats included RCN, Unions, Newfoundland Regiments, Truckmen, Canadian Army, United States Army, Intermediates, All-Comers, All-Star Services, Clubs, and Labourers.²⁷² The winning crews from each of the heats relating to the services, which included the Newfoundland regiment, squared off in the All-Star Service race. The Telegram described the race for the RCN as follows,

There were four crews in this race, viz: Harbour Craft in the Buttercup. Shore Patrol in the Freedom, White Runners (Plumbers) rowing the Royalist and Fort Williams in the Red Cross. In the first few strokes at the beginning an oar was broken in the Freedom and the boats were recalled. A new oar was procured and on the second attempt all four made a good start. Last year winners, Shore Patrol and Harbour craft were the favourites both having won the elimination heats prior to the regatta. Freedom and buttercup were fit to make the turn though by a small margin, but coming up the pond they drew away from the others and it was a neck and neck struggle between them to the stakes. Shore patrol forged ahead and were the first to cross the line by a length in 10.55 which was the best four oared time for the day. Order of boats at the finish 1st Freedom, 2nd, Buttercup, 3rd Red Cross, 4th Royalist.²⁷³

The site of the Quidi Vidi Regatta was right in front of Fort Pepperall and, as mentioned earlier, the American troops were quite willing to help out in the annual event to make it successful.

Although sporting life in St. John's for RCN ratings was confined to competition between other military teams and squadrons, with the Quidi Vidi regatta an obvious exception, Newfoundlanders did not try to discourage sporting activity of the services. They simply failed to invite them into their own leagues. Whatever the motivation for the

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

separation, what developed were two separate and distinct sporting cultures in wartime St. John's. Sports was one way that St. John's was able to separate itself from the highly transient military population that frequented the city.

In most other situations, however, the relationship between the city and the military was one of cooperation and working together. One way that Newfoundlanders demonstrated their support and commitment to servicemen in the city was in their reaction to the various tragedies they faced during the war. St. John's faced a string of devastating fires, a breakout of infectious disease, and two U-Boat torpedoes fired at the narrows. And then there were the harsh winters that would bury the city deep in snow every year. If these were not enough, there was also the tragic sinking of the *S.S. Caribou* by the German U-Boats. (The *S.S. Caribou* ferried passengers between North Sydney, Nova Scotia and Port aux Basques, Newfoundland). Yet the resilience of Newfoundlanders, and their continual efforts to provide for military personnel in the face of these tragedies, demonstrates a working partnership between citizen and sailor in St. John's against a common foe.

At 4:30 AM on October 14, 1942 the fears of Newfoundlanders came true. The *S.S. Caribou* was attacked and sunk by German U-Boats. There were 101 survivors, but 136 souls perished as the ship sank.²⁷⁴ The bodies of many who perished in the attack were brought by special train from Port aux Basque to St. John's where large crowds turned out for the funeral services that were held. Survivors of the Caribou claimed that after torpedoing the ferry, the German submarine surfaced and attacked the life boat with

²⁷⁴*The St. John's Telegram*, October 15, 1942, p. 3.

machine gun fire. The ship itself sank in less than five minutes.²⁷⁵

The sinking of the Caribou not only cast Newfoundland into sorrow but affected many elsewhere in Canada. The Commission of Government in Newfoundland received letters of condolences from various dignitaries from Canada including the Right Honorable Secretary of State.²⁷⁶ People from all over Canada sent letters of sympathy in various forms. One of the most moving letters included a poem entitled Sinking of the Caribou composed by Mrs. Mabel Christian Parsons of Montreal, Quebec and which was printed in the Telegram.

The Sinking of the "Caribou"

The blackest hour that one before the dawn
When horrors lurk in shadows, spaced between,
When icy waters look more cold and deep
And demon cowards hide to kill unseen.

So was the hour when proudly on her way
With fearless crew and Captain kindly brave
The gallant Caribou our friendly boat,
Was plunged un-warned deep in the Cabot grave.

Oh cold, relentless brutal German foe,
To watch with glee wee babies tossed to the foam,
And human souls hurled to eternity;
The lives of innocents, to loved ones going home.

But he who rules the earth and all therein,
Who trod the waters deep in Galilee,
Will comfort those who suffer through this loss,
And keep this land a Country of the Free.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵Ibid., October 19, 1942, p. 3.

²⁷⁶Ibid., October 24, 1942, p. 7.

²⁷⁷Mabel Parsons, "Sinking of the Caribou", Montreal, October 22, 1942, *The St. John's Telegram*, October 24, 1942, p. 5.

The St. John's Telegram tells us that along with the many civilians who lost their lives, the entire naval crew of the *S.S. Caribou*, save one, died as well.²⁷⁸ During this time citizen and sailor came together to mourn their dead and reaffirm their conviction in fighting the common enemy that threatened their country. There was no accusation of naval incompetence in failing to ward off the attack, only praise in St. John's for the quick response made by RCN naval crews to find survivors and rescue them.²⁷⁹

The *S.S. Caribou* was not the only ship off Newfoundland attacked by U-Boats. The Germans also sank four ore boats off Bell Island, just miles outside of St. John's. The ore boat attacks came within weeks of the Caribou assault. Four ore ships in total were lost; the *S.S. Saganaga*, the *S.S. Lord Strathcona*, the *S.S. Rosecastle* and the *P.L.M. 27*.²⁸⁰ The U-Boats attacked the ore ships on two different occasions. The first came on September 5, 1942 when the U-Boats sunk the *S.S. Saganaga* and the *S.S. Lord Strathcona*. The first ship to go down was the *S.S. Saganaga* after being hit by two torpedoes. Immediately after the *S.S. Saganaga* started going down, U-Boats torpedoed the *S.S. Lord Strathcona*. The reports suggest that it took the *S.S. Lord Strathcona* only two minutes to go down. Lives lost from both ships numbered 29, all being from the *S.S. Saganaga*.²⁸¹ The funeral for the men lost was the largest ever held on Bell Island. It was attended by the officials of the Royal Navy, the Newfoundland Militia and the G.W.V.A. (Great War Veteran's Association) who provided honour guards. It concluded with a

²⁷⁸*The St. John's Telegram*, October 24, 1942, p. 7.

²⁷⁹*Ibid.*, October 19, 1942, p. 3.

²⁸⁰Addison Brown, *The Ore Boat Sinkings at Bell Island in 1942* (St. John's: Centre for Newfoundland Studies, 1965), p. 7.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 2, 7.

lengthy procession that went from the Bell Island mines to the Anglican cemetery.²⁸²

The second sinking that occurred on November 2, 1942 caused slightly more damage than the first.²⁸³ The U-Boat attack this time came in the early morning hours swiftly taking the *S.S. Rosecastle* and *P.L.M. 27* along with 40 lives.²⁸⁴ The funerals for victims of the second sinking were also widely attended. The mining company on Bell Island closed down so that workers could attend and pay their respects.²⁸⁵ The bell from the *S.S. Rosecastle* washed ashore on a piece of wreckage from the ship and was hung in the Canadian Legion Club at Bell Island being rung thereafter at the start of any meeting occurring there.²⁸⁶ The threat of the German U-Boats did not break the spirit of Newfoundlanders. Neither sinking of the ore boats at Bell Island nor the *S.S. Caribou* shook their faith. Instead, among many, there was a firmer resolve than ever before to support the servicemen in the city. For Newfoundlanders these sailors were the ones who would bring the global conflict to an end.

Another serious threat to life in wartime St. John's was the spread of disease, specifically infectious disease. Throughout the war years several diseases spread viciously across the Island. The most infectious outbreaks were of measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and scarlet fever. Many of these diseases brought about death. As St. John's was the largest city in Newfoundland, it faced the largest concentration of the disease and the

²⁸²Ibid., p. 3.

²⁸³Ibid., p.3.

²⁸⁴Ibid., p.3.

²⁸⁵Ibid., p.3.

²⁸⁶Ibid., p. 6.

toughest problem controlling the spread of disease among its population. Of all infectious diseases, tuberculosis (TB) was the most severe and deadly. As Dr. James McGrath in his address to the St. John's Rotary Club in 1942 suggested, "I hardly need to say that Newfoundland's greatest medical problem is pulmonary tuberculosis."²⁸⁷ The doctors words were quite true. TB alone in St. John's killed between 78-101 on a yearly basis. (See figure 12).

Coupled with the high number of deaths from tuberculosis were the hundreds more who contracted the disease yearly in St. John's and across the island. The Annual Report of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths for 1949 ranked the TB rates in Newfoundland against Canadian provinces. The figures point out that Newfoundland had the highest TB rates between 1939-1945. (See figure 13).

The problem of dealing with TB fell on the combined shoulders of the Commission of Government, City Council in St. John's, and to some extent the RCN. Each had a particular role to play in reducing the incidence of TB in St. John's and across Newfoundland. St. John's City Council employed several approaches to the outbreaks. The first step taken was to have weekly updates presented to City Council by the City Medical Officer outlining the number of deaths, new cases, and a tally of the number of patients in the hospital over the previous week. A typical report went as follows. "The Report of the City Medical Officer for week showed two new cases of Diphtheria in the city. At present in hospital: Diphtheria 5, Scarlet Fever 1, Typhoid 2."²⁸⁸ Although TB was

²⁸⁷*The St. John's Telegram*, January 30, 1942, p.3.

²⁸⁸St. John's City Council, *Minutes*, January 23, 1941, p. 273.

not mentioned in this particular report it was still a problem for Newfoundlanders. As new cases of TB developed in St. John's, the medical examiner would also include them in his reports to City Council. In the face of sickness and disease, Newfoundlanders displayed their resilience by caring for the needs of sailors while also taking pro-active steps to solve the problems affecting their city.

One of the steps taken by City Council dealt specifically with unsanitary buildings in St. John's. The spread of disease through the city was due in part to unsanitary conditions.²⁸⁹ One approach that City Council took to limiting the un-sanitary conditions was to remove dwellings deemed unfit for habitation. City Council minutes spell this out quite clearly, "Respecting houses 35 Rossiter's Lane; 21 Berron Street; 1 Buchanan Street; 5,7,9, and 11 Bambrick Street, all of which he [city medical officer] considered unfit for habitation and stated that they should be removed. The buildings are all tenanted at present."²⁹⁰ Countless examples of reports by the Medical Examiner to City Council concerning the demolition of debilitated or unsanitary buildings exists in Council minutes throughout the war years.²⁹¹ In November 1942 Council took another step to try and clean up the city by establishing The Commission of Enquiry into Housing and Town Planning in St. John's.²⁹² The purpose of the Commission was to "recommend a scheme for the rehousing of a proportion and ultimately the whole of the poor and low-income classes and

²⁸⁹Jim Lynch, *Interview*, April 10, 2001.

²⁹⁰St. John's City Council, *Minutes*, February 27, 1941, p. 334.

²⁹¹For several other similar examples see St. John's City Council, *Minutes* (January 23, 1941., & December 9, 1943), and January 23, 1944.

²⁹²*Ibid.*, (November, 1942), p. 367.

for the re-planning of the city.”²⁹³ The Housing Commission was another approach by City Council to address the problem of infectious diseases by revealing the unsanitary and unlivable buildings in St. John’s and relocating the people living there who were seen as high risk to cleaner quarters.

The city of St. John’s was not alone in its fight against infectious disease. The Commission of Government in Newfoundland also provided some aid in the battle against TB. During the war years the government set up a floating clinic that sailed around the Island offering checkups to those who were ill in port communities. The vessel Christmas Seal was loaded with medicine, medical supplies, an x-ray machine and doctors and nurses to aid those who were sick in the port communities across Newfoundland. Jim Lynch describes the efforts of the Christmas Seal and affect of TB in St. John’s as follows:

In St. John's and all of Newfoundland TB was a serious problem. This arose from the 1930's, when people were hungry and undernourished. When you have this, you get all sorts of medical problems. TB was one of the serious problems, but that was eradicated probably close to the end of the war. They used to have a ship called the Christmas Seal that would go around the Island and would take x-rays of peoples' chests. In each community it went to anybody who thought they needed one would get an x-ray. The Christmas Seal also supplied those in pain because of TB with drugs.²⁹⁴

Besides funding the Christmas Seal the Commission of Government released bulletins that would update the general public on the state of overall health on the Island. In November, 1943 the Social Services division of the Commission of Government directly addressed the state of TB in Newfoundland. “In recent years our professional staff specifically

²⁹³Ibid.

²⁹⁴Jim Lynch, *Interview*, April 10, 2001

trained in TB work has been greatly increased and we have experienced rapid strides and progress in the treatment of TB”²⁹⁵ The social services department also published statistics on the numbers of people treated in various hospitals across St. John’s. One of these hospitals was the Merchant Navy Hospital. The Merchant Navy Hospital was set up specifically to care for “officers and men of the ships of the allied nations.”²⁹⁶

Newfoundlanders were not only concerned with helping local residents with infectious disease, they also assisted in operating a hospital that was set up specifically for treating sailors who fell ill. In 1943 the Commission of Government went on to expand the Merchant Navy Hospital, thus making accommodations for more sailors in need of treatment. The commission report stated: “Early last year [1943] the commission of government erected the new wing and remodeled the old buildings of the Merchant Navy Hospital as a joint operation and for the principal purpose of caring for survivors from ships which have been destroyed by enemy action and for the merchant navy personnel.”²⁹⁷

Tuberculosis, scarlet fever and measles were not the only infectious diseases in St. John’s during the war years. Venereal disease (VD) was another infectious disease that ran rampant in Newfoundland between 1939-1945. VD was one issue that every RCN rating experienced in one way or another during their military service. Traditionally, port towns like St. John’s gained reputations as being highly susceptible to VD and thus the RCN put in place strict regulations to keep the sailors protected from VD infection. One

²⁹⁵Commission of Government, *Newfoundland Government Bulletin: Social Services*, November, 1943, p.

9.

²⁹⁶*Ibid.*, April 1944, p. 15.

²⁹⁷*Ibid.*

measure taken by the RCN was to make any house of prostitution in the city out of bounds for ratings.²⁹⁸ VD was mostly avoided and forgotten among the general population of St. John's but was discussed in health reports of the Newfoundland Commission of Government and the U.S. army. Like the Nova Scotia government, the Newfoundland Commission of Government issued health updates for Newfoundland. By 1944 the problem of VD could no longer be avoided by the health department. In the monthly report for February the government published a column entitled 'VD in Newfoundland: Prostitutes are a Scourge.' The article begins by examining the root cause of the problem,

Now what of the cause of this deplorable state of affairs? We have many times heard it blamed simply on the presence of the troops in our midst. We do not suggest that the servicemen are blameless, but they are certainly not responsible any more than partially for the present conditions and it must be remembered that the service man is the one individual in the community who is under constant surveillance to get prompt treatment.²⁹⁹

The Commission report does not accuse sailors or any other military personnel for the increasing VD infections. Rather the issue of VD was a concern for civilian and military doctors in St. John's equally. The two groups of medical teams often worked together to reduce the rising numbers of VD cases and treat those who were infected.³⁰⁰

American doctors also came to Newfoundland to assess the overall level of health in St. John's and in other communities as well. One such army doctor was Captain Daniel Bergsma, M.D. On November 8, 1942 Bergsma submitted a report on his findings for

²⁹⁸David Facey Crowther, *NewfieJohn: Garrison Town* (St. John's. Museum Lecture Series. June 1995) p.13.

²⁹⁹Commission of Government, *Newfoundland Government Bulletin: Social Services*, November, 1943, p. 6.

³⁰⁰Facey Crowther, *NewfieJohn: Garrison Town* 14.

Newfoundland entitled Venereal Disease and Other Health Problems in Newfoundland.³⁰¹

The very title of his report suggests that VD was a serious problem in St. John's and across the Island. Bergsma's report examined a wide range of topics concerning VD that include religion, governmental health services, sanitation, characteristics of inhabitants, sex mores, prostitution, alcohol, women at army posts, sources of infections and recommendations.

Of particular interest is Bergsma's comments concerning the sexual mores of Newfoundlanders. Bergsma wrote:

On the basis of reports from presumably reliable persons plus personal observations it seems quite definite that a large proportion of unmarried Newfoundland women have no effective inhibitions relative to non-marital sexual intercourse. During the evenings when the weather is favourable bargain day crowds of women may be seen promenading along specific streets to be noticed and favored with attention. Some of these girls will take a very active part in becoming acquainted with strange males... Some of these girls specifically desire that sexual intercourse be a part of the evening's entertainment while most others are easily persuaded to consent to sexual intercourse... In taverns and dance halls it is not uncommon to see girls taking the initiative in fondling, kissing and hugging men whom they never saw before an hour ago.³⁰²

Bergsma goes on to address the number of VD cases in Newfoundland, estimating over 24,000 cases of syphilis and 10,000 cases of gonorrhoea. Of these 34,000 cases of VD across the island Bergsma suggests "all cases of gonorrhoea are infectious until cured and probably 3,000 to 4,000 cases of syphilis are potentially infectious."³⁰³

Bergsma's report is consistent with the report of the Commission of Government in pinpointing the sources of VD across the Island. "A number of infections were acquired

³⁰¹Daniel Bergsma, *Venereal Disease and Other Health Problems in Newfoundland*; (St. John's: November, 1942), Reproduced in *Newfoundland Studies*, 15,1 (1999), pp.79-103.

³⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 91.

by soldiers while in furlough in the United States or Canada.”³⁰⁴ Bergsma suggests that many cases of VD did not come from Newfoundland but were brought there and transmitted to girls who were open to sexual encounters. Likewise, Bergsma recognizes the work done between doctors from the community, the RCN, and the U.S. army to fight against the spread of VD.

Lt. Colonel Berwald initiated a plan to have the civilian health authorities and medical officers of the American and Canadian Armies and Navies to meet to discuss their mutual problems related to VD control... It was agreed it would be desirable to officially call to the attention of the Commission Government that the problem of VD control was becoming increasingly serious and to ask their participation in a meeting intended to review every phase of the control problem and to plan specific action which is like to be effective in the immediate future.³⁰⁵

The spread of VD was quickly recognized as a growing problem in St. John's early in the war. Few statistics were kept on the numbers of infections in St. John's or across the Island as Bergsma's report suggests. However, his report for the U.S. army does estimate that over 34,000 cases of VD were present across Newfoundland, with most occurring in St. John's. VD was perceived as a serious problem among health officials in St. John's and the military alike. Yet instead of casting accusatory fingers at the opposing party each group was willing to work together to find a mutual solution to the problem.

Beginning in December, 1942 a string of terrible fires visited St. John's and brought with them severe damage. Like VD, the response required cooperation between the civilian and military communities. The most notable blaze happened on December 13, 1942, when a fire broke out at the Knights of Columbus hostel on Harvey Road. The death

³⁰⁴Ibid., p. 95.

³⁰⁵Ibid., p. 96-97.

toll from the fire would eventually reach 99. Many of those who perished in the flames were military personnel who valiantly tried to save civilians who were attending the dance at the club that night. Of the 99 who perished 29 were sailors; 24 were from the RCN.³⁰⁶ The K of C fire spurred two distinct sentiments among Newfoundlanders, grief for the local victims, and gratitude to the servicemen who gave their lives in the blaze and helped the city recover after the fact. The grief of the entire city was readily apparent in the attention given the disaster by the newspapers that reprinted the complete story several days later for all to read again. The tragedy of the blaze also affected the mood of the city. At the funeral service for victims of the catastrophe thousands of Newfoundlanders attended to show their sorrow.³⁰⁷ The funeral took the better part of a day. It included two long corteges that processed through the cities of Mount Pleasant and Mount Carmel with solemn bagpipe music and flowers being laid out.³⁰⁸

Newfoundlanders displayed an enormous sense of gratitude to servicemen in the city, especially those who were involved with the blaze. Days after the fire the Telegram was still praising the heroic efforts of the servicemen who perished and who risked their life to save others.

A deed of heroism that was not locked forever in the flames of Saturday's fire, as many were, was that of Private Gabriel Ryan of Newfoundland Militia...Private Ryan helped to save some thirty others, who were trapped inside... His heroism is shared by two naval ratings, at present unknown,

³⁰⁶Dunfield, *Destruction by Fire of the K of C Hostel*, p. 1.

³⁰⁷*St. John's Telegram*, December 16, 1942, p. 3.

³⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p.3.

who stuck to the door after pushing it open.³⁰⁹

Newfoundlanders understood the efforts of servicemen at the K of C fire and demonstrated their gratitude to the men in RCN uniform for their generous deeds. At the same time, Newfoundlanders did not stop in their efforts to provide for military personnel in the city. Rather they made a firm resolve to build another K of C hostel for the troops. The new hut, located on St. Clare Avenue, was finished on January 14, 1944 at a cost of \$200,000.³¹⁰ The new hostel had state of the art fire protection as well.

Although the K of C fire was the most damaging, St. John's experienced a string of smaller fires over the following months that caused distress. Many other military clubs and establishments in the city faced similar problems. Several weeks before the K of C tragedy, the Canadian barracks in St. John's also caught fire. The barracks on Signal Hill caught fire and were completely destroyed. There were no fatalities but the building was lost.³¹¹ In February 1943 the Barracks at Fort Pepperrall had a fire that "caused considerable damage to the building before it was extinguished."³¹² Again in June another fire hit the Allied Merchant Navies club in St. John's causing an estimated damage of \$100,000. The fire at the Merchant Navy club on King's Beach Road started on the second floor and gutted the upper levels of the building.³¹³ Another blaze hit the Notre Dame hospital in Twillingate. There was no loss of life but the fire caused serious damage to the

³⁰⁹ *St. John's Telegram*, December 14, 1942

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1943, p. 7.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1942, p. 7.

³¹² *Ibid.*, February 13, 1943, 7.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, June 25, 1943, p. 3.

hospital.³¹⁴ In late April 1943 E. O'D. Kelly's Garage on Duckworth Street was destroyed. A gasoline fire that started at the garage destroyed the entire building.³¹⁵ Just two weeks earlier a fire at the Yacht dance club at Long Pond Road razed the entire structure to the ground.³¹⁶ The string of fires in St. John's in 1943 were of grave concern to citizens and military personnel alike. On January 22, 1943 several fires broke out in the city. "Fire Destroys Old Colony Club and Four Members of Staff Burnt to Death" read the headline in the St. John's Telegram.³¹⁷ On the very same page of the Telegram a second headline read, "2 Houses and Shop Destroyed by Fire"³¹⁸ The buildings that were razed to the ground were located on Pearce Avenue.

The string of fires in St. John's in 1943 presented yet another opportunity for Newfoundlanders to cast blame upon the naval ratings and military personnel in the city, if they had desired to do so. Many of the buildings destroyed by fires were military in origin and might have afforded the opportunity for servicemen to view St. John's as a dangerous port. But no hard feelings emerged. Instead stronger dependancy developed between citizen and sailor. Each party seemed to understand that solving the problem of fires throughout the city would come through teamwork and mutual help rather than by casting blame. Newfoundlanders aided the military in any way they could when fires struck military buildings. Likewise, servicemen were at the disposal of local officials when a

³¹⁴Ibid., March 6, 1943, p. 7.

³¹⁵Ibid., May 1, 1943, p. 7.

³¹⁶Ibid., April 10, 1943, p. 7.

³¹⁷Ibid., January 23, 1943, p. 7.

³¹⁸Ibid., p.7.

blaze erupted in the city.

The camaraderie formed between citizen and sailor in the face of danger contributed to the strong, friendly ties that existed between the RCN and St. John's. In each instance where a threat to Newfoundlanders or the RCN existed, there was a mutual understanding between citizen and sailor that the problem would only be solved through pooling resources and working together. Blaming one group or the other for any adverse predicament was not done. Instead the RCN and community of St. John's only intensified efforts in working harder to come up with a solution to the problems at hand.

Of course it would be foolish to suggest that over six years of war, that RCN sailors in St. John's caused no problems or disturbances for Newfoundlanders. Towards the end of the war particularly, when numbers of naval personnel increased, crime and trouble involving the RCN also did. Although no official crime statistics were ever kept in St. John's, the Telegram provided an on-going account of general activity in the city including criminal acts. One must bear in mind, however, that for every instance of trouble caused by sailors in the city there were at least double the amount of good deeds being visited by other naval personnel. Newfoundlanders realized this and were more willing to overlook the transgressions of RCN sailors in the city. Indeed, for sailors in Newfyjohn, and for residents of St. John's as well, the wartime experience was one of mutual support, cooperation, and feelings of goodwill abounded.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

RCN ratings serving in the North Atlantic during World War Two had favourite North American ports they looked forward to visiting. When one reads diaries, journals, short stories, or books written by these sailors, it becomes obvious that ratings loved St. John's and hated Halifax. This paper has set out to examine these cities by looking at sport, recreation, the facilities offered to sailors, and the spirit of cooperation that did or did not exist, to help cast light on sailors and their feelings about the two ports. The conclusion reached is that Halifax was out of touch with the desired pursuits and interests of sailors, especially the desire for female companionship and access to liquor, while St. John's offered them this and more. While Haligonians were busy restricting access to liquor and closing down drinking establishments such as the Ajax club, Newfoundlanders chose to offer a variety of wet canteens to servicemen. While Haligonians were busy dealing with the population explosion occurring in the early 1940's, blaming servicemen in the city for the increased congestion, Newfoundlanders and the RCN worked in partnership to help keep snow off the streets of St. John's and run power lines and water mains to military buildings. While landlords and shopkeepers in Halifax chose to gouge customers through excessive rents and prices, Newfoundlanders and the RCN produced tour books for servicemen in St. John's. During World War Two one city clearly decided to work with the increased numbers of ratings in the city while the other city took advantage of their presence, considering them a nuisance. The response of each city brought very specific consequences. According to Stephen Kimber,

There were reasons why this torrent of pent-up rage [the Halifax Riots] had suddenly surged over Halifax's downtown streets with the irresistible force of a spring flood. To start with, there were these damn trams. Too few. Too old. Too uncomfortable. Too crowded....Could sailors help it if they weren't from Halifax? They certainly hadn't chosen to be here. Who would? Nowhere to go. No restaurants worthy of the name. No place to get a drink. Who shut down the Ajax club anyway? Nothing to do. Ever. Nothing. Except stand in line and pay through the nose to merchants who didn't smile... Reasons? Oh yes they had their reasons, all right.³¹⁹

This quotation epitomizes the feelings that the majority of Navy personnel felt when entering the city of Halifax. The animosity between citizen and sailor did not begin with the Canadian entry into war; rather the bitterness grew as the war continued. Haligonians did try in their own way to reach out and provide accommodation for the sailors entering the city offering numerous sporting opportunities for servicemen to enjoy. The media also worked diligently to advertise these events updated in local papers. There were also some attempts made to provide other forms of entertainment for ratings, such as talent shows and movies. Yet many Haligonians assumed wrongly that this was sufficient for sailors. Many sailors did enjoy the activities, but many more were interested in grabbing a bottle of beer or a tot of rum. What they experienced was a city with a strong, temperance-minded attitude.

One reason for the anti-liquor sentiment in Halifax was the view Haligonians took towards servicemen. Naval ratings were regarded as fearless, ever-vigilant protectors of the Dominion. This romanticized view suggested that sailors should not be weakened by the influences of alcohol even for a short time. A second factor was the influence that

³¹⁹Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs*, pp. 252-3.

religious groups within the Halifax were able to exert. The Ajax controversy exemplifies the influence of temperance-minded church groups in Halifax. It was through the efforts of Fort Massey United Church, aligned with other religious groups and temperance organizations, that the Ajax Club, one of the first successful organizations established for sailors in Halifax, was denied its liquor license. Members of Fort Massey church could not accept a club that allowed drink to be located across the street from their place of worship. Of all the situations faced by sailors in Halifax, the closure of the Ajax was probably the worst blow of all. It seems that the Ajax shut down set a course that would end with the Halifax riots.

There were other difficulties besides the restrictions of liquor and female companionship that made naval life in Halifax contemptible. At the height of its housing shortage hundreds of ratings were forced to sleep outside each night in the city. There simply was no room in the city. If by chance you were able to secure lodgings, the rents charged by greedy landlords were excessive.

The population explosion not only affected Navy men, but also had a direct impact on citizens in Halifax. Citizens found their once quiet town bustling with military personnel. There was only one group to blame for almost the doubling the city's numbers, and making anything done in public a hassle. The ratings! The annoyance Haligonians experienced as a result of the population explosion was projected onto the servicemen. The cold stares and unfriendly responses of citizens made sailors feel unwanted and unappreciated. Some might argue that the attitudes of sailor and citizen clashed so strongly in Halifax, that the V-E Day riots were a natural conclusion to six years of living together

in a context of mutual distrust and suspicion.

When coming to port in St. John's, sailors were excited to leave their ships. The city offered a variety of opportunities, provided in large part by the St. John's War Services Association. Officers knew that the Crow's Nest was expecting them for a pint, while deck hands could have their fill at the Caribou Hut. There were plenty of dances, movies, and assorted activities, offered in St. John's by the citizens there. Most importantly, it was not a problem for Newfoundlanders to offer the war weary visitors a cold one.

In St. John's citizens and sailors worked together throughout the war years. There was agreement that both citizen and sailor had to do their part so that the best circumstances could be attained. This is particularly evident in the responses of the city to military needs and the response of the navy to challenges faced by Newfoundlanders, such as K of C fire, other the fires that besieged the city, or through the citizen actions of providing a merchant naval hospital. Throughout the war citizen and sailor in St. John's fought the common enemy whether overseas or on the home front.

The cities of St. John's and Halifax provide two contrasting examples of how citizens along the Eastern seaboard chose to welcome naval ratings during World War Two. St. John's offered access to liquor and booze while Halifax chose to prevent access and restricted liquor. Newfoundlanders allowed females to associate with ratings while Haligonians frowned upon any naval advances towards 'up-standing' women. Most importantly, however, the people of St. John's knew they could depend upon servicemen when facing tragedy or difficult situations. In Halifax sailors were seen primarily as the

root cause of the city's wartime problems, and of the destruction of the city in the aftermath of VE day.

FIGURES AND APPENDICES

Figure 1 Venereal Disease in Halifax 1939-1945 ³²⁰

Year	Reported Cases of V.D	Deaths from Syphilis
1939	N.A.	10
1940	N.A.	9
1941	249	22
1942	316	16
1943	311	17
1944	476	14
1945	467	15

³²⁰Figures taken from Deputy Registrar General, *Report of the Department of Public Health: Containing the Vital Statistics of the Province* (Halifax: Kings Printer, 1941-1947)

Figure 2 **The Battle of Halifax**³²¹

1. Now gather 'round children and to you I will spill,
the tale of the raid upon Oland's old still.
How civies and ladies, both young ones and old,
Enlivened by whiskey grew sodden and bold.

2. They roared through the city and wrecked as they roared
The places where clothing and jewel'ry was stored.
Where once stood a restaurant now stands a cruel wreck,
And dummies were dragged through the streets by the neck.

3. They called out the coppers and sent in the troops,
To quell all the mobsters and place them in coops,
But the coppers, on seeing the mob, all lost heart,
And joined in the frolic and played a main part.

4. The street-cars long hated (down here they're called trams),
Were all set upon and opened like cans.
They took patrol wagons and piled them in heaps,
And carried off loot in a long line of jeeps.

5. For five dreary years people heard people say
That when the war ended, old "Slackers" would pay.
And they laughed it off with a sly cheerful grin,
Now they've pulled in their necks from this slap on the chin.

6. The mayor has stated that he is dismayed,
Because of the part that the Navy has played.
He forgets in the midst of his trouble and tears
That sailors in "Slackers" have paid plenty for years.

7. The Army and Navy were in with the rest,
But the Air Force were sleeping the sleep of the blest,
And safe in their billets they whiled hours away,
And took no part in it (at least so they say).

8. So take from this story a lesson from me,
When War starts again don't you head out to sea.
Remember that day when the civvies went mad,
And wrecked all of "Slackers" (tch,tch) that's too bad!

³²¹Anthony Hopkins, *Songs from the Front and Rear* (Edmonton: Hurtig., 1979), p.48.

Figure 3 Populations of Halifax 1939-1945³²²

Year	Halifax (pop)
1935	64315
1939	67872
1940	76256
1941	87144
1942	96644
1943	106480
1944	106742
1945	98896

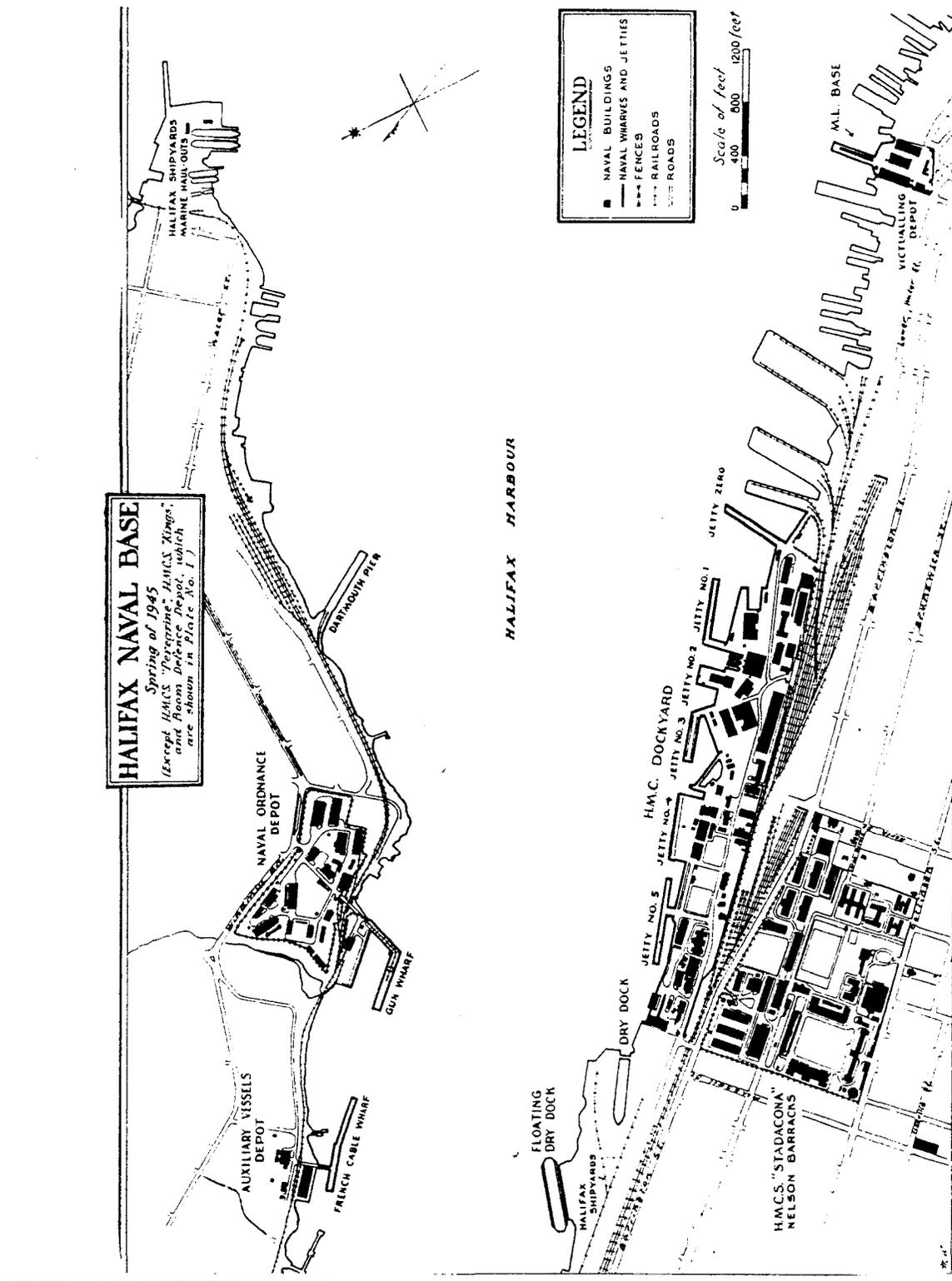
Populations of St. John's 1939-1945³²³

Year	Population
1939	56511
1940	57281
1941	58511
1942	63111
1943	66044
1944	62501
1945	64651

³²²Population statistics taken from *Halifax City directories 1935, 1939-1946* (Halifax: Might Directories Atlantic Limited)

³²³Taken from, *Annual Report of births, marriages and deaths for the year ended Dec 31, 1949* (Robinson and Co. Ltd Printers, St. John's. 1949), pg. 8 table 13.

Figure 4 Naval Developments In Halifax³²⁴



³²⁴ Gilbert Tuckers *A Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), plate II, pgs. 134-5. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Figure 5 Convoy deployments involving Halifax ³²⁵

Canadian and British-Canadian Trade Convoys Operated in Western Atlantic
(Based on Statistical Summary of Convoys (D.T.D. records))

Convoy	Between	First Convoy	Last Convoy	Total		REMARKS
				Convoys	Ships	
HX	Halifax-United Kingdom.....	16.9.39	13.9.42	207	8,501	Speed: to Jan., 1942, 9 to 14.9 kts.; thereafter 10 to 14.9 kts. (to Feb. 16/40, 17 of these convoys had "fast" sections of 11 to 15 kts.) SHX Section from Sydney 31.7.40 to 21.8.41 (except for winter season) WHX section from Newfoundland. Sections SHX (after 1.5.44), WHX, and HHX (from Halifax). Between 13.4.44 and 21.9.44 convoys of three speeds, 8, 9 and 10 kts. sailed from New York replacing HX and SC. These were HXS, HXM and HXF (included in these figures).
	New York-United Kingdom.....	17.9.42	23.5.45	151	10,214	
				358	18,715	
SC	Sydney-United Kingdom.....	15.8.40	31.7.42	94	3,652	Sailed from Halifax during winter season. Speed: to Jan. 1942, 7.5 to 8.9 kts.; Jan./42 to July 8/42, 7.5 to 9.9 kts. Thereafter 8 to 9.9 kts. Sections SSC from Sydney and WSC from Nfld. Sections SSC, WSC, and HSC (from Halifax). Between 18.4.44 and 16.9.44 HXS (8-kt.) convoy from New York replaced the SC convoy. (HXS included in HX figures).
	Halifax-United Kingdom.....	4.8.42	19.9.42	11	318	
	New York-United Kingdom.....	19.9.42	20.3.43	20	1,184	
	Halifax-United Kingdom.....	31.3.43	26.4.45	53	2,328	
				178	7,482	
ON	United Kingdom-New York.....	28.7.41	29.5.45	221	10,986	Terminated Halifax until September 1942.
ONS	United Kingdom-Halifax.....	29.7.41	22.5.45	143	5,837	
BS	Corner Brook-Sydney.....	21.5.42	24.12.44	104	237	No sailings during winter season.
	Sydney-Corner Brook.....	19.5.42	30.12.44	98	188	

NOTE: Total dead-weight tonnage conveyed in HX-SC convoys: 235,104,856

Convoy	Between	First Convoy	Last Convoy	Total		REMARKS
				Convoys	Ships	
BW	Sydney-Wabana.....	11.9.42	23.5.45	162	711	No sailings during winter season.
WB	Wabana-Sydney.....	15.9.42	23.5.45	147	793	
BX	Boston-Halifax.....	20.3.42	22.5.45	191	3,511	
XB	Halifax-Boston.....	18.3.42	23.5.45	196	2,166	
CL	St. John's, Nfld.-Sydney.....	28.2.42	18.6.43	66	368	After June, 1943 sailed with BW/WB convoys.
	Sydney-St. John's, Nfld.....	5.4.42	4.6.43	55	227	
FH	Saint John, N.B.-Halifax.....	18.9.42	23.5.45	196	901	
	Halifax-Saint John, N.B.....	13.9.42	20.5.45	158	905	
HJ	Halifax-St. John's, Nfld.....	22.5.42	25.5.45	151	458	
	St. John's, Nfld.-Halifax.....	21.5.42	31.5.45	186	614	
HS	Halifax-Sydney.....	16.5.42	21.5.45	216	1,439	No sailings during winter season.
	Sydney-Halifax.....	15.5.42	25.5.45	245	1,382	
JN	St. John's, Nfld.-East Coast Nfld. and Labrador.....	5.6.42	7.5.45	38	106	Intermittent.
	East Coast Nfld. and Labrador-St. John's, Nfld.....	6.6.42	9.5.44	35	103	
LN	Quebec-Labrador.....	25.6.42	26.10.44	28	96	Intermittent.
	Labrador-Quebec.....	4.7.42	4.11.44	30	99	
QS	Quebec-Sydney.....	17.5.42	14.12.44	93	976	Intermittent.
	Sydney-Quebec.....	17.5.42	19.11.44	90	666	
HT	Halifax-Trinidad.....	22.5.42	30.6.42	3	12	
	Trinidad-Halifax.....	4.6.42	4.7.42	3	16	
HA	Halifax-Aruba.....	5.7.42	19.8.42	4	57	
	Aruba-Halifax.....	27.7.42	2.9.42	3	35	
Special	Various ports.....	14.5.42	8.5.45	49	90	

³²⁵ Gilbert Tucker, *A Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), p.538-9. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Figure 6 Naval troops in Halifax 1939-1945³²⁶Officers and Men Serving at Canadian Naval Bases
1941—1945*

(Weekly Strength Reports N.S. 1015-5-26 (1); N.S. 30-8-43 (1-3))

OFFICERS AND MEN

BASES	July 1941	Mar. 1942	July 1942	Jan. 1943	July 1943	Jan. 1944	July 1944	Jan. 1945	July 1945
Montreal	455	972	1,382	1,125	2,260	2,431	3,907	3,011	5,005
Quebec	205	79	216	246	319	294	469	332	370
Gaspé	59	209	277	585	370	588	385	220
Sydney	310	515	665	695	1,857	1,850	2,017	2,475	2,327
Saint John.....	240	166	216	290	296	373	511	462	672
Halifax†.....	6,290	6,548	7,781	10,522	12,207	12,597	14,709	17,191	16,887
Shelburne.....	...	51	116	257	474	821	1,390	2,116	2,141
St. John's, Nfld.....	900	992	1,254	2,344	3,020	3,635	4,096	5,006	3,041
Esquimalt.....	2,996	3,380	3,665	5,937	6,050	3,623	2,642	2,648	4,445
Prince Rupert....	39	71	175	518	546	574	626	804	668
Vancouver.....	298	210	235	279	425	987	482	567	636
Totals.....	11,733	13,043	15,914	22,490	28,039	27,555	31,437	34,997	36,412

* No figures are available for the period prior to July 1941, and for the subsequent 18 months they are recorded only at irregular intervals. From December 1942 until the end of the war the record is complete.

† The figures for Halifax include those of H.M.C.S. "Cornwallis" until it moved to Deep Brook, N.S. in the spring of 1943.

³²⁶Gilbert Tucker, *A Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), p.531. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Figure 7 Accommodations available in Halifax for servicemen 1939-1945³²⁷

Ajax Club	Name	Address
1939	N.A.	N.A.
1940	Ajax Club	34 Tobin St.
1941	Not Listed	Not Listed
1942	Ajax Hospitality Club	Spring Garden
1943	Ajax Hospitality Club	Spring Garden
1944	Ajax Hospitality Club	Spring Garden
1945	Ajax Hospitality Club	Spring Garden
Knights of Columbus (K of C)	Name	Address
1939	N.A.	N.A.
1940	1. K of C Army Huts 2. K of C Club Rooms	1. 372 Barrington St. 2. 100 Sackville St.
1941	1. K of C Army Huts 2. K of C Club Rooms 3. K of C recreation center	1. 372 Barrington St. 2. 100 Sackville St. 3. 134 Almon St.
1942	1. K of C Army Huts 2. K of C Club Rooms 3. K of C recreation center	1. 372 Barrington St. 2. 100 Sackville St. 3. 134 Almon St.
1943	1. K of C Army Huts 2. K of C Club Rooms 3. K of C recreation center	1. 372 Barrington St. 2. 100 Sackville St. 3. 134 Almon St.
1944	1. K of C Army Huts 2. K of C Club Rooms 3. K of C recreation center	1. 372 Barrington St. 2. 59 Spring Garden 3. 134 Almon St.
1945	1. K of C club rooms 2. K of C recreation center	1. 59 Spring Garden Rd. 2. 134 Almon St.

³²⁷ All statistics are interpretation of the author. All statistics taken from *Mights Halifax City Directory 1939-1945* (There is a one year lag with the city directory, for example the statistics taken from the 1940 city directory represent the establishments through to 1939) As well the categories chosen include most activities or opportunities available to sailors as interpreted by the author.

	Name	Address
Navy League (NL)		
1939	1. N.L. Building 2. N.L. Canada	1. 17 South St. 2. 136 Hollis St.
1940	N.L. Canada	136 Hollis St.
1941	N.L. Canada	41 Hollis St.
1942	1.N.L. Merchant Seaman's Club 2.N.L. Naval Officers Club 3.N.L. Canada 4.N.L. Recreation Center	1. 41 Hollis 2. 105 Young St. 3. 81 Granville 4. Sackville
1943	1.N.L. Merchant Seaman's Club 2.N.L. Naval Officers Club 3.N.L. Canada 4.N.L. Recreation Center 5. N.L. Merchant Officers Club	1. 41 Hollis 2. 105 Young St. 3. 81 Granville 4. Sackville 5. 50 Inglis St.
1944	1.N.L. Merchant Seaman's Club 2.N.L. Naval Officers Club 3.N.L. Canada 4.N.L. Recreation Center 5. N.L. Merchant Officers Club	1. 41 Hollis 2. 105 Young St. 3. 81 Granville 4. Sackville 5. 50 Inglis St.
1945	1.N.L. Merchant Seaman's Club 2.N.L. Recreation Center 3. N.L. Merchant Officers Club 4. Navy Cadets Recreation Hall 5. N.L. North End Services Canteen	1. 41 Hollis 4. Sackville 5. 50 Inglis St. 6. Barrington St. 7. Barrington St.
North End Services Canteen	Name	Address
1939	North End Services Canteen	Russell St.
1940	North End Services Canteen	Russell St.
1941	North End Services Canteen	Russell St.
1942	North End Services Canteen	Russell St.
1943	North End Services Canteen	Russell St.
1944	North End Services Canteen	Barrington St.
1945	No Listing Taken over by Navy League - same address	No Listing

Salvation Army (S.A.)	Name	Address
1939	1. S.A. Headquarters and Public Relations 3. S.A. Hostel	1. 77 Hollis St. 3. 220 Argyle St
1940	1. S.A. H.Q. 2. S.A. Hostel - same 3. S.A. War Service Center	1. 77 Hollis St. 2. 220 Argyle St. 3. 7 Argyle St.
1941	1. S. A. H.Q. 2. S.A. Hostel 3. S.A. Red Shield 4. S.A. War Service Center	1. 77 Hollis St. 2. 220 Argyle St. 3. 10 Hollis St. 4. 7-11 Argyle St.
1942	1.S.A. HQ 2.S.A. Huts (red shield) 3.S.A. War Service Center	1.77 Hollis St. 2. 10 Hollis St. 3. 7-11 Argyle St.
1943	1.S.A. HQ 2.S.A. Huts (red shield) 3.S.A. War Service Center	1.77 Hollis St. 2. 10 Hollis St. 3. 7-11 Argyle St.
1944	1. S.A. HQ and War Service Department 2. S.A. Huts (red shield) 3. S.A. War Service Center 4. S.A. Hostel	1. 77 Hollis St. 2. 10 Hollis St. 3. 7-11 Argyle St. 4. 220 Argyle St.
1945	1. S.A. HQ 2. S.A. Hostel 3. S.A. Rehabilitation Hostel (providing accommodation for returning men and their dependents)	1. 77 Hollis St. 2. 220 Argyle St. 3. 273 Barrington. St.
YMCA	Name	Address
1939	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1940	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1941	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1942	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1943	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1944	Hostel and Recreation Center.	- 264 Barrington St.
1945	No Listing	No Listing

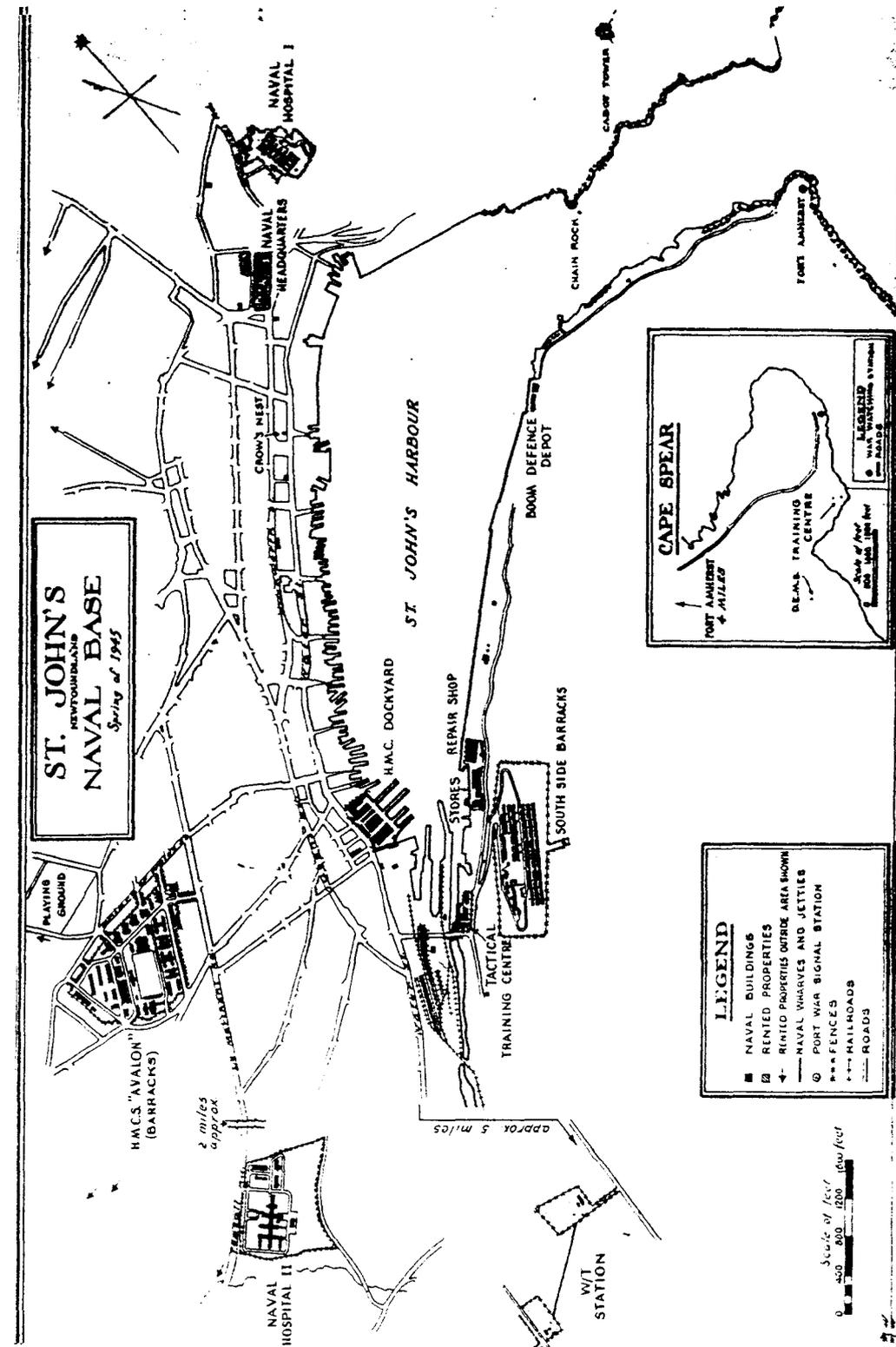
Canadian Legion C.L.	Name	Address
1939	1. C.L. War Services Office 2. C.L. Nova Scotia Command	1. 435 Barrington St. 2. 435 Barrington St.
1940	1. C.L. Atlantic House, C.L. Provincial Command, C.L. Educational Center, C.L. War Services INC. 2. C.L. Hostel 3. C.L. Library	1. 65 Hollis St. 2. 435 Barrington St. 3. 84 Hollis St.
1941	1. C.L. Atlantic House, C.L. Provincial Command, C.L. Educational Center, C.L. War Services INC. 2. C.L. Hostel 3. C.L. Library	1. 65 Hollis St. 2. 435 Barrington St. 3. 84 Hollis St.
1942	1. C.L. Atlantic House, C.L. Provincial Command, C.L. Educational Center, C.L. War Services INC. 2. C.L. Hostel 3. C.L. Library	1. 65 Hollis St. 2. 435 Barrington St. 3. 84 Hollis St.
1943	1. C.L. Atlantic House, War Services, Educational Services, Provincial Command 2. C.L. British Empire Seamen's League 3. C.L. Club Cafeteria (C.L. hostel name change?)	1. 65 Hollis St. 2.154A Hollis 3.601 Barrington
1944	1. C.L. Atlantic House, War Services, Educational Services, Provincial Command 2. C.L. British Empire Service League (changed from Seamen's club) 5. C.L. War Services Hostel	1. 65 Hollis 2. 154A Hollis 3. Barrington St.
1945	1. C.L. Atlantic House, War Services, Educational Services, Provincial Command 2. C.L. British Empire Service League (changed from Seamen's club) 5. C.L. War Services Hostel	1. 65 Hollis 2. 154A Hollis 3. Barrington St.

Figure 8 Development of Various Establishments relating to Housing and Recreation in Halifax, 1939 - 1945 ³²⁸

	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Apartments Houses	41	47	49	51	53	53	54
Boarding Houses	29	31	28	30	33	31	no listing
Bowling Alleys	2	2	2	2	2	1	2
Clubs	56	50	53	54	?	56	43
Navy Related Clubs**	3	9	9	11	?		6
Halls	28	29	30	29	??	23	23
Hotels - Private	11	14	12	8	8	10	9
Hotels - Standard	13	13	12	11	10	7	10
Parks and Squares	14	14	14	14	14	12	14
Restaurants	82	95	100	98		99	
Skating Rinks	2	2	1	1	1	1	no listing
Societies							
Misc. Societies							
Theaters	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Taxi Companies	18	20	25	19	14	10	16

³²⁸ All Naval clubs were arbitrarily chosen by author based on the name given in the yellow pages of the *Mights City Directory Halifax 1939-1945*. If the name of the club made a connection to military, naval, or officer's club it was counted, foreign club or otherwise.

Figure 9 Naval base in St. John's³²⁹



³²⁹Gilbert Tucker, *A Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), plate VI, pgs. 202-203. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Figure 10 Number of ships entering St. John's 1939-1945³³⁰

WARSHIPS* BASED ON ST. JOHN'S FROM JAN. 1942 TO MAY 1945

[Taken from statements on allocation of H.M., H.M.C., and Allied ships to Canadian Forces, in N.S. 1057-3-6 series]

	Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes	M/S's	Aux. Vessels	M.L.'s
Jan. 1942.....	16	—	52	2	—	—
June 1942.....	11	—	46	5	—	—
Jan. 1943.....	23	—	30	7	1	8
June 1943.....	12	2	37	9	—	9
Jan. 1944.....	12	7	39	16	2	11
June 1944.....	—	9	31	8	2	8
Jan. 1945.....	8	27	39	8	2	14
May 1945.....	3	36	41	9	2	14

* Canadian, British, and Free French.

³³⁰Gilbert Tucker, *A Naval Service of Canada* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), p.203. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of National Defence.

Figure 11 Statistics for the Caribou Hut for 1942-1943. Taken from the SJWSA annual report on the Caribou Hut 1943³³¹

	Sessions	Attendance
committee meetings	28	196
dances	108	48995
Sunday teas	51	23080
sing songs	48	22675
bingo nights	12	1225
quiz programmes	10	2130
movie shows	446	127735
concerts	24	11200
indoor games (ping pong, etc.)	382	100126
bowling	248	27343
wrestling	15	1350
weight lifting	150	1400
swimming classes	42	840
personal problem interviews		1137
personal services		7788
beds rented		64929
free beds		836
use of reading and writing room		98085
use of gymnasium		8005
use of showers and swimming pool		34684
canteen customers		410507
free meals to services		2053
Total attendance to all events		<u>987113</u>

³³¹Taken from St. John's War Services Association, *Operating the Caribou Hut Annual Report for Year 1943*, pgs. 12-13. Statistics submitted by C.K. McLean, Sr. Supervisor, Canadian YMCA War Services.

magazines distributed	25414
newspapers distributed	5654
writing paper	166901
envelopes	85435
coats and parcels checked	66322
safety deposit envelopes used	4090
articles sewn or mended by home corner	833
free cigarettes distributed	6400
night canteen customers	142644
lunches to patrols and civil police on duty at hut	988
men placed in homes for relaxation and entertainment	1735

Comparative Figures

1942

1943

	Sessions	Attendance	Sessions	Attendance
dances	92	33254	108	48995
sing songs	60	15550	48	22675
concerts	30	7921	24	11200
movies	351	91263	446	127735
canteen customers		396604		401507
beds used		53447		64929
bowling		34061		27343
use of reading and writing room		143360		98085
writing paper		133700		166901
envelopes		72350		85435
magazines distributed		18075		25414
newspapers distributed		6882		5654
swims and baths		32308		34684

Figure 12 Deaths from TB in St. John's 1939 - 1945³³²

Year	Number	Rate Per 100,000
1939	87	154.1
1940	81	141.5
1941	94	161.0
1942	81	128.2
1943	79	120.0
1944	101	161.5
1945	78	120.0

Figure 13. Death Rates from TB in NFLD and the provinces of Canada 1941-1945
(rates per 100,000)³³³

Province	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
NFLD and Labrador	171	157.5	143	158	139.7
Prince Edward Island	73	44.7	46.2	63.7	45.6
Nova Scotia	74.2	64.6	68.7	58.3	54.2
New Brunswick	68.6	71	48.2	51.5	56.8
Quebec	80.5	80.2	82.3	75	71
Ontario	39.1	28.6	28.8	27	25.8
Manitoba	44.9	45.5	52.9	47.5	42.7
Saskatchewan	31.7	27.7	29.7	26.3	26.9
Alberta	41.3	33.7	37.1	35.6	31.3
British Columbia	65.2	68.7	68.0	55.4	55.2

³³² *Annual Report of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, for the Year ended December 31, 194.*
(St. John's: Robinson and Co. Ltd. Table 22), p. 23.

³³³ *Annual Report of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, for the Year ended December 31, 1949*
(St. John's: Robinson and Co. Ltd. Table 22), p. 38.

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³³⁴From this point on the Public Archives of Nova Scotia will be referred to as PANS.

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³³⁵ A special note of thanks is extended to the City of St. John's for granting me permission to open city council minutes for the years 1939-1945 in order to complete this research.

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Research Ethics Board

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Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Subjects

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal or other type of study submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Marc Koechl

**Name of Research Project: Sailors Ashore - A Comparative Analysis of Wartime
Recreation and Leisure in Halifax and St. John's**

REB File Number: 03-079

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Conduct of Research Involving Humans.

Please note that approval is only effective for one year from the date approved. If your research project takes longer than one year to complete, submit Form #3 (Annual Report) to the REB at the end of the year and request an extension.

Date:

September 26, 2003

Signature of REB Chair:

Dr. John YOUNG