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REPORT NO. 79

HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

JAN 30 1959

SAINT-PIERRE-ET-MIQUELON DURING  
THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon during  
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1. Following the fall of France in June 1940, the status of the French colony of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon became a matter of some importance. This Report traces the action subsequently suggested and/or taken by the interested parties. The story is told from the Canadian point of view, with just enough background material provided to make understandable the actions of the British, Vichy and American Governments and the Free French Movement.

(i) Geographical and Historical Setting

2. The archipelago of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon is all that remains of once considerable French possessions in North America. It comprises a group of nine small islands lying about 10 miles west and south-west of Point Crewe the south coast of Newfoundland, and is commonly called "St. Pierre and Miquelon" by the English-speaking peoples. For the sake of simplicity, therefore, this nomenclature will be used. Since 1783 Grande Miquelon and Petite Miquelon (or Langlade) have been joined by a shingle bank five and a half miles long, and thus are really one island with an area of 83 square miles. Three miles distant, across a channel known as La Baie, is St. Pierre: with an area of about 10 square miles, it is five miles long and three and a half miles wide. The much smaller Ile aux Chiens is the only other of the islands which is inhabitable and of economic value. All present a bare and rocky appearance: a thin surface of peat covers the rocks in many parts, while the valleys are filled with lakes or peat mosses; boulders are scattered everywhere. The tops of the hills on Miquelon are long and flat, while in St. Pierre the outline is more irregular. The coasts are generally steep and high, except on the north-east side of Petite Miquelon. Navigation is difficult and landing is often dangerous, with St. Pierre having the only really good harbour. The severity of the climate is due more to polar currents and winds than to geographical position. The heat of summer rarely rises above 72 degrees. During the period April to November there is a rainfall of 40 to 47 inches. Winters are long, rather than rigorous; snow lasts from November to April, though the thermometer seldom falls to four degrees Fahrenheit. Although the harbour of St. Pierre has not been blocked since 1874, navigation around the islands is hindered by field ice during February and March. On an average there are 160 days of fog in the year, with June and July being the worst months and August and September the best.

3. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 provided that St. Pierre and Miquelon should remain in French hands to serve as a shelter for fishermen, but the Islands were retaken by the British during the course of each succeeding war and have been permanently occupied by French settlers only since 1814. The several treaties indicated, however, that the rights of sovereignty did not extend to the right to cede the islands to any other Power, or to turn them into a fortified base so as to convert them into an object of jealousy between the United Kingdom and France. Without agricultural resources, mineral wealth, or independent industrial activity, the colony lived by its cod fishery and owed not merely its importance but its very commercial existence to the accident of nature which created a safe roadstead and harbour in proximity to the prolific fisheries of the Newfoundland Banks.

4. During the early years of the 20th Century, longshore fishing began to increase in popularity among the inhabitants and there was a corresponding decline in the size of the local fleet engaged in deep-sea fishing on the Banks. On the other hand, the numbers of vessels from France tended to increase, justifying for a time the continued existence of St. Pierre as a port of call. But the colony was in a state of decline when the United States of America embraced "Prohibition" in 1920. From then until 1933 St. Pierre basked in the prosperity brought by the bootlegger. Although a certain amount of smuggling continued to be aimed at Newfoundland and the Maritime Provinces of Canada, by 1940 the colony's economy was once again in an unhealthy state and its annual deficit was being made good by a subsidy from France.

5. At that time the colony was governed by an Administrator, M. Gilbert de Bournat, assisted by a consultative council of administration and by municipal councils. De Bournat took direction from Admiral Georges Robert, who was French High Commissioner in the Antilles and ordinarily resident in Martinique. According to a 1940 census the population of St. Pierre numbered 3396 persons, while there were a further 520 on Miquelon and 259 on Ile aux Chiens (1).

#### (ii) France and the Free World, 1940-1941

6. The defeat of the French armies was followed by the conclusion of an Armistice with Germany on 22 Jun 40 and one with Italy two days later. A dispirited people were only too ready to accept the authority of a French government headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain, the elderly hero of Verdun and a symbol of better days. This régime soon established itself at Vichy. Although the first reaction in the colonial empire was refusal to accept defeat, the official class in all the major colonies threw in their lot with the Pétain régime; indeed, their sense of hierarchic subordination and tradition of obedience made any other course impossible. Similarly, most officers of the armed forces considered that their oath of allegiance bound them to Vichy (2). Yet Vichy never achieved political coherence. According to Professor Alfred Cobban:

Its history is not the history of a government by Pétain, or by anyone else, but of the intrigues and struggles of competing factions, fighting for power in what was left to them of France, but confined and restrained on all sides by the conditions of a world at war and the dictates of the Germans<sup>(3)</sup>.

Of all the illusions which flourished at Vichy the greatest was the belief that France would be left alone to pursue its new domestic policies peacefully while the rest of the world continued to fight. What it hoped to turn into an oasis of peace proved to be simply a no man's land in the battle-front. The escape into reality was to prove an impossibility<sup>(4)</sup>.

While there was no section within the administration contemplating the possibility of a return to the alliance with the United Kingdom, a powerful faction, headed by Pierre Laval, did actively desire closer relations with the Germans.

7. On the other hand, fearing the secession of North Africa to the British, the Germans were anxious not to push the French too far or too quickly. Therefore Hitler was prepared to encourage France to defend her own colonies, and permit her to retain the means of doing so, despite Italian demands for the disarmament of French North Africa<sup>(5)</sup>.

8. The British Government was forced to adopt a cautious role and to avoid any act which might bring Vichy into the war on the side of Germany. Thus British policy was merely to exercise economic pressure on the colonies which adhered to Vichy and promise assistance, but only against naval attack, to those which might reject the rule of Marshal Pétain<sup>(6)</sup>. Although diplomatic relations were ended following the attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir and nearby Oran on 3 Jul, all links were not entirely severed. Contacts were established through the British and French Ambassadors at Madrid and on 10 Nov Prime Minister Churchill wrote General de Gaulle: "We are trying to arrive at some modus vivendi with Vichy which will minimise the risk of incidents and will enable favourable forces in France to develop". He later wrote in Their Finest Hour:

I was very glad when at the end of the year the United States sent an Ambassador to Vichy of so much influence and character as Admiral Leahy, who was himself so close to the President. I repeatedly encouraged Mr. Mackenzie King to keep his representative, the skilful and accomplished M. Dupuy, at Vichy. Here at least was a window upon a courtyard to which we had no other access<sup>(7)</sup>.

9. Although the Canadian Legation had been withdrawn from Paris to London during the critical days of the Battle of France, it continued in being and there was no

diplomatic obstacle to its Charge d'Affaires, Mr Pierre Dupuy, visiting Vichy on 20 Aug to investigate the interests of Canadians who were unable to leave France. He returned to London only on 20 Dec 40. Subsequent visits were made to Vichy during January-March and August-September 1941. While in London, Mr Dupuy was in frequent communication with the various departments of the British Government, to whom information regarding developments in France was made available<sup>(8)</sup>.

10. Meanwhile, in the face of mounting criticism, the French Legation remained undisturbed in Ottawa. The Conservative Party urged that the British lead should be followed, and diplomatic relations with Vichy discontinued. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation objected to recognition being accorded a régime that seemed so obviously fascist<sup>(9)</sup>. Thus Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King was led to state on 6 Aug 40, in answer to questions raised in the House of Commons, that:

...our position has been to permit the minister who has come to Canada from France to remain. He understands that the situation is a delicate one and that he is here with a view of assisting our government to meet questions as they arise rather than to do anything directly or indirectly which would serve to embarrass the government. The position as far as our relationship with France is concerned is well known and understood in the United Kingdom. I believe we are helping to meet the desire of the United Kingdom government in not severing diplomatic relations to the extent of asking the present minister to retire. I believe a similar attitude is being taken on the part of South Africa towards its representative from France. Certainly as between this country and the French people there has always been the closest and friendliest kind of relationship. France has been the ally of the United Kingdom more than once and we certainly hope that the day will come when relations will be restored to the old normal happy state that has existed in past years. In the interval if there is anything we can do to further that end, and avoid, as I have said, any new issue arising, I think it should be done. And it is on that basis that the relationship is being maintained as it is at the present time<sup>(10)</sup>.

Although there were no pronouncements by political leaders from within the province of Quebec, the French-speaking press was friendly disposed towards the Pétain Government because of its strong clerical bias. Yet, at the same time, there was no marked antagonism towards the Free French Movement.

11. It has been suggested that General Charles de Gaulle's brief tenure of office in the Reynaud Cabinet, before escaping by air to England, caused this self-appointed leader of the Free French Movement to regard himself hence-

forth as a politician rather than a soldier - a psychological point that initially was not realized by British political and military leaders. "Their prime object," according to Sir Desmond Morton, "was doubtless to use de Gaulle as a military rallying-point for any elements of the French army and air force who might elect to fight on and so swell the number of fighting men available to the Allies"<sup>(11)</sup>. Although they were not to be used against France, it was agreed that the forces being organized were, as far as possible, to bear an entirely French character, particularly as regards language, discipline, promotion and administration. Even though Vice-Admiral Emile Muselier, who had placed his ships and resources at the disposal of the Royal Navy in June, was a good deal senior in the French service hierarchy, the Admiralty proposed to concert naval arrangements with General de Gaulle. "The admiral's acceptance of this provision appeared to show that he regarded de Gaulle as the supreme commander of the Free French navy as well as of the army; this weakened his position if, as indeed occurred later, he should wish to assert his original claim to independence"<sup>(12)</sup>. Free French forces might be placed at the disposal of British commanders anywhere by General de Gaulle, who agreed to accept British direction of the higher conduct of the war.

12. From the outset there had been agreement on the importance of acquiring French colonial territory. Grand strategy pointed to North Africa, but this proved too difficult for de Gaulle's forces to attempt, in view of the attitude of the local administration and armed forces. Neither in Madagascar nor French Guiana, nor the Antilles, nor St. Pierre and Miquelon, was there any overt demand to join the Movement; in any case, these colonies, together with the Indian possessions and islands in the Pacific, were too far from the scene to be of first concern. During September 1940 a joint Anglo-Free French expedition against Dakar failed and French West Africa held to Vichy. Fortunately, the Cameroons and Equitorial Africa were won over, as a result of successful coups d'état. Although the British Government subsequently agreed to treat with the Council for the Defence of the French Empire, whose formation de Gaulle proclaimed from Brazzaville on 27 Oct, it was made clear that no views would be expressed on any constitutional or juridical considerations which might be raised in any of his manifestoes or speeches. For, willingly or unwillingly, the majority of Frenchmen were accepting the rule of Vichy. Furthermore, unlike the Governments-in-Exile in London, all of whom had been elected at one time or another by the people they claimed to represent, there existed no means whereby the policies of General de Gaulle could obtain the approval of any sort of free popular vote<sup>(13)</sup>.

13. Although the benevolently neutral United States of America was being guided by a very astute statesman and practical politician during the critical weeks and months of 1940, President Roosevelt's advisers remained obsessed with the belief that the British would be defeated. Thus, while the President soon correctly diagnosed the British

Isle as being America's first line of defence, principal subordinates such as Admiral Harold R. Stark, General George C. Marshall and Secretary of State Cordell Hull continued to worry about the disposition of the British and French Navies - since the United States Navy necessarily was concentrated in the Pacific - and to place unusual emphasis on the attitude adopted by the Pétain Government at Vichy<sup>(14)</sup>. In regard to this last, Mr Hull's policy had four main objects:

- (a) to see that the French fleet was not turned over to Hitler;
- (b) to see that the Axis did not get possession or control of French bases in Africa or in the Western Hemisphere;
- (c) to see that the Vichy Government did not go beyond the terms of the armistice toward active collaboration with Hitler;
- (d) to restore a degree of friendship between France and Britain<sup>(15)</sup>.

15. Obviously, the pursuit of these objects was not compatible with recognition of the Free French Movement. Reports from France continued to rate General de Gaulle's following there as being low. Even though these undoubtedly were based on the naturally closer contacts that Americans had with the world of officialdom and high society than with the great bulk of the people, there was the obvious fact that Vichy represented effective French power in France and North Africa. Moreover, the intense pressure brought to bear on the Roosevelt Administration by Free French sympathizers and propagandists in the United States, and their bitter attacks on American foreign policy, strengthened the official prejudice against General de Gaulle and a determination to have as little as possible to do with his Movement.

16. Although the Monroe Doctrine was to have no standing in International Law until the Senate ratified the Convention of Habana of 30 Jul 40, the State Department's policy was based on the views expressed by President James Monroe in his message to Congress of 2 Dec 1823. As early as 3 Jun 40 a resolution of this nature was introduced into both Houses of Congress. On 17 Jun, the day that it was approved by the Senate, Germany and Italy were informed that the United States would not recognize any transfer and would not acquiesce in any attempt to transfer, any geographic region of the Western Hemisphere from one non-American Power to another non-American Power. The United Kingdom, France and The Netherlands were informed in the same sense<sup>(16)</sup>. On 21 Jul the foreign ministers of the American Republics met at Habana. Before concluding their meetings on 30 Jul, they approved an Act of Habana which would go into force immediately and a Convention which would have to be ratified by two-thirds of the participating nations. As events developed, the Act of Habana never had to be applied, but it

may have served as a deterrent to would-be aggressors. It authorized an emergency administrative committee to assume the administration of any European colony which might be attacked or threatened. Should there not be time to convene this committee, any republic, acting by itself or with other republics, could act in the manner required by its own defence or that of the continent (17).

(iii) Initial Canadian Steps

17. Having been deterred during April 1940 from despatching Force "X" to protect Greenland\* against possible German aggression, the Canadian Government may have been hesitant to tangle so soon again with the U.S. State Department, over so small an issue as St. Pierre and Miquelon and at a time when survival might depend upon material assistance from the United States. Although requests for Canadian-American staff talks on the subject of North American defence had been greeted without enthusiasm in Washington, the United States Minister in Ottawa was directed to find out exactly what the Canadians wished to discuss and then report upon it in person<sup>(18)</sup>. Therefore, on 29 Jun the Hon. Jay Pierpont Moffat spent an hour discussing Canadian defence requirements and fears with the Hon. J.L. Ralston and Hon. C.G. Power.\*\* Both Ministers stressed the importance of Newfoundland in any scheme of defence. According to Mr Moffat's Diary:

With regard to the island of St. Pierre-Miquelon Mr. Power said that if he had his way Canadian troops would occupy it. Obviously, however, this raises so many political questions that there would be no move without the approval of the Department of External Affairs. If worse should come to worst the Canadians hope to find out what we have in mind with regard to preventing various places such as Iceland, Greenland, the West Indies, etc., from being used as German bases<sup>(19)</sup>.

This last was the line adopted by the Cabinet War Committee two days earlier (27 Jun), when Mr Power had been directed to obtain a report on St. Pierre and Miquelon, and when it

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\* Instead, merely a Canadian Consulate was established in Greenland during June 1940 (Preliminary Canadian Narrative, Chapter XI). The United States had despatched a Consul to Greenland in May.

\*\* From 11 Jun to 4 Jul 40 Mr Power was Acting Minister of National Defence as well as being Minister of National Defence for Air. On that last date Mr Ralston vacated the appointment of Minister of Finance to become Minister of National Defence.

had been agreed that any action contemplated for the defense of these Islands, as well as Canadian coastal areas, should be the object of prior consultation with the United States.

18. On 30 Jun Commander F.L. Houghton, Director of Plans Division, submitted to the Chief of the Naval Staff an appreciation on St. Pierre and Miquelon. The gist of this three page memorandum was that these Islands would be of little use to Canada or the enemy: better submarine or surface craft bases existed on the south coast of Newfoundland and could easily be occupied by the enemy. In Commander Houghton's opinion:

9. The principal danger at present appears to be the possibility of their use by submarines waiting to attack shipping. It is therefore recommended that air patrols should visit the islands regularly for reconnaissance purposes<sup>(20)</sup>.

In a covering letter forwarding this memorandum to Mr Power on 1 Jul, Rear-Admiral Percy W. Nelles added his own personal opinion that "the Government of Canada (possibly in conjunction with the Government of Newfoundland) might consider setting up a system of administration for the duration of the war, such administration being backed up by the R.C.M.P., as originally proposed for the occupation of Greenland". The object of such an administration, he added, "would be merely to deny the islands and fish products to the Germans or the United States"<sup>(21)</sup>.

19. The subject of St. Pierre and Miquelon became more urgent, however, upon receipt of the following telegram despatched by the Governor of Newfoundland, Sir Humphrey Walwyn, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on 4 Jul:

In view of latest information received this morning we feel increased apprehension as to the position of St. Pierre and would like to suggest for consideration that in certain eventualities which at present seem not unlikely suitable military and naval action should be taken to prevent the island or French vessels there from hostile action against us or British shipping. We would co-operate in every possible way and would be glad to be kept in touch with any action you may have in mind. French sloop "Ville d'Ys"<sup>\*</sup> is now at St. Pierre and we have

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<sup>\*</sup>Ville d'Ys (ex-Andromide) was laid down in 1916 for the Royal Navy but was turned over to the French Navy and employed latterly on fisheries service. This coal burning sloop had a displacement of 1121 tons, complement of 103, and a radius of 2400 miles at 10 knots. Its armament consisted of three 3.9-in guns, two 3-in. guns and two 47-mm. guns.

accordingly instructed S.S. "Belle Isle", Canada Steamship Line, not to call there. Presence of this sloop is, however, anxious from our point of view and renders early action all the more necessary. Further, as you are aware, a number of French trawlers are at present operating off St. Pierre and we feel that unless they are brought under control they would also present a potential danger (22).

Later that day the matter was discussed by the Cabinet War Committee. Mr Ralston expressed the opinion that the Islands were of "no great military importance". It was decided, however, to recommend the institution of a periodic air patrol.

20. Dr O.D. Skelton, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Admiral Nelles got together and soon agreed that there were two alternatives: either a show of force sufficient to prevent any possibility of failure, or peaceful and friendly discussion between representatives of the interested parties. There was a 6-in. gun cruiser, H.M.S. Caradoc, in the vicinity and Commodore G.C. Jones, Commanding Halifax Force, could be despatched in her to enforce any action determined by the Canadian Government. According to a memorandum prepared later by Admiral Nelles:

I...strongly advised against any policy which would involve such a showing of force but leave the hands of the Senior Officer tied to such an extent that he would not be empowered to use the force in case it became necessary as proved to be the case at Oran. It was pointed out that the R.C.N. flies the same White Ensign as the British ships at Oran and that it would be unfair to the officers undertaking the mission if they were not, in the last resort, entitled to take similar action. In fact, it would result in a weakening of our position rather than the strengthening which the show of force would be designed to convey (23).

Admiral Nelles favoured the second alternative and offered to place the services of Commander J.W.R. Roy, Director of Operations, at the disposal of the Department of External Affairs to assist any delegation proceeding to St. Pierre. As well as being bilingual, Commander Roy was known personally to both Dr Skelton and Dr H.L. Keenleyside (also of the Department of External Affairs).

21. At a somewhat lower level, the Joint Planning Committee, of which Commander Houghton was a member, prepared an Appreciation amplifying his memorandum of 30 Jun:

2. If it is the intention of the Canadian Government to take over the administration of these islands, the Committee are of the opinion that the following action will be necessary:-
  - (a) Take over the French sloop by the use of a superior Naval force, order her into Halifax or other British port in order to prevent her carrying out any hostile action against us or from falling into the hands of the enemy. The Committee further recommends that this operation should be assisted by a flight of bomber reconnaissance aircraft.
3. The Committee feels that more harm than good may be done by the landing of armed forces prior to gaining definite information regarding the attitude of the population towards the Bordeaux Government, and the probable reaction to the taking over of these islands by the Canadian Government with or without the use of force. To this end they recommend that the Senior Officer of the Naval force should interview the British Consul at St. Pierre with a view to ascertaining whether the presence of troops on the island would be necessary, or alternatively, whether a small police force to back up the Canadian Administrator would be sufficient.
4. If it is found that it will be necessary to station troops in the islands from the point of view of internal security the Committee considers that the maximum number of troops which might be employed would not exceed one company of infantry.
5. The Committee considers that any measure regarding internal security need not necessarily be taken until after the removal of the French sloop and the acquisition of definite information as to the attitude of the local population.
6. With regard to the possibility of the use of these islands as a base for enemy submarines, the Committee concurs in the recommendation contained in paragraph (9) of appreciation ...\*.
7. Owing to the low power of the wireless station at Galantry Head, it is doubtful if this could be used for communication with either Botwood or Sydney but the Committee recommend that this should be investigated by the Senior Officer of the Naval Force.

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\*Quoted in paragraph 18 above.

8. Finally, the Committee is of the opinion that if the population of the island proves to be entirely amenable to Canadian acquisition of these islands, a small force of police would be sufficient under an Administrator appointed by the Canadian Government<sup>(24)</sup>.

22. During the course of his conversation with Prime Minister King on 5 July, recounting the results of his trip to Washington, Mr Moffat expressed the hope that Canada would undertake no unilateral occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon, in view of a proposal to be put before the American Republics (soon to meet at Habana) that a temporary trusteeship might be established over such islands in the Western Hemisphere (see para 16). Mr King admitted that the Governor of Newfoundland had been pressing him to do so:

... but was categoric in his statement that he would not send any troops. He was planning to send a Canadian official, together with a Newfoundland official, to the island to talk over the disposition of a French armored sloop which was either at or near St. Pierre but he would be careful to avoid any untoward precedent. He might also have to send in a ship with relief supplies as the island which depended entirely for its subsistence on ships from France, and its ability to sell fish for these exports, would soon be in a desperate condition...(25).

On the following day, 6 Jul, Mr King told the members of the Cabinet War Committee that Newfoundland's Commissioner of Defence, Hon. L.E. Emerson, who had come to Ottawa to discuss a number of matters of common interest, had requested that no action should be taken until the Commission Government had had an opportunity to give further study to the problem.

23. It should be emphasized at this point that the French Administrator of St. Pierre and Miquelon was without news from France and had wired the British Consul General in New York and the French Commercial Attachés in Washington and Ottawa seeking relief from the economic crisis which might soon develop as a result of trade restrictions and lack of dollar credits<sup>(26)</sup>.

24. Only on 15 Jul was agreement reached that Commander Roy (in civilian clothes) and Hon. J.H. Penson, Newfoundland's Commissioner for Finance, should proceed to St. Pierre. This intelligence was imparted through official channels to the U.S. State Department<sup>(27)</sup>. Commander Roy and Mr Penson reached St. Pierre by steamship on 17 Jul and later that day had a three-hour interview with the Administrator; also present were the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the senior member of the Administrative Council and the British Consul. At a further and private

meeting of 18 Jul, the Administrator spoke much more frankly. Commander Roy and Mr Penson remained at St. Pierre until 20 Jul and subsequently submitted a joint report to their respective governments. They felt that, while the Administration was not particularly pro-British, it was definitely anti-Axis. No instructions had been received from France, however, so the Administrator did not know where he stood. De Bournat provided a written guarantee that the Islands would not be used for any purpose by the enemy, but would give only verbal assurance that any enemy activity in the area would be reported without delay. Commander Roy and Mr Penson felt, however, that St. Pierre could offer few facilities to the enemy as a base because:

- (a) There is only one harbour and that small, which can be used; and it is easily reconnoitred by air from Canada.
- (b) There is a shortage of food and fuel supplies in the Islands.
- (c) These Islands are not suitable for the establishment of air bases<sup>(28)</sup>.

The presence of the Ville d'Ys presented a problem, since she came under the jurisdiction of Admiral Robert at Martinique. Another problem was the presence of 12 French trawlers, loaded with fish for which there seemed no longer to be a market. Commander Roy was able to obtain the Canadian Government's agreement (by wireless) for the voyage of one trawler loaded with cod to Martinique. The Administrator insisted that he could carry on the economy for some time, but that something would have to be done about "dollar credits".

25. De Bournat also took passage for Canada on the S.S. Belle Isle, which called at St. Pierre on 20 Jul. Two days later he had an interview with Dr Skelton in Ottawa: the Deputy Minister of Fisheries, First Secretary of the French Legation and Dr Keenleyside were among those present. After the French representatives had guaranteed that the Ville d'Ys would not be employed in any manner hostile to British and Canadian interests, it was agreed that the preferable course would be for it to proceed to Martinique. Matters of finance and the disposal of the present catch of fish were then discussed at some length<sup>(29)</sup>.

26. Back in Ottawa on 31 Jul after a trip to Washington, the Administrator had a further interview with Dr Skelton and Dr Keenleyside, conversing for an hour through an interpreter. De Bournat opened the discussion by stating that, as a result of his visit to the United States, complete agreement had been reached between himself, the French Legation in Ottawa and the French Embassy in Washington, with regard to the necessity of maintaining cordial relations between St. Pierre and Miquelon and Canada. Everything possible was being done to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of such relations. In view

of an order issued by the Vichy Government on 12 Jul that French naval units were not to attack or interfere with British ships, the Administrator felt that there would be no possibility of Ville d'Ys interfering with any British or Canadian ships which might call at St. Pierre. The French Embassy in Washington had suggested to Vichy that Ville d'Ys should either be disarmed or sent to Martinique. Dr. Skelton indicated that either course would be acceptable to the Canadian Government, and expressed the hope that an early decision might be reached. The Administrator replied, however, that the French Government might consider that no further orders were necessary "in the case of so small and obsolete a vessel"(30).

27. The discussion then turned to the question of finance. The Administrator had managed to obtain enough funds to continue for the time being, but he requested assistance in freeing blocked accounts in Canada and dealing with its Foreign Exchange Control Board. It was agreed that the Canadian Government would inquire whether the United Kingdom would be prepared to let the French trawlers sell their existing catch of fish in Spain and Portugal, or agree to them clearing for Martinique should it be found possible to dispose of their fish in the French West Indies. At this point, Dr. Skelton emphasized that there was no longer any difficulty about the issuance of ship clearances from Canadian and Newfoundland ports for St. Pierre; the number of ships subsequently calling at the Islands would depend purely on the traffic.

28. On 1 Aug the Canadian Minister in Washington, Mr Loring C. Christie, told Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles that the Canadian Government had no intention of interfering with either the administration or status of St. Pierre and Miquelon. (By an Order in Council of 31 Jul the British Government had extended its "navicette" system of blockade to all Europe; henceforth Metropolitan France and French North Africa were to be treated as enemy-controlled territory.) Mr Christie went on to say that the Canadian Government had read with interest and satisfaction the proposals advanced at Havana for the defence of European colonial possessions in this hemisphere; should any danger arise as regards these Islands, the Canadian Government assumed that this would be a matter of immediate interest to the United States and would be glad to consider any means by which Canada could co-operate in any necessary defensive provision. Mr Welles said that in such an event the United States Government would at once get in touch with the Canadian Government(31).

29. Late in August General de Gaulle and Admiral Muselier began pressing the British Government to permit them to "rally" St. Pierre and Miquelon(32). But political considerations forced the British Government to refuse and to limit its operations to the existing naval blockade against the territories adhering to Vichy. (see para 8).

30. According to a report rendered by the British Consul at St. Pierre on 27 Sep some 85 percent of the population of the islands were pro-British, of whom 65 percent were supporters of General de Gaulle and eagerly awaiting word from him. The 15 percent Vichy and anti-British element was found among the business and official class. It was his firm opinion that "the policy of the Administrator of Saint Pierre Miquelon [sic] and of several of his Members of Council of Administration, is to maintain the 'status quo', at all costs, and endeavour to secure indirect economic advantages from adjoining British Countries without departing from his allegiance to Vichy, this in opposition with the above-mentioned majority of the inhabitants of the islands" (33).

31. On 31 Oct the Cabinet War Committee in Ottawa discussed the possible implications arising from Marshal Pétain's radio broadcast publicising his recent meeting with Hitler and acceptance of the principle of sincere collaboration with the so-called New Order in Europe. The Committee agreed, however, that any action against St. Pierre and Miquelon — in the event of overt French hostility — should be undertaken only after consultation and, if possible, agreement with the United States. On the following day (1 Nov) Mr Christie had an exploratory discussion with Mr Welles of this hypothetical question. Mr Welles' comments on the several points raised were reported as follows:

In principle, he recognized Canada's special concern regarding these islands and also that it would be desirable to arrive at a joint policy between Canada and the United States. He also thought that the suggestion as to utilizing the Joint Defence Board at some stage in the proceedings might turn out to be an excellent one. As regards the question of associating Newfoundland directly or formally with any action that might be taken, Mr. Welles felt that this would be undesirable in view of Newfoundland's virtual status as a Crown Colony. As regards the economic position in St. Pierre and Miquelon, Mr. Welles recognized there would have to be discussions in certain contingencies and saw no difficulties. He seemed disinclined to make any comment upon the question of the present Administrator of the islands or of the Chief Justice as a possible alternative, nor upon the question of possible relations with the de Gaulle movement, and I did not think it well to press him at this stage.

Mr Welles suggested only one consideration from the point of view of the United States Government. He said that he ought to point out that the other American countries would have some concern about what might be done regarding St. Pierre and Miquelon and that the United States Government would accordingly have to inform them of whatever action the United States and Canada might contemplate.

In conclusion, Mr. Welles indicated that he did not expect any new developments to arise immediately, but that he would be glad to keep in touch with me as regards developments that might affect the position of these islands<sup>(34)</sup>.

It might conveniently be noted here that the U.S. Consulate at St. Pierre had recently been re-opened, with Mr Maurice Pasquet as incumbent.

32. Although the Canadian Government had been advised early in September that Ville d'Ys would be ordered to Martinique "as a matter of courtesy", its departure from St. Pierre was long delayed, to the annoyance of the de Gaulle supporters there. Only on 11 Nov did it actually reach Martinique. The last four French trawlers (except for one that had run aground) left St. Pierre on 15 and 16 Dec, laden with fish for a reported destination of Casablanca, and all fishermen from France were subsequently reported to have been repatriated before the end of the year<sup>(35)</sup>.

33. On 14 Jan 41 the Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command signalled Air Force Headquarters at Ottawa to ascertain whether the harbour of St. Pierre "could be used as an emergency anchorage for RCAF rescue vessels in the event of vessel becoming iced up during winter gales when on patrol in that area"<sup>(36)</sup>. Dr Skelton assumed that the "ordinary rules of International Law would and should apply" but wrote to advise the Administrator of St. Pierre and Miquelon that such an emergency might occur<sup>(37)</sup>. On 19 Feb the Administrator replied\* that this already had happened:

...on January 24th, 1941 the motorboat "O.K. Service V" of the Royal Canadian Air Force commanded by Captain John Howell took shelter in Saint Pierre's harbour as a result of bad weather conditions.

I am pleased to inform you that a warm reception and all the necessary facilities have been extended to the crew and that the usual navigation duties plus similar charges that are ordinarily levied on foreign vessels entering the harbour at St. Pierre have been omitted.

Prior to his departure on the 25th, I met Captain Howell. I can assure you that, should the occasion arise, this treatment would be given to all vessels referred to in your... letter<sup>(38)</sup>.

34. When a new Canadian Minister to the United States, Hon. Leighton McCarthy, presented his credentials on 12 Mar 41, President Roosevelt asked whether the Canadian Government had given any thought to the future of St. Pierre and Miquelon after the war. He said that the United States had no desire to take over the islands and wondered whether the United Kingdom or Canada had considered the possibility

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\*Translation which appears on file.

of their acquisition. Mr McCarthy reported that the President's remarks seemed to be based on the assumption that the colony would not remain under French sovereignty (39).

(iv) A More Positive Approach

35. Although the problem posed by St. Pierre and Miquelon had been kept hidden from the Canadian public during 1940, such a situation was too good to last. Hon. R.B. Hanson, Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, had written to the Prime Minister on 5 Dec 40 to obtain assurance that measures would be taken to prevent a French fishing fleet returning to the Grand Banks in 1941 and obtaining a valuable catch which might find its way to Germany (40). Mr King assured him, in his reply of 13 Dec, that the Canadian Government had been "keeping in very close touch with the situation" on St. Pierre and Miquelon and had discussed various phases of the problem with the governments of Newfoundland, the United Kingdom and the United States (41). Even the publication by Maclean's Magazine, in its issue of 1 Jan 41, of an article entitled "Dilemma on St. Pierre" seems to have aroused little interest. On 1 May 41 Mr Hanson again wrote the Prime Minister, but seems to have been reassured that the Royal Navy was fully alive to the necessity of preventing food from reaching Germany (42).

36. During question time in the House of Commons on 16 May, however, the Leader of the C.C.F. Party, Mr M.J. Coldwell, expressed the hope that the Prime Minister would inform the House about the position of St. Pierre and Miquelon during the course of his forthcoming statement on the war situation. Such action seemed desirable in view of Marshal Petain's broadcast of the day before, agreeing to Franco-German collaboration in Africa and President Roosevelt's consequent warning to the French people to do no such thing. There was also the point that unfavourable comments on the pro-Vichy Administration of St. Pierre and Miquelon were now beginning to appear in the press (43). After dealing with a question concerning Canada's relationship to Vichy and the Free French Movement, during the afternoon session of Monday, 19 May, Mr King did make a statement about St. Pierre and Miquelon:

...all islands in the northern half of the western hemisphere have been the subject of careful consideration by the permanent joint board of defence, in relation to both military and naval security; and the government of Canada has been watching the situation closely with respect to such islands as are off our coasts. I can assure the house that we have every reason to feel that there is no occasion for concern on the part of the people of Canada in reference to either St. Pierre or Miquelon. I would add that the government is being kept informed of conditions in these islands, also that the government is in constant touch with the government of the United Kingdom in respect to the larger question of the relations between the Vichy government and Germany (44).

37. Newspaper reports of Mr King's statement did, however, upset the Governor of Newfoundland, who already was perturbed by rapidly deteriorating Anglo-French relations over Syria, and cause him to wire Ottawa as follows:

We recognize that the military situation is of immediate and overriding importance, but we hope that we shall in accordance with undertaking of Permanent Joint Defence Board be consulted before decisions are taken.

In the meantime, the question of control of the islands (apart from matter of defence) is one in which Canada and Newfoundland have a common interest, which is of the gravest importance to both, and of vital importance to Newfoundland. It would, we suggest, be unwise to overlook the possibility of control of United States over the islands becoming permanent if they assume it now for the duration of the war. We assume that the Canadian Government would view such an eventuality with the greatest concern. So far as Newfoundland is concerned, such a result would be truly disastrous. In the past, French control of the islands within 10 miles of our coasts has necessitated heavy expenditure in customs protective service and substantial loss of revenue in spite of all our efforts. The competition in salt cod fish industry, which has been heavily subsidized for many years, has caused us incalculable loss.

The establishment of the United States in Saint Pierre and Miquelon would make it possible for them to dominate Newfoundland politically, and if they so decided, to threaten the independence of our fisheries e.g. by establishing a fresh cod industry at St. Pierre. The assumption of civil control by the United States would raise a storm of protest of the strongest kind from our people. In view of relations between Canada and the United States there would arise in their minds a sense of betrayal by Canada of a British interest which at this particular time might have serious repercussions.

If control of the islands is to pass out of Vichy's hands we presume that we have a common desire that they become British, that is, either Newfoundland or Canada. Geographically they are as much a part of this country as any other islands that surround our coast, and in this respect bear the same relation to Newfoundland as Magdalen Islands and Anticosti do to Canada. There is easy and frequent intercourse between the two peoples. They can be administered most easily by our Government. In fact there is so little to justify control passing from Vichy to any Government but that of Newfoundland that feeling our people would be almost as great (although for different reasons) to our losing control to Canada as it would be if we lost it to the United States.

Under these circumstance we urge:-

(1) That before matter of defence of St. Pierre and Miquelon are settled, this Government be consulted;

(2) That the Canadian Government use its best endeavours to ensure that if civil control of the islands is to pass from Vichy hands, that it be entrusted to the Newfoundland Government (45).

38. The answer despatched by the Canadian Prime Minister on 25 May assured the Governor that no recommendation would be made by the Permanent Joint Board on Defence and no decision would be taken by the Canadian Government without prior reference to Newfoundland. Furthermore:

We are keeping closely informed with regard to conditions in the Islands and our present policy, with which you are acquainted, has been discussed with the United States Government who have been most cooperative. In our opinion there is not the least likelihood of the United States taking control of the Islands and while rapidly changing conditions abroad may necessitate a modification in our policy we do not believe that any such change is necessary at present.

While we hope that it may not be necessary to interfere with the political status of the Islands we recognize that some action of this kind may, under certain circumstances, become inevitable. In such circumstances the whole position will have to be reviewed and consideration given to all pertinent factors including, of course, the views and desires of the residents of the Islands.

If and when political, economic, defence or other requirements make intervention necessary we shall discuss the situation with you and with Washington. In the meantime we are confident that your apprehension that the United States may seize control is groundless (46).

39. Prime Minister King had been as good as his protestations. On the same day (16 May) that Mr Coldwell had asked his question in the House of Commons, Mr King had requested the French Minister in Ottawa to arrange that Inspector Oscar LaRivière, R.C.M.P. might visit St. Pierre and Miquelon to observe conditions at first hand, ostensibly those relating to the Canadian Customs and Preventive Service (47). Permission having been granted by the Administrator, Inspector LaRivière left Montreal on 21 May and reached St. Pierre, via Halifax, on 26 May. The American Minister in Ottawa was advised of what had transpired and was assured that no thought was being given to positive action without prior consultation with the United States (48).

40. Meanwhile the Joint Planning Committee in Ottawa had been instructed to study the possibility of a Canadian occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Its

memorandum, dated 22 May, seems to have been based on rather sketchy information, however, the members hoping that Inspector LaRivière would be able to fill in the details on his return. Even the professed object of the occupation sounds rather vague: "to prevent the use of these islands by the enemy as a refuelling base for submarines, as a refuelling base for aircraft, or as a centre for the collection and transmission of enemy intelligence" (49). It was recommended that the available information should be turned over to the Joint Service Committee of Atlantic Command, which should be ordered to prepare "definite and detailed operational orders" for the occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon, "for execution if and when the Canadian Government decides such action is necessary".

41. By coincidence, a letter from the President of the Free French Movement in Manitoba, suggesting that a small party of Free French residents of Canada might be landed, "by parachute or any other suitable means" to take over St. Pierre and Miquelon, had been minuted to the Chief of the General Staff on 23 May (50). General Crerar considered it advisable to ask the Minister of National Defence whether he would like to take up the matter at the next meeting of the Cabinet War Committee (51). Mr Ralston replied in the affirmative and requested him to set forth his views on the subject (52). These were submitted in a memorandum dated 24 May and read as follows:

- (a) The imminence of a move to take over the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon depends entirely upon the development of the situation as between London and Vichy. This is not promising and in view of the seizure of a French tanker in the Atlantic a day or two ago and with the situation as it is in Syria, a complete break between the two countries may not be far away. In such circumstances it would appear expedient for us temporarily to take over these islands so as to ensure that they could not be used in any way inimical to the defence of Canada. While this would be carried out by military forces, it should not be looked at as a capture of these islands but rather their temporary occupation for the duration of the war.
- (b) So far as I can judge, the U.S. reaction would be favourable to our doing so, and, so far as I can judge, they would not be desirous of participating. They would probably want to take similar action in respect of French colonial possessions in the Caribbean. One point, however, is, I think, clear: that if we do not act, they will, and I am sure it would be preferable for us to do so.

(c) As the operation contemplated is not a capture or annexation, at least I presume it is not, the utilization of Free French would seem to have a good deal to commend it. It would be an outlet for the enthusiasm of such Free Frenchmen as we have in Canada. It would contribute in a measure to Free French cause throughout the world. It would save "Free Canadians" for theatres where their services are more urgently needed (53).

A copy of General Crerar's memorandum was enclosed with the letter which Mr Ralston sent to the Prime Minister on 26 May. "You will see," Mr Ralston wrote, "that the Chief of the General Staff says he thinks that if we do not act, the United States will and that it will be, in his opinion, practicable for us to do so. He thinks the utilization of Free French might have a good deal to commend it" (54).

42. After the above proposal had been rejected as impracticable by the Cabinet War Committee, meeting on 27 May, discussion turned to the true functions of the Government's service advisers and Mr King stressed the importance of ensuring that the Committee's decisions were strictly carried out. The recent appearance of the German battleship Bismarck in North American waters bore out his consistent contention that hemispheric defence was a primary responsibility, despite the continued efforts of the Chiefs of Staff to concentrate attention on the overseas war effort. Shortly thereafter, and in consequence of an Admiralty decision that there must be "end to end" escort of convoys throughout the North Atlantic, since the U-boats were moving their activities ever westward to avoid British anti-submarine operations, the Royal Canadian Navy agreed to base its available destroyers and corvettes at St. John's. Commodore L.W. Murray, R.C.N. was placed in command of this Anglo-Canadian Newfoundland Force, which came to handle all convoy work in the area off Newfoundland (55).

43. On 28 May the Chiefs of Staff Committee approved the Report by the Joint Planning Committee and instructed its Secretary to have the Joint Service Committee in Halifax act upon the following suggestions:

- (a) The Force to be transported in two corvettes from Sydney (or if desired, in one destroyer).
- (b) The Force to consist of one company of infantry. (This Company to be furnished by the Sherbrooke Fusiliers.)
- (c) The desirability of air reconnaissance before and, if necessary, during the landing be emphasized.
- (d) The desirability of including the area of the Islands in naval and air reconnaissance plans in the event of occupation (56).

44. No one, however, could be expected to be familiar with all the ramifications inherent in the Act and Convention of Habana. Indeed, the Department of External Affairs was not certain how the United States would regard, and whether it would support, any positive action by Canada which was an "American Nation". Although the United States claimed that its recent agreement to assist Greenland in its own defence was "consistent with the obligations of the United States under the Act of Habana", Mr Hull's Note of 7 Apr 41 had neither "set up a regime of provisional administration" nor, in the words of that Act, placed the matter before the "emergency committee" composed of one representative of each of the American republics (57). Moreover, Mr Hull had not yet answered a letter written by Senator James Mead of New York on 21 May, suggesting that the United States Government should negotiate with Vichy for the establishment of defence bases in the French islands of the Antilles, St. Pierre and Miquelon and on the territory of French Guiana (58). Mr Hull was not interested in General de Gaulle's message of 26 May offering to collaborate with the American Republics in establishing over French colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere a "provisional regime which, while preserving French sovereignty over them, would protect them from German aggression" (59), but he took some pains with the reply finally despatched to Senator Mead on 2 Jun; a reply that this member of the Isolationist Bloc in Congress then made public. After assuring Senator Mead that the State Department was watching the situation closely, and outlining the background of existing American policy, Mr Hull's letter concluded:

Should evidence develop so that further action by this government in the interests of national defense be required, you may be assured that any action contemplated will accord with the agreement reached with the other American republics at the Havana conference (60).

45. As soon as this information reached Ottawa a study was undertaken by the Department of External Affairs and Mr Norman A. Robertson, its acting Under Secretary of State, requested comments from the Minister of National Defence for Naval Services (61). On 28 Jun the Hon. Angus L. Macdonald replied that the three Armed Services were working out detailed operational plans for a possible occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon (see paras 54-56):

The principal dangers that can be foreseen, and which the object of our occupation would be to prevent, are the use of these Islands by the enemy as a refuelling, victualling and rest base for submarines or aircraft, and as a centre for the collection and transmission of enemy intelligence....

Recent reports of enemy submarines in the Atlantic clearly indicate a steady extension of this type of warfare to the westward. The possibility of German ocean-going submarines using these Islands,

not necessarily for refuelling, but merely for the opportunity of rest, recreation and carrying out running repairs, cannot be eliminated. The Islands flank very closely the vitally important routes into and out of the Gulf and River St. Lawrence, and are distant from Halifax 360'; from St. John's, 240'; from Sydney, 180'; and from the U.S. Base at Argentia only 115'.

I consider that in the event of open hostilities between the British Government and the Vichy Government, immediate and determined action by Canada will be of vital importance. There are two principal reasons underlying this statement; the actual threat of enemy use of the Islands; and the clear indication that if the Canadian Government fails to act quickly and vigorously, the United States Government is almost certain to do so. Any such action on the part of the United States would inevitably prove most embarrassing, and the situation would be further complicated by the position in regard to St. Pierre and Miquelon taken up by the Newfoundland Government [see para 37]... (62).

46. Although Inspector LaRivière had arrived back at Halifax on 13 Jun and made a lengthy report to Commissioner S.T. Wood of the R.C.M.P., its contents had not yet been communicated to all the interested parties. Inspector LaRivière considered that there had been little change in the situation on the Islands since the summer of 1940. The Administrator and the small pro-Vichy element had done their best to discourage the Free French Movement: reprisals had been threatened against its supporters and, since most of the population were either on relief or dependent on the Administration for their normal means of livelihood, this had had a sobering effect on the hotheads; furthermore, the belief had been encouraged that by joining de Gaulle the colony would lose its monthly subsidy from Vichy (actually obtained through the Canadian and American Governments from frozen French funds). Contrary to earlier reports, the clergy were pro-Vichy. All mail, telegrams and radiograms were strictly censored. This had applied even to the correspondence of the former British Consul, Mr Archibald Bartlett, who had resigned his post early in 1941 and not been replaced. The American Consul, Mr Maurice Pasquet, was now the only representative of a foreign government. Mr Bartlett had continued as superintendent of the Anglo-American Telegraph Company office (i.e. Western Union), however, and had told Inspector LaRivière that he would get out a message to the Canadian and Newfoundland authorities should the enemy appear -- by fishing vessel should the cable be cut. With respect to the government controlled wireless station at St. Pierre (with a sub-station on Miquelon), however, Inspector LaRivière's information differed greatly from the earlier appreciations:

The main station is capable of and is keeping constantly in touch with Bordeaux, France. It is also in communication with Fort de France on the Island of Martinique for Governmental communications, and insofar as the public is concerned, they may send radiograms through this station to Canada and the United States (63).

47. In conversation with Inspector LaRivièr, the Administrator had done his best to minimize the existence of discontent among the population. According to the former's Report:

...he [de Bournat] said the majority of the population was satisfied with the present condition, adding that he would not permit the occupation of the Islands; that they would be defended to the limit, and that the authorities concerned (apparently meaning the Vichy Government) would be advised immediately. However, he said that if the Canadian Government desired to keep posted as to the existing conditions at St. Pierre, he would welcome the appointment of a Canadian Consul. (The impression I gained from his remarks was that he would prefer a Canadian Consul at St. Pierre to Canadian or other allied Military forces; and that he was definitely opposed to the occupation of the Islands by the Axis Powers.) He also informed me that a number of Italian fishermen endeavoured to come to St. Pierre last year, but he emphatically refused to allow them entry and would not, under any consideration, allow any German or Italian to enter the Island for any purpose whatever, of that we might rest assured.

Inspector LaRivièr believed that the vast majority of the inhabitants would welcome the arrival of Free French forces; they would have no objection to Canada or the United States taking over the islands for the duration of the war, "preferably the latter, for financial reasons". He had gained the impression, however, that "occupation by Newfoundland troops would not be so favorably received".

48. Shortly thereafter, the British Government entered the picture more directly. In consequence of a decision that Free French Naval sloops would shortly be detailed for convoy duty in the Western Atlantic and based on Newfoundland, Admiral Muselier suggested that one of them should put into St. Pierre and rally the islands. Before giving him an answer the British Government sought the views of the Canadian and United States Governments. The letter despatched to Mr Norman Robertson on 9 Jul 41 noted:

...that one objection to the proposed operation is that any attack on Vichy territory exposed the Vichy Government to fresh demands by the Germans, through which our interests might suffer, and