

Wilfrid Laurier University

Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

---

1984

## James Layton Ralston and manpower for the Canadian army

John Robinson Campbell  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Campbell, John Robinson, "James Layton Ralston and manpower for the Canadian army" (1984). *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 12.

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/12>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

## CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE

## THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE



National Library of Canada  
Collections-Development Branch

Canadian Theses on  
Microfiche Service

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada  
Direction du développement des collections

Service des thèses canadiennes  
sur microfiche

### NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

**THIS DISSERTATION  
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED  
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED**

### AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE  
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE**

**Canada**

JAMES LAYTON RALSTON  
AND MANPOWER FOR  
THE CANADIAN ARMY

by

JOHN ROBINSON CAMPBELL  
B.A. Wilfrid Laurier University 1980

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University 1984

© John Robinson Campbell

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is tremendously indebted to a number of people for their assistance in the production of this thesis. Terry Copp, who acted as my thesis supervisor, provided extremely perceptive advice and insightful guidance. Terry, although very busy with more important matters, was consistently unselfish, both in the time that he devoted to the direction of the thesis, and in the manner in which he provided the 'wishy-washy' author with much needed moral support. For Terry's friendly counsel - in the past, in the present, and hopefully in the future - I am forever grateful.

Jean Gourlay's self-sacrifice in typing and editing the thesis surpassed my most optimistic expectations. During my five years at Wilfrid Laurier, Jean cheerfully acceded to my many unreasonable requests without voicing a single complaint. Only a true friend could give so much while asking for so little in return.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the entire History Department at Wilfrid Laurier. The many years of instruction and fellowship which I enjoyed here will always be warmly remembered.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Enza, whose patience and understanding has allowed me to continue my education.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of one aspect of the public career of James Layton Ralston (1881-1948). soldier, lawyer, politician and Minister of National Defence 1940-1944. Ralston was a man known to all Canadians during the Second World War, but after his forced resignation from the Cabinet in the fall of 1944 he ceased to play a prominent public role and was largely forgotten. Historians, working within the traditional framework of Liberal-national unity historiography, have been content to stereotype Ralston as an Empire-minded conscriptionist whose policies threatened national unity. No biography of this major Canadian politician has been written and no scholarly article seriously examining Ralston's policies has appeared.

Although this thesis was originally intended to examine Ralston's full term as Minister of National Defence, the complexity of the issues involved and the comprehensive nature of the primary source material necessitated a reduction in the scope of the paper. It was therefore decided that this study of Ralston would be confined to a detailed examination of the period from Ralston's appointment to the Cabinet to the conscription crisis of 1942 which led to Ralston's letter of resignation from the Cabinet. In addition, it was decided to retain a biographical chapter on Ralston's formative years including material on his experiences in the First World War which are of vital importance in understanding his basic values. Ralston's letter of resignation, not to be accepted by the Prime Minister until the second conscription crisis of 1944, serves as an event which allows the author to reach some interim conclusions about Ralston's role in the wartime administration of Canada.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
I. The Reluctant Politician .....	6
II. Limited Liability .....	36
III. The 1941 Army Programme .....	59
IV. The Politics of Principle .....	78
Conclusion .....	122

---

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most persistent features of Canadian historiography has been the tendency to explain past events as being an expression of Canada's elusive national character. Unfortunately, one's perception of the composition of the Canadian entity often obscures the context in which a particular incident takes place. While it would be dangerous to dismiss the importance of the linguistic and cultural duality which has existed, and continues to exist, between French and English Canadians, it would be equally undesirable to place an undue emphasis upon this dichotomy in interpreting Canada's past. The 'two nations' approach involves making broad generalizations about Quebec and the rest of the country, and ignores regional differences within English Canada. The attempt to maintain national unity acquires a disproportionately prominent role in the process, while any events which threaten the delicate balance of Confederation are viewed with disdain and suspicion.

The extent of Canadian participation in World War II has generally been historically perceived within the 'two nations' framework. For French Canadian nationalists, involvement in the war was indicative of the subordinate role of Quebec in the federal structure as well as English Canada's continued allegiance to Britain. Extreme imperialist English Canadian opinion believed that the war effort was being grossly restricted by an effort to appease Quebec. The role of the federal government was to conciliate these diametrically opposed interests and to avoid any threat to national unity. Such an equation, although valid in many respects, inevitably encourages the proliferation of vague generalizations.

The perception of James Layton Ralston's involvement in the Mackenzie King wartime government has been somewhat distorted because of the emotional impact of the conscription issue. Ralston's advocacy of the policy of compelling 15,000 men to be sent overseas as infantry reinforcements during October 1944 has received far more attention than have some of his more important contributions to the national war effort. From the moment that he entered the Cabinet in September of 1939, Ralston played a pivotal role in determining the composition of Canada's participation in World War II. In focussing upon Ralston's behaviour in the Cabinet prior to his first major conflict with King, it will be possible to place Ralston's subsequent actions in a clearer context.

One danger when dealing with Ralston is the temptation to dismiss him as a typical conscription-favouring imperialist.<sup>1</sup> Ralston was much more complex than such a description would suggest. For example, Ralston was opposed to the subordination of Canadian interests to those of the British Empire. His sentiments concerning Canada's position vis-a-vis that of Great Britain were best expressed in a 1944 letter to his son, Stuart:

[A minister] prayed this morning for Mr. Churchill and his colleagues of the United Kingdom, for the Dominions and for President Roosevelt. The rest of us are either past praying for or are not worth it. How long, O Lord, how long before some Englishman will understand the implications of the Statute of Westminster....In the words of Old Man River "Ah gets weary and sick o'tryin'" to help demonstrate that colonial status is as outworn as diapers for a full-grown man. I'm going to start a school for backward Britain's pretty soon.<sup>2</sup>

It would appear that Ralston was more than a little sensitive about the subject.



If Ralston did not conform to the traditional beliefs of an imperialist, he was also irrefutably not a 'knee-jerk' conscriptionist. He was prepared to resort to compulsion for overseas service only if it became otherwise impossible to recruit the necessary manpower. The experience that Ralston had as a frontline soldier in World War I, rather than making him more favourably disposed towards conscription, caused Ralston to value the advantages of commanding volunteers as opposed to conscripts. Once again, it is in a 1944 letter to his son Stuart that Ralston revealed his opinion on the subject:

As I told the House the other day, some people are not concerned with getting the men, all they are concerned with is getting the men by conscription. In other words, it's the means, not the end, which seems to count with them. They won't be satisfied no matter how many volunteers we get; that doesn't raise the devil sufficiently to suit them... My job is to maintain our Army overseas. I think it is a better army if it is a volunteer army like Australia and South Africa. If the volunteer system works, and I am going to keep trying to make it work, then my job is done. If it doesn't work, then I have no alternative but to recommend the other system, although I have had my own experience in the last war of inspecting conscripts beside volunteers.

Expressed in this manner, it would be difficult to argue that Ralston's position on conscription was based solely upon emotion.

While Ralston did not possess the characteristics usually associated with a conscriptionist or an imperialist, he did suffer from a highly refined sense of duty and a profound commitment to the Canadian volunteer army. Throughout their relationship, Mackenzie King would attempt to manipulate Ralston by appealing to the latter's perception of responsibility. Ironically, it was Ralston's feeling of moral obligation which was ultimately responsible for the widening schism that developed between the two men. As Minister of National Defence, Ralston was the spokesman for the Canadian Army in the King Cabinet. In this capacity he sought to mobilize an army that was as large as

manpower resources would permit. As the army expanded, Ralston believed that the government and the people of Canada were bound upon principle to support and maintain every volunteer unit which had been authorized. Because King did not share this conviction, the two men found themselves increasingly at odds as the pressure of the war intensified.

The following pages are devoted to a study of Ralston's participation in the War Cabinet up to, and including, his threatened resignation in July 1942. The first chapter deals with Ralston's experiences prior to entering the Cabinet in September 1939. In the second chapter, Ralston's tenure as Minister of Finance is chronicled, with an emphasis upon Ralston's conservative approach to financial commitments in the early stages of the war. Chapter three involves Ralston's first months as Minister of National Defence, and his efforts to obtain approval for the 1941-42 Army Programme. The final chapter examines the many difficulties which Ralston had in administering the Army Programme, ultimately climaxing in a major confrontation with King. By the conclusion of chapter four, the army has reached its maximum state of expansion and the parameters for all future disputes between King and Ralston have been established.

## NOTES

1. One prominent Canadian historian to yield to this temptation was Jack Granatstein, who observed that: "Emotionally, Ralston was a conscriptionist. A front line soldier in the Great War, a supporter of the Union Government of 1917, a convinced believer in the virtues of Empire, he could be nothing else." See: Jack L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.202.

2. Letter, J. L. Ralston to Stuart Ralston, July 2, 1944, James L. Ralston Papers, MG 27 III B 11, Vol. 4, Public Archives of Canada [PAC].

3. Letter, J.L.Ralston to Stuart Ralston, June 15, 1944, Ralston Papers, vol. 4, [PAC].

Chapter I.  
The Reluctant Politician

It would be an impossible task to analyze the performance of Colonel James Layton Ralston in the Mackenzie King War Cabinet without understanding Ralston's situation prior to rejoining the government in 1939. The manner in which Ralston conducted himself as a senior Cabinet Minister was inexorably connected to his previous experiences in politics, the military and private life. As a front-line battalion commander in World War I, Ralston witnessed the horrors of armed conflict and developed a profound empathy for the common soldier. In his tenure as a politician, Ralston refined his administrative skills, but demonstrated that he had little patience for the mundane necessity of getting elected. Most significantly Ralston's self-made legal career allowed him the independence to view politics as a hobby. During the 1930's, Ralston made a final decision to totally abandon politics in order to devote all of his attention to an extremely lucrative law practice. Although King persuaded him that it was his patriotic duty to become a member of the War Cabinet in 1939, Ralston's consent was given with the understanding that he would return to private life when hostilities terminated. With no ambition to enhance his political status, Ralston could not be tempted to subordinate principle to career advancement. Consequently, for the duration of the war, Ralston was responsible primarily to his own conscience.

There was little indication in Ralston's early life that he would possess the opportunity to become a figure of national prominence. On

September 27, 1881, he was born in the quiet town of Amherst, Nova Scotia, the son of Burnett William and Bessie Chipman Ralston. Both of Ralston's parents were descendants of United Empire Loyalists who had left New England following the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Ralston was named after his maternal grandfather, James M. Layton, who was well known in Amherst for his involvement with the First Baptist Church. Ralston shared his namesake's dedication to Christianity and the Baptist church, remaining a lifelong church goer and teetotaler.<sup>2</sup> Although difficult to quantify, Ralston's faith was so intense that it must have influenced his conduct in public affairs.

The Ralston family's involvement in politics was extensive, but it was limited to local matters. Burnett Ralston was a member of the initial Amherst Town Council in 1889, eventually served as mayor for one term, and was the local postmaster for about 20 years. Described by the Amherst News and Sentinel as "a man of strong convictions and of courage to express them", the elder Ralston must have been responsible for instilling his son with these qualities.<sup>3</sup> It was his father's desire that Layton should remain in Amherst and aid in the operation of the family grocery store.<sup>4</sup> Young Ralston, however, was too ambitious to be content with such a comparatively sedate vocation, and sought a more challenging future.

Ralston was supported in his aspiration for a professional career by his mother and her cousin, Hance J. Logan. A member of the federal House of Commons for Cumberland, Logan was also a successful lawyer, having offices in Amherst and Parrsboro. Eventually Bessie Ralston and Logan were able to persuade Ralston's father that Layton should be permitted to study law with Logan's firm.<sup>5</sup> Ralston's legal preparations were successfully completed when, after having read law with Logan and Jenks from 1898 to 1903, he graduated from Dalhousie Law School and was called to the Nova Scotia Bar on March 10, 1903.<sup>6</sup> During his apprenticeship Ralston was described as 'a whale for work',

when he studied constantly and even assumed the janitorial duties of the office.<sup>7</sup> Ralston's capacity for hard work, characterized by a meticulous attention to detail and a tendency to work long hours, became the trait for which he was best known later in life.

Following his admission to the Bar in 1903, Ralston practiced law in Amherst until 1913. He became a partner in his uncle's firm in 1903, and the partnership remained Logan, Jenks and Ralston until 1909 when it became simply Logan and Ralston. Politics and the legal profession are very closely related in Nova Scotia, and with his uncle's influence and persuasion, it was not surprising that the young lawyer would eventually become involved in seeking elected office.<sup>8</sup> Ralston received his first experience of political action in the federal election of 1908, when he ran as a Liberal candidate in his home riding of Cumberland. Although his uncle Hance had been victorious for the Liberals in the same riding in the three previous elections, Ralston lost the contest by approximately 5% of the popular vote.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the lengthy term of electoral office that Ralston would compile, his defeat in 1908 was by no means an aberration. Of the eight federal or provincial elections in which he would run that were contested, he would lose a total of four times.

The preference which Ralston had for his legal career over his political activities became apparent in 1911. In June, Ralston had had his first success at the polls when he won a seat in the Nova Scotia legislature, representing Cumberland.<sup>10</sup> Despite this victory, Ralston was becoming dissatisfied with his legal practice in Amherst following his uncle's departure from the firm. Consequently, he began to look elsewhere for an opportunity to increase his business. The rapidly expanding city of Winnipeg provided a natural attraction to a young lawyer in Ralston's position and he seriously contemplated abandoning his Maritime roots and moving to the 'Gateway to the West'. Charlie Burchell, a fellow lawyer and a close personal friend heard of Ralston's in-

tention to move west, and, in a letter dated November 10, 1911, attempted to persuade his colleague to remain at home:

If there was any certainty as to the amount of work we would get in Halifax, I do not think you would have any hesitation in deciding where you would prefer to live. The trouble is that you would probably be offered a certainty in Winnipeg and will only have more or less of an uncertainty in Halifax. However, I have very little doubt that we can get all the work we want in a very few months, and in the meantime, there would be enough in the business we now have in Halifax and Sydney to keep us going.

Not only did Burchell succeed in dissuading Ralston from leaving Nova Scotia, but the two friends formed a partnership in Halifax in 1912 that would last until 1926.

Ralston's move to Halifax in 1912 should have coincided with a period of stability in his professional and family life. Now thirty-one years of age, Ralston had been married for five years to Nettie Winnifred McLeod. The marriage was to prove to be a solid one, surviving Ralston's tumultuous career and long working hours. The couple was rewarded with one son, Stuart, who remained in close contact with his parents throughout their lives, including during his service overseas in World War II. Ralston's new law firm, in addition to allowing him to work with Burchell, provided a valuable connection to the upper echelons of the Liberal party through the firm's senior partner, A.K. Maclean. When it is considered that Ralston also possessed a seat in the provincial legislature, it would appear that the grocer's son from Amherst had attained a position of prominence and security. Unfortunately, it was the wrong decade in the world's history for a young man to avoid being exposed to some of the most unsettling experiences imaginable.

As the diplomatic situation in Europe deteriorated in 1914, it became evident that war could not be averted. Britain's declaration of war was followed by a similar action on behalf of the Canadian government, with the result that Canadians were requested to serve and sacrifice in a conflict which many individuals believed did not directly affect national interests. Be-

cause of the perceived imperialistic nature of World War I, English-Canadian volunteers for overseas service have been subsequently categorized as militaristic British imperialists. When one refers to Ralston's World War I background, it is such a stereotype that is often implied. Ralston, however, did not share the misconception that Britain would quickly win the war or that one should automatically enlist. Ralston underwent an intense personal struggle when considering whether or not to volunteer.

It is possible to obtain Ralston's feelings about World War I from letters which he wrote to various members of his family. In a letter to his parents in late November, 1914, Ralston demonstrated an uncertainty about whether he and his brother, Ivan, should enlist:

I talked over with Ivan the proposition of enlisting with the Overseas Contingent. He seemed to feel that it was his duty to do it and that he should leave to the Medical Examining Officer the question as to whether he was acceptable physically. As I pointed out to him that was all right provided the Medical Examining Officer knew as much as Ivan did about his condition, but the chances were that he would not. He promised me he would put the matter before the Examiner just as fully as it was possible to do so, in case he did go up for examination. Meantime, I wrote Dr. Gibney as to Ivan's physical fitness and had a letter from his [sic] just this last week in which he practically said that violent exercise would probably light the disease up again and that he did not think he was acceptable or that any Medical Officer would pass him. I sent his letter to Ivan. I feel that he will give up the idea altogether. Meantime, we are drilling here to be ready for anything that comes along. Sometimes I feel that my place is in a more active sphere than this, and if I hadn't a wife and boy, I know that there would be no two opinions in my own mind as to where my duty lay. It is hard for one to be sure of oneself and to be satisfied that one is not simply using one's duties here simply as a shelter or an excuse for not undertaking the more strenuous duty elsewhere. I haven't by any means made up my mind yet. I have talked a little with Nettie, and she naturally feels that the call is not so urgent that I should in a sense abandon my duties here to her and to Stuart yet. She does not put it that way, but I know she feels it. I know she would be willing if she believed it were right for me to do it. So far I can only tell her that if she wants to join



in making a contribution, I would like to be the other half of it. I feel that my business is so different from that of most people. I wouldn't throw anybody out of work by leaving and my family are not quite so dependent on my actual presence here for their comfort as some are; and my going might influence some others at least. On the other hand, my duty may be right here; but it is such a pleasant duty that I almost doubt its genuineness as a legitimate alternative to the other. This is only for you two; quite possibly nothing may come of it. I can say this that so far as my personal inclination and serenity of mind goes, I think I would much prefer the front to staying under the constant doubt as to whether I was restrained by duty or by simple cowardice. This may go to show that the hardest task is not to go; and that therefore that is what I am to do.

I felt the other evening when speaking to Nettie that I was simply giving her something to worry over, and now that I have written this, I am doing the same thing with you - unless you will take it simply as a little introspection out loud on a subject on which I haven't any strong convictions; only a desire to do what is right. Don't worry over it because I assure you any conclusion I come to will be because I think honestly it is right. I have thought enough about it to know and believe that I have no personal fear of going if I should and on the other hand, I am not going to let myself be stampeded into wronging Nettie and Stuart for whose comfort and happiness I am responsible, unless the other duty is in truth the greater one. <sup>12</sup>

In spite of Ralston's interference with regards to his brother's medical condition, Ivan enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force the following June. Ralston wrote to his parents in an effort to lessen their fears about Ivan's safety, and in so doing he offered some philosophical observations about the war:

The outstanding feature of the week past to me, and I suppose to us all, is Ivan's definite move in taking up his work with the C.E.F. We have all I guess half expected it notwithstanding the fact that his physical fitness was in doubt. He is, I believe, following the highest impulses in him and where that is the case, can we do anything but say God bless him and make it just as easy as we can for him. I know he is not doing it for any love of adventure or in disregard of the love he has for us, but he thinks that he has a more compelling call and is entering on its response just as solemnly as a man can. What [sic] we wish is not that he should refuse to do what he believes to be his duty but only that the awful conditions out of which the duty has arisen should end. I am afraid the end

isn't for awhile yet, and that this is a part of our contribution towards the bringing about of that end. What further we may feel we should do is a question which only the future can answer. The comfort to you just be that you have a son who dares to do the thing he believes in and that through him you have given your best. We are thinking big thoughts these days and things of time and space have assumed relatively small propositions [sic] compared with the future of the world and the part we are having and can have in it. The solemn deliberate sacrifices that are being made must bring their just and inevitable result in the re-moulding of human tendencies and desires and the realization that our scale of values has been all wrong. This very year 1915 will, I believe, mark a distinct change in the kind of currency in which the thing worth while will be measured. Mr. Cohoe [an associate of Ralston's] has asked the question more than once whether the people of progress can alter their ideals of what is valuable in life, and I believe the answer is being realized - and you dear people are helping to make that answer emphatic. Let it help you to know that Ivan will bring nothing but honour to you... Don't worry, just believe that everything will be right - nothing matters so much if we do the thing we ought to do. 13

Ralston's decision to enlist was finally confirmed in the following month. His motivation for reaching such a conclusion was complex. At no time in his correspondence with his parents did Ralston explicitly mention a loyalty or duty to the British Empire. While Ralston undeniably felt some attachment to Britain, it would not appear to have seriously influenced his appraisal of the situation. Aware of the sacrifice that it would involve for his family, Ralston's enlistment was based largely upon a perception of his domestic responsibility as a public figure in Nova Scotia. It is obvious that Ralston never suffered from romantic delusions of military adventure. While training to become a Lieutenant in July, 1915, Ralston advised his parents of his resolution to volunteer:

You no doubt ask why I am training. It is simply to be ready. I am expecting that very soon there will be need and opportunity for an example to be set to those who have not yet felt that they should go, and I feel that I could do something to influence recruiting if I can say come with me, instead of go and I'll stay home. I argued it out at length in a former letter but now there seems the additional and the strongest

reason of all, namely the need to do everything possible to see that this Province does its share in recruiting and I am afraid that people are beginning to think that those who are in more or less public positions and who should be preaching by example are content to do their work by precept and like Mark Twain sacrificing his wife's relations, they suggest with much fervour that everybody but themselves should go. I have no definite place as yet. The course will take four weeks more and after that I would like to take a Captaincy so as to be as well-equipped as possible. No doubt the opportunity will come soon enough. Needless to say, the prospect is not pleasing to Nettie altho she is as loyal and brave as a woman could be. She wants me to be very sure of my duty, but after that she makes her contribution if it must be. I think about you dear people and believe me, I count my duty to you as well, but any instincts of duty I have, I got from you, and I don't think you would wish me to be heedless of the call when it comes. Nettie has said that we have been too happy and this is what is coming to blot it all out, but when we think that we might have been sick or physically unfit to do our part, we surely should be thankful that we have sound bodies and are in a position to do something.<sup>14</sup>

It was not until October, 1916, that Ralston's battalion was despatched overseas. By this time Ralston had risen to the rank of Major with the 85th Infantry Battalion, Nova Scotia Highlanders. The battalion experienced its first action in February, 1917, and had little relief until the Armistice was signed. Ralston served continuously with the 85th, participating in some of the most intense engagements which the war produced, including The Somme, Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Passchendaele and Amiens.<sup>15</sup> Ralston quickly acquired a good reputation as a soldier, receiving the Distinguished Service Order in June, 1917, for "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in operations which included the capture of a village."<sup>16</sup> In the battle, Ralston had been ordered off the field after having been wounded, but he returned to the action because the battalion was lacking officers.<sup>17</sup>

In December of 1917, a bitter election was fought in Canada over introducing conscription through the Military Service Act. Ralston's support for Prime Minister Robert Borden's Unionists has often been viewed as an indication that Ralston was truly a conscriptionist at heart. There can be

no doubt that Ralston favoured compulsory service in 1917. During the middle of the election campaign, he sent a telegram to the Halifax Herald which plainly stated that: "I strongly favour the immediate operation of the Military Services Act, and hope Nova Scotia will heavily support candidates pledged to that policy."<sup>18</sup> The Halifax Herald made optimum use of the telegram, introducing it with a substantial headline which read "From the Trenches Major Ralston APPEALS To Nova Scotians At Home." Considering the severe emotional and physical circumstances in which Ralston was placed at the time, it is not surprising that he would support conscription. He later recalled the 85th's state of affairs in December, 1917:

When that telegram was sent, I, as an officer of a battalion, had had the experience of receiving men from dismantled battalions from all over Canada - units which had had to be broken up in order to provide reinforcements to replace casualties. At that time the battle of Passecendaele had just been fought and the Canadian corps had been decimated. The casualties in my own battalion in the two days we were engaged numbered between four and five hundred, of which 138 were killed. <sup>19</sup>

Following the war, Ralston was afforded the opportunity of analyzing conscription in a more detached atmosphere, with the advantage of realizing the nature of the domestic and military liabilities inherent in such a policy.

As the war progressed in 1918, Ralston's military accomplishments increased. In April he was given command of the 85th Battalion, a position which he held until demobilization.<sup>20</sup> In a peculiar arrangement, Ivan was appointed to the 85th as Ralston's second-in-command in June. Consequently, when Ralston was wounded at the battle of Amiens, Ivan had to assume command of the battalion. With his right foot and left leg severely lacerated by a sniper's bullet, Ralston was forced to withdraw to a hospital bed in Rouen for almost a month. On the first day of his confinement Ralston wrote to his parents to inform them of his injury and

of his gratitude that Ivan was in charge of the 85th:

The doctors say that it will take four to six weeks to make me a soldier again - meantime I am wondering how Ivan is getting on. I know he is getting on all right so far as leading the battalion is concerned, but whether he is all right is what I am thinking of. The battalion was to continue the advance the day after I left and I fear that they would meet pretty determined resistance. I am trying to find out if anybody from ours came into this hospital last night, but it is such a big place that it is not at all easy. Like you dear people at home, I am just hoping for the best. Is the greatest comfort in the world to me to have Ivan in command from the point of view of the battalion. He has fitted in as if he had always been there and his experience has been of wonderful value to us. He has done the thinking and the work too while I have let things run on only putting in a word here and there... You are and should be proud of him as a fine soldier and son.

Ralston's reservations about his brother's safety were well-founded. Later in the same day that he had advised his parents that he had been wounded, Ralston learned that Ivan had been killed while leading a frontal attack against a group of machine gunners. Ralston relayed the tragic news to his parents in a powerful and moving letter:

The sun has gone out of life in an instant - since I wrote you this morning I have found that two of our officers Lt. Chipman and Rogers (Arthur) are here - I sent to them for word of the battalion, and the stunning blow comes in the word that Ivan has gone. I have cabled you immediately so that you would have it before that terrible official cable. How my heart aches for you both. This boy was the dearest to me of any man in the world but my father. He was to me the embodiment of manliness and soldierliness. His disappointments in his soldier's life never seemed to dampen his enthusiasm for the course he had taken up. His coming as second in command to me was as I told him a thing which most men would regard as a humiliation but he assured me, and I believe him, that nothing of that sort entered into his mind or heart. He took up the work of the battalion with his whole soul and any success the battalion may have in the present struggle is largely due to his work . . . .

To me the sorrow is too deep for tears. He knew what I thought of him and I don't think any two brothers ever loved each other more. We never had to talk of our feelings

towards each other. We never said goodbye to each other but just went out one or the other as the case might be with a good luck and nothing more. We both knew the possibilities and what they meant to us and we both knew what the other thought about as we parted.

The two months that we have been together have been the happiest for me since I have been with the battalion and how I shall miss him no one knows. The constant seeing of men with whom one has been associated go out of one's life has not dulled the pangs which these partings bring and when the man who is now taken is my brother whom I loved and admired it is hard to find comfort, but the comfort is as I cabled you in the glory of his splendid life and his soldierly and heroic death. We don't think of men dying under these circumstances. They are always alive in the battalion and in the lives of those of us who are left and history in the years to come will give them the place they deserve as emancipators of the world. . . .

I hope father and mother that you too will see a gleam of comfort through this greatest trouble of your lives and I am very very sincere when I say that I believe that after the first shock has spent itself, you will not sorrow because it is just what Ivan wouldn't want. Think of his life and his manliness and his courage and his splendid ability to do the tasks he had to do and believe that these, instead of being wasted have been put to the uses which the Great Father of us all intended and that his work so far as physical activity is done, but the influence and example of his life is endless. I can simply tell you that your sorrow and distress is mine and the pride and honor in his life and work is for all of us. I hope earnestly you may see it as I do and be comforted.

My fondest love to you both and my prayer that your first sadness may be replaced by confidence and hope and belief in the Supreme plan of it all.

Mother, I know Ivan would rather you would not go in mourning for him - he knew you loved him and he would so much rather you would think of him as living in the Truer Sense.

22

All of Ralston's personal military achievements were tarnished by the loss of his brother. The month of Ivan's death coincided with Ralston's being awarded the Bar to the Distinguished Service Order and his promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel.<sup>23</sup> He was also recommended for the Victoria Cross for rescuing a wounded junior officer while under fire at Champoux, but he did

not receive the award because the higher authorities ruled that a commanding officer should not risk his life unnecessarily.<sup>24</sup> It was not until 1924, well after hostilities had ceased, that Ralston was gazetted a full colonel. By the time that Ralston returned to civilian life following demobilization he had been wounded four times, seen his Nova Scotia Highlander Battalion decimated, and lost his brother. While Ralston developed a profound empathy for the plight of the front-line soldier during World War I, he did not nurture a corresponding amenity towards war itself. Gratton O'Leary, a prominent, Conservative-sympathizing, Ottawa columnist, accurately assessed Ralston's contribution in World War I: "he fought with distinction (though not as a militant or patrioteer) in the Great War. 'Ralston of the 85th' meant something in the Canadian Corps."<sup>25</sup>

The political environment which Ralston returned to in Canada in 1919 had undergone a temporary transformation. Prior to being despatched overseas, Ralston had successfully run for re-election to the Nova Scotia legislature in Cumberland in June, 1916.<sup>26</sup> However, the post-war period in most of English-speaking Canada had witnessed the development of an antipathy towards the traditional political parties. Labour unrest and agrarian revolt had combined in an unprecedented manner to defeat the incumbent Conservative government in Ontario in 1919. Similar forces were present in the Nova Scotia election of June, 1920. The Liberals had little difficulty in winning the election, but the farm-labour candidates won 27% of the popular vote. In Cumberland, a three-member riding, Ralston lost his seat to a coalition of farmer and labour candidates.<sup>27</sup> Temporarily removed from elected office, Ralston focussed his attention on practicing law with Charlie Burchell in Halifax.

From the time of his defeat in the provincial election until 1926, Ralston possessed one major distraction from his legal firm. The distraction was in the form of a short, unathletic man of rather singular personal habits. Ralston had first met William Lyon Mackenzie King at the National Liberal Convention in August, 1919.<sup>28</sup> It was at this convention that King was selected party leader, a position that he would hold until 1948. The Liberal party had been severely split over the conscription issue in the 1917 election, with many prominent party members joining the Unionist government of Robert Borden.<sup>29</sup> King, who added a new dimension to the term 'shrewd', was aware of the political advantages to be gained by having a candidate with Ralston's military record.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, King began to attempt to persuade Ralston to enter federal politics, but Ralston continually declined.

The first correspondence that passed between King and Ralston is indicative of the type of relationship which would continue to exist between the two for the remainder of their careers. Ralston wrote to King in an effort to have the Leader of the Opposition express an unequivocal position on the issue of cash bonuses being provided to returned soldiers:

As I suppose you already appreciate, returned soldiers are watching with a very great deal of interest, to see what attitude the Opposition will take respecting the claims which have been put forward by the G.W.V.A. [Great War Veteran's Association] as to assistance to be granted in connection with repatriation and civil re-establishment.

As you remember the [National Liberal] Convention went on record as favoring repatriation by a system of cash bonuses, and with this in view. I feel that the scheme advocated by the G.W.V.A. is entitled to the united support of the Opposition.<sup>31</sup>

King, the master of the process of conciliation, explained to Ralston that the matter was before a parliamentary committee:



Under the circumstances, I am sure you will agree that the attitude of the Opposition toward the Committee's Report will necessarily depend in no inconsiderable measure upon the views and opinions of its members on the Committee. The whole matter is one we are carefully considering at the moment. Your letter, therefore, is most opportune.<sup>32</sup>

Apparently the contrast between Ralston's plain, straightforward approach and King's policy of delay and compromise had early origins.

In preparation for his first national election as party leader, King went on a speaking tour to various parts of the country. Lacking a lieutenant in the Maritimes, King requested that Ralston accompany him to functions in Charlottetown and St. John.<sup>33</sup> Ralston declined the offer, sending a telegram to King stating that "while appreciating sincerely the invitation regret not possible to accept."<sup>34</sup> Ralston's absence from the platform notwithstanding, King's Liberals went on to win the 1921 election, forming a minority government with the support of the Progressive Party.

From earlier correspondence King was aware that Ralston possessed a keen interest in policies related to veterans' affairs. Consequently Prime Minister King appointed Ralston as Chairman of the Royal Commission on Pensions and Re-establishment in 1922.<sup>35</sup> If the position was intended as an inducement to procure Ralston's candidacy for the next election, it was to prove to be unsuccessful. King requested that Ralston run for federal office in a letter dated September 21, 1923:

If your candidature can be secured, I think the moment has come when we might meet the wishes of one of our best friends in the matter of an appointment which he is anxious to have, and at the same time secure your immediate election. If the desire expressed to you is to be realized at an early date - as it is my hope it may -

I think it is all important that you should enter the House of Commons at once and cause your influence to be felt there. <sup>36</sup>

The allusion which King makes to appointing a friend to a particular position is probably a reference to offering a Senate position to a sitting member in a solid Liberal seat, in an effort to provide an opening for Ralston. Despite King's best efforts to arrange a secure nomination for him, Ralston once again declined to run.

The following two years represented a microcosm of Ralston's life. In typical fashion, he lost an election, practiced law and served as an advocate of war veterans' interests. In 1924, Ralston became incensed over the failure of the Civil Service to employ an adequate number of ex-servicemen. Although the Civil Service Act guaranteed a certain percentage of available jobs to veterans, a large number of positions were removed from the jurisdiction of the Act and given to various Departmental officials. Unfortunately, the officials often ignored the preference which was supposed to be extended to ex-servicemen and hired on the basis of patronage. In a letter to King and the Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, Ralston vented his frustration:

It may be argued and with some force that there should be some safety valve whereby a certain limited amount of patronage can be extended, and that the point to be emphasized is that in a great majority of cases the appointment is under the Civil Service Commission, and that in over 75% of these appointments ex-servicemen are given the preference. The difference of 15% in appointments made by Departments, and 75% in appointments made by the Commission, certainly leaves a very generous margin, and as one who has taken as genuine the assurances of the country concerning the consideration given ex-servicemen, I am not at all convinced that this great discrepancy is justified. <sup>37</sup>

Aside from Ralston receiving an appeasing letter from King, it is difficult to know to what extent Ralston's objection was acknowledged.

The fortunes of the Liberal party in Nova Scotia suffered considerably in 1925. The Liberals had formed the government in the province for the forty-three years which preceded the June election.<sup>38</sup> In a dramatic swing, the electorate virtually annihilated the Liberals, returning only three Liberal candidates to the forty-three seat legislature.<sup>39</sup> The Conservatives, who won all but two of the remaining seats, were jubilant and eagerly awaited the upcoming federal election. Ralston was one of the many defeated Liberal standard bearers, having once again failed to obtain one of Cumberland's three seats.<sup>40</sup> After receiving the intelligence that King was contemplating a fall election, Ralston wrote to the Prime Minister in an effort to persuade him to wait until the following year:

As President of our Liberal Association I have talked with a number of prominent friends in Nova Scotia, and those whom I have consulted are a unit in feeling that so far as Nova Scotia is concerned, a Federal Election this fall would be most inadvisable. At the moment our opponents are brimming over with exhilaration and enthusiasm and are straining at the leash to get into a federal fight and repeat the experience of [the provincial election].

My own view is emphatically that if any showing at all is to be made in this province the election should be delayed until next Spring or Summer.<sup>41</sup>

King, not wishing to allow his mandate to reach the constitutional maximum, called an election for October 29.<sup>42</sup>

The results of the federal election were not gratifying for King. The Liberals lost fifteen seats, reducing their representation in the Commons to 101 members, while the Conservatives more than doubled their previous standing, winning in 116 ridings. The Progressives, who declined from 63 to

24 seats, held the balance of power. As Ralston had predicted, Nova Scotia went heavily Conservative electing only three Liberals out of a total of fourteen seats.<sup>43</sup> In the Maritimes as a whole, the Liberals were on the wrong end of a seventeen-seat swing to the Conservatives. The tenuous situation of his party in the Atlantic region, in the wake of the 1925 election, forced Mackenzie King to intensify his efforts to recruit Ralston to federal politics.

The situation which existed in Ottawa was a singular one. King detested the Conservative leader, Arthur Meighen, who had been responsible for the implementation of the Military Services Act in 1917. In an unprecedented move, King decided to meet parliament without resigning as Prime Minister, in spite of the Conservative's superior number of seats. King relied upon the support of the allegedly non-partisan Progressives who quickly abandoned him when there was evidence of a scandal in the Government's Customs Department. Without adequate support in the Commons, King requested that Governor-General Lord Byng grant him a dissolution. In one of the most infamous adjudications by a Governor-General, Byng denied King's appeal and called upon Meighen to form a government. Meighen was faced with many insurmountable logistical problems and quickly lost a vote in the House. Consequently, an election was called for September 14, 1926.

King was determined not to fail in his quest to obtain Ralston as a candidate. As King became more closely acquainted with Ralston, he realized what type of argument would be the most successful in obtaining Ralston's compliance to run.<sup>44</sup> Just as Ralston had served in World War I largely out of a sense of duty to Nova Scotia, King appealed to a similar obligation on behalf of the Colonel to his native province:

I cannot too strongly express the hope that you will consent to become a Liberal candidate in the present Federal election. You know I think how anxious I have

all along been to see you in the Federal Parliament. There is I think a very special call to you at this time to consider the needs of Nova Scotia and I believe your acceptance of the nomination would help the cause, not only in your own province but throughout the Dominion. Again let me urge very strongly that, if at all possible, you comply with the wishes of our Liberal friends of the Province generally.<sup>45</sup>

King's solicitation met with success. From this time on, King would always attempt to obtain Ralston's acquiescence by calling upon his perception of obligation.

One may be inclined to wonder why King was so insistent about procuring the candidacy of an individual with Ralston's proven inability to win elections. Indeed, 1926 was no exception for the already thrice-defeated Colonel. Ralston ran in the two-member riding of Halifax, a constituency in which the lowest Conservative had beaten the top Liberal by almost 8000 votes in 1925. Ralston was able to diminish the wide plurality, however he still lost by approximately 3000 votes.<sup>46</sup> The province of Nova Scotia was apparently unimpressed by Ralston's association with the federal Liberals, returning twelve Conservatives and only two Liberals.<sup>47</sup> Nationally King had made significant gains and, with the support of the Liberal-Progressives, was able to form a majority government.

In spite of Ralston's failure at the polls, King was still determined to have the Colonel come to Ottawa. In drafting his Cabinet, King decided to offer the National Defence portfolio to Ralston. Ralston, the only defeated candidate to be offered a position in the Cabinet, was once again reluctant to accept. Blair Neatby, King's official biographer for the period between 1923 to 1939, contends that King "was wise enough not to talk of honour or prestige. He emphasized the plight of the Liberal party in Nova Scotia, the need to organize the Department of National Defence, and the contribution Ralston could make to the ex-servicemen."<sup>48</sup> Ralston accepted King's offer.

The Prime Minister decided to secure a seat for Ralston by appointing Hatfield, the sitting Liberal member of Shelbourne-Yarmouth, to the Senate. Unfortunately the member was of the opinion that he merited the Cabinet post and was hesitant to give up his seat. The Yarmouth riding association supported their member, with the proceedings attracting some unfavourable publicity. Ralston, who had never anticipated such problems, immediately cabled King that he could no longer accept the portfolio.<sup>49</sup> Ralston explained in a longer letter to King that: "I had decided that the only decent thing for me to do was to make some statement which would remove from the minds of my friends, at least the idea, which even some of them seemed to have gotten pretty strongly, that I was grasping for preferment and willing to see my friends give up their hard-earned laurels for me."<sup>50</sup> King was not inclined to accept the insubordination of Hatfield. After a discussion with King, during which the Prime Minister told Hatfield very bluntly that he lacked the ability to be a Cabinet minister, the Shelbourne-Yarmouth member accepted the Senate position.<sup>51</sup> His only objection now removed, Ralston accepted the portfolio and won the ensuing by-election by acclamation on November 2.<sup>52</sup>

The most significant experience of Ralston's initial tenure as Minister of National Defence was the antagonistic relationship which he developed with Andrew George Latta McNaughton. Ralston appointed Major-General McNaughton as the Chief of the General Staff on January 1, 1929. McNaughton did not enjoy working with Ralston, largely because he was unable to adjust to the Minister's meticulous attention to detail. The long hours which resulted from Ralston's sometimes frustrating failure to allocate trivial tasks intensified McNaughton's animosity.<sup>53</sup> The difficulties between the two men reached a climax over a difference of opinion on a matter of policy. McNaughton believed that the construction of a new Dominion Arsenal was essential in

order to make Canada independent in terms of guns and ammunition. Ralston, having already obtained the largest annual budget for the Defence Department during the 1920's, did not believe that such a policy was necessary. McNaughton, who could not accept Ralston's intransigence in the matter, drafted a letter of resignation.<sup>54</sup> McNaughton decided, however, not to present the letter when the 1930 federal election conveniently interceded. Regrettably, the antipathy which existed between Ralston and McNaughton was to be rekindled during World War II.

The 1930 election did not prove to be one of the federal Liberal party's finer moments. The onset of the Great Depression had increased voter volatility to such an extent that no national or provincial government in Canada would be spared defeat at some point during the next decade. Although R. B. Bennett's Conservatives decisively defeated King's Liberals, Ralston, somewhat ironically, managed to hold on to his Shelbourne-Yarmouth seat.

Relegated to the ranks of the opposition, Ralston's interest in politics waned. Following his appointment to the Cabinet in 1926, Ralston had resigned from his law firm partnership with Charlie Burchell in Halifax. Now on the opposition benches, Ralston was free to resume practicing law. With his public profile measurably increased by his four years as Minister, Ralston represented a valuable addition to any law office. Consequently, he was recruited by a major partnership in Montreal, which with the new acquisition, became Mitchell, Ralston, Kearney and Duquet.<sup>55</sup>

In arranging his shadow cabinet, Mackenzie King decided that Ralston would make the most effective financial critic. Ralston, however, was hesitant to assume any burden that would detract from his new law practice.

In a letter to King he expressed his feelings:

as you know I want to do my share, but I have heavy private responsibilities and I want to do my very best to be fair to both public and private activities....

As you can well understand I want to be a little more free to give some attention to private affairs, particularly in view of the new start which I am making, and the necessity for some attention to matters which have to do with 'bread and butter', that is why I do not want to bite off much in connection with sessional activities. <sup>56</sup>

King acknowledged Ralston's desire to devote more energy towards his preferred profession, offering to divide the responsibilities of the critic portfolio.<sup>57</sup> Ralston consented to the proposed arrangement, which involved continuous commuting between Montreal and Ottawa.

After five years of serving in the dual capacity as lawyer and front-bench critic, Ralston decided to abandon his political activities and concentrate on his law practice. Never able to allocate tasks to subordinates or to overlook minor details, Ralston was not comfortable with having too little time to perform his responsibilities. No one could accuse Ralston of opportunism. His political future was never more promising, with a Liberal victory almost a certainty in the 1935 election and the Finance portfolio virtually guaranteed. Although King attempted to dissuade him from retiring, Ralston remained resolute in his intentions. Ralston explained his position in a letter to H.R.L. Bill, the President of the Shelburne-Yarmouth Liberal Association:

My situation is just this: that I could not keep on with the attempt to discharge important private responsibilities and at the same time meet the exacting demands of active political life without disregarding



obligations which I have no right to ignore; and a deciding factor has been the severe loss which my associates and I have recently sustained in the death of our senior partner, the late Honourable W. G. Mitchell, K.C., which has suddenly thrust new responsibilities on me as the surviving head of the firm. 58

With the death of Mitchell, the partnership became Ralston, Kearney and Duquet.

Ralston's political experience prior to 1935 had not been a success from the perspective of winning elections. In a letter to King in which he confirmed his retirement, Ralston reflected upon his political career:

My only comfort is that I think all my friends will recognize that I have not shirked even when it meant some sacrifice and that on a number of occasions I yielded when it was insisted my candidature was absolutely necessary in the party interests and carried the party banner in hopeless fights. The fact that I thus got the reputation of being the most defeated man in Nova Scotia did not worry me in the slightest so long as the cause had been served. Now the position is different. I am turning my back on the almost certain prospect of active and interesting participation in public affairs. If there is a sure seat in the Maritime Provinces it is Shelbourne-Yarmouth-Clare and if there ever was a time when the success of the Liberal party was assured it is at the coming election. I have given my poor best while I have been in public life and have neglected almost too long obligations which ought to have been treated more seriously. 59

Indeed 1935 should have marked a watershed in Ralston's life. Now fifty-four years of age, Ralston genuinely desired to devote the remainder of his life to his family and to his practice.

Mackenzie King, who had never desisted since 1919 attempting to obtain Ralston's service in the federal Liberal party, was not inclined to abandon his repeated solicitations to the Colonel. Even in acknowledging Ralston's retirement from elected office, King could not refrain from implying that future service might be required.

I should fail to express what I feel is most owing to you at this moment if I did not say you may well view with pride your readiness, regardless of sacrifice, throughout the whole of your years to serve the cause of freedom wherever that service seemed to be most needed. Your life's purpose will continue to flow in that channel. In that though I find, not only continued service to our party, wherever your lot may be cast but, under the Providence of God, a service that, to its close, will be ever deepening and ever widening as well. <sup>66</sup>

King's observations, while prophetic in one sense, are also extremely manipulative in nature. The Leader of the Opposition was well aware of the type of rhetoric which Ralston could not resist and he was certainly not ashamed to exploit it.

An incident in 1937 is indicative of the extent of Ralston's resoluteness in withdrawing from politics. Having won the 1935 election by a comfortable majority, Mackenzie King was back in the Prime Minister's office. King, in wishing some continued association with Ralston, resolved to offer the Colonel an appointment to the Senate. Perhaps the ultimate 'plum' in the complex system of Canadian political patronage, the senatorship would allow Ralston to continue to allocate as much time as he deemed necessary to his Montreal law practice, while necessitating only a few token appearances in Ottawa. Ralston, however, could not accept a position which involved remuneration without commitment. In a letter which is refreshing in its integrity, Ralston outlines to King his reasons for refusing the appointment:

Since you telephoned me I have gone all over that matter of the Senatorship with the result that I feel I must... decline the honour. Honestly I should not have given the matter a second thought, in view of my situation, if it hadn't been that you were suggesting it and for the forcible reason you gave. I realize that it isn't every one who has it put to him that his duty is to accept a Senatorship and to most people it would seem to be a not-too-[demanding] path of duty. But the situation is that I made my decision a year ago after much travail. I made it deliberately so as to lighten the load and be able to devote myself to the discharge of private obliga-

tions which I had neglected for over 25 years of fairly constant political activity. The feature which became threatening was the attempt to keep the pot boiling in the office and keep on the go, back and forth, to Ottawa. It meant pretty severe physical strain coupled with the fact that people who are paying me to look after their work had to put up with a lick and a promise and have the actual work done by a junior while I hadn't the excuse that I had to be away on professional business but that I had to attend to my public duties in Ottawa.

I know you believe that the situation would be immensely different in the Senate and that there is no obligation to be there very often, but you always told your ministers that they must be keepers of their own consciences and I am quite sure that if I were a member of the Senate I could not treat it as a sinecure but would want to pull my weight....

There is one other feature namely that I am most anxious that my boy should get a start. He was only admitted [to the Bar] last July and the next two or three years are his testing time and with the profession crowded as it is he needs all the help I can give him. He wants to get married and I want him to but I couldn't expect him to get paid enough to warrant that step if I diverted my energies so as to slacken the flow of work for him and the others to do. <sup>61</sup>

It would appear that King could no longer hope to lure Ralston back into his orbit of political activity.

For Ralston, the years between 1935 and 1939 were extremely prosperous. Ralston, Kearney and Duquet had become one of the most lucrative corporation practices in Canada. <sup>62</sup> In addition to being one of the country's most prominent lawyers, Ralston was the President of the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Canada and was on the Board of Directors of nine major corporations. <sup>63</sup> One of the greatest advantages for Ralston was the opportunity which he had to spend more time with Nettie and Stuart. In certain respects the family was in a position of stability that is reminiscent of their situation prior to World War I, when Nettie Ralston had felt that they were 'too happy'.

As was the unfortunate fate of many men of his generation, Ralston's

life was once again seriously disrupted by a global war. Precipitated upon this occasion by Adolf Hitler's megalomania, virtually every country in the world was eventually involved in the conflict. When the prospect of Canadian participation in the war began to materialize in August, 1939, King once again requested that Ralston re-enter the Cabinet, this time as Minister of Finance. Although Ralston refused, he did promise that if war broke out, he would serve in the crisis.<sup>64</sup> Consequently on September 5 when it was evident that war with Germany could no longer be averted, Ralston offered his compliance with the Prime Minister's wishes. King gave Ralston a choice between the National Defence and the Finance portfolios.<sup>65</sup> The two vacancies in Cabinet existed for different reasons. Charles Dunning had been forced to resign as Minister of Finance due to ill health. The Minister of National Defence, Ian Mackenzie, was adequate in the position in peacetime, but King thought that he lacked the administrative skill that would be necessary during the war.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Ralston selected the Finance portfolio and was sworn into the Cabinet on September 6. The wish to withdraw from public life which Ralston had so firmly developed over the preceding five years had been superseded by his more acutely nurtured sense of duty.

The return of Ralston to the Cabinet was applauded by even the harshest critics of the Liberal government. George McCullagh's Globe and Mail had been berating the King Administration for its lack of preparedness for war, and perceived the appointment of Ralston as a move in the proper direction: "King is to be commended for the prompt action he has taken to strengthen his Cabinet by the inclusion of Colonel James Layton Ralston, a soldier with a brilliant record in the Great War

and a dynamic personality who will inspire confidence in the nation's government in this hour of peril."<sup>67</sup> Mackenzie King, already possessing strong Cabinet representation from Quebec, was well aware that Ralston would improve the perception of his government in English-Canada. It should not be assumed, however, that Ralston was beholden to popular opinion in English-Canada. Unlike most politicians, Ralston desired neither re-election nor career advancement in the government. It was Ralston's sole purpose in entering the Cabinet to fulfill his responsibilities and to return to his law practice after the hostilities in Europe had ceased. Consequently, Ralston was accountable primarily to his conscience during his tenure in the King War Cabinet.

Under the circumstances it is difficult to perceive Ralston acquiescing to policies which he believed not to be in the national interest. If Ralston would not be able to function as Minister in accordance with his own convictions, there would be little reason for him to remain in the Cabinet. Therefore, the reputation that Ralston would develop over the next five years for being stubborn and unyielding is quite understandable. While earlier experiences had taught him to hate war, Ralston had also learned to appreciate the role of the soldier. Having lost his brother and countless friends in World War I, Ralston was all too aware of the cost of armed conflict. However, if war was deemed necessary, it was equally essential that the government be firm in its commitment to the armed forces. From this principle Ralston would not knowingly deviate. Ultimately, it was to be as a result of this tenet that Ralston could no longer serve under Mackenzie King.

## NOTES

### Chapter 1

1. The Legionary, July 1935, James L. Ralston Papers, Vol. 17, [PAC].
2. Sec "Defenceman", Maclean's, Dec. 1, 1941, p. 14; "Canada at War", Time, May 8, 1944, Ralston Papers, Vol. 4, [PAC].
3. Amherst News and Sentinel, Aug. 11, 1942, Ralston Papers, Vol. 4, [PAC].
4. Hector Charlesworth, "Ralston is Back," Saturday Night, September 16, 1939, p. 5.
5. Ibid.
6. "Biography", November 2, 1946, Ralston Papers, Vol. 30, [PAC].
7. Charlesworth, "Ralston is Back", p. 5.
8. Ibid.
9. In addition to having been the riding held by Ralston's uncle, Cumberland had been Sir Charles Tupper's seat from Confederation to 1891. Somewhat ironically, 1908 was also the first general election in which either Mackenzie King or Arthur Meighen ran as candidates. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1909), p. 164.
10. Ibid., 1914, p. 423.
11. Letter, Burchell to Ralston, Nov. 10, 1911, Ralston Papers, Vol. 16, [PAC].
12. Letter, Ralston to his parents, Nov. 29, 1914, Ralston Papers, Vol. 2, [PAC].
13. Letter, Ralston to his parents, June 12, 1915, Ralston Papers, Vol. 2, [PAC].
14. Letter, Ralston to his parents, July 18, 1915, Ralston Papers, Vol. 2, [PAC].
15. The Globe and Mail (Toronto), Sept. 7, 1939.
16. The Legionary, Ralston Papers.
17. Ibid.
18. The Halifax Herald, December 14, 1917.
19. House of Commons Debates, June 13, 1941, p. 3951.
20. "Biography", Ralston Papers.

21. Letter, Ralston to his parents, August 11, 1918, Ralston Papers, Vol. 2, [PAC].
22. Letter, Ralston to his parents, August 11 P.M., 1918, Ralston Papers, Vol. 2, [PAC].
23. "Biography", Ralston Papers.
24. Sec "Canada at War", Time, Ralston Papers; and "Back in Harness", Financial Post, Sept. 16, 1939, Ralston Papers, Vol. 55, [PAC].
25. Gratton O'Leary "Canada's Man at Naval Parley", in Saturday Night, Jan. 11, 1930, Ralston Papers, Vol. 19, [PAC].
26. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1917), p. 373.
27. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1922), p. 413.
28. H. Blair Neatby, William Lyon Mackenzie King: 1924-1932, The Lonely Heights, Vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 165-66.
29. King, however, had remained loyal to Laurier. He ran unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in a Toronto riding in 1917 and developed a bitterness towards those who had deserted Laurier. King's continued support of Laurier was largely responsible for his being selected party leader in 1919.
30. Neatby, pp. 165-66.
31. Letter, Ralston to King, Oct. 25, 1919, King Papers, J1, Vol. 49, [PAC].
32. Letter, King to Ralston, Nov. 1, 1919, King Papers, J1, Vol. 49, [PAC].
33. Letter, King to Ralston, Dec. 29, 1919, King Papers, J1, Vol. 49, [PAC].
34. Telegram, Ralston to King, Jan. 2, 1920, King Papers, J1, Vol. 56, [PAC].
35. "Biography", Ralston Papers.
36. Letter, King to Ralston, September 21, 1923, King Papers, J1, Vol. 93, [PAC].
37. Letter, Ralston to Lapointe, October 30, 1924, King Papers, J1, Vol. 107, [PAC].
38. Neatby, p. 61.
39. Loren M. Simerl, "A Survey of Canadian Provincial Election Results", in Politics Canada, edited by Paul Fox (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1977), pp. 606-609.

40. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1927), p. 461.
41. Letter, Ralston to King, July 23, 1925, King Papers, J1, Vol. 122,  
[PAC].
42. Neatby, p. 61.
43. Ibid., p. 75.
44. Ibid., pp. 165-66.
45. Telegram, King to Ralston, August 6, 1926, King Papers, J1, Vol. 137,  
[PAC].
46. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1927), p. 253.
47. Neatby, p. 169.
48. Ibid., pp. 173-74.
49. Telegram, Ralston to King, September 25, 1926, King Papers, J1,  
Vol. 137, [PAC].
50. Letter, Ralston to King, September 29, 1926, King Papers, J1, Vol. 137,  
[PAC].
51. Neatby, pp. 173-74.
52. Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa, 1927) p. 330.
53. John Swettenham, McNaughton, Vol. 1, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968),  
pp. 241-42.
54. Ibid., pp. 242-43.
55. "Biography", Ralston Papers.
56. Letter, Ralston to King, November 24, 1930, King Papers, J1, Vol. 180,  
[PAC ]
57. Letter, King to Ralston, November 27, 1930, King Papers, J1, Vol. 180,  
[PAC ]
58. Letter, Ralston to H.R.L. Bill, June 8, 1935, King Papers, J1, Vol. 210,  
[PAC ]
59. Letter, Ralston to King, June 10, 1935, King Papers, J1, Vol. 210,  
[PAC ]
60. Letter, King to Ralston, June 22, 1935, King Papers, J1, Vol. 210,  
[PAC ]
61. Letter, Ralston to King, January 4, 1937, King Papers, J1, Vol. 240,  
[PAC ]



62. Globe and Mail, September 7, 1939.

63. In 1939, Ralston was a Director of the following companies: Barclays Bank (Canada); Barclays (Canada) Ltd.; Eastern Trust Co.; Asbestos Corp., Ltd.; Dominion Steel and Coal Corp., Ltd.; Dominion Coal Co., Ltd.; Canadian Paperboard Ltd.; Southern Canada Power Co. Ltd.; and Andrew Malcolm Furniture Company, Ltd. See "Biography", Ralston Papers.

64. Jack L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 14.

65. Jack W. Pickersgill, The Mackenzie King Record: 1939-1944, Vol. 1, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 25.

66. Ibid.

67. The Globe and Mail, September 7, 1939.

## Chapter II Limited Liability

When Ralston was sworn in as Minister of Finance, he joined a government that was uncertain about what form Canadian participation in the war should take. Without a seat in the House of Commons, Ralston could only observe the emergency session of Parliament which passed the formal declaration of war against Germany. No one who was familiar with the debate at the emergency session could have failed to be impressed with Ernest Lapointe, the Minister of Justice and King's French-Canadian lieutenant in the House, who helped to ensure that the majority of members from Quebec supported the declaration of war. With the exception of a few French-Canadian nationalists and English-Canadian Conservatives, there was a general consensus that war was necessary and that conscription of manpower should not be introduced. Aside from this tenuous agreement, there were broadly conflicting interpretations of the role which Canada should assume in the conflict against Germany.

The task of defining Canada's war effort was largely the responsibility of the War Committee of Cabinet. Referred to as the Emergency Council during the first four months of the war, the War Committee consisted of the most influential Cabinet Ministers and was chaired by Mackenzie King. Virtually every major government policy which was concerned with the prosecution of the war originated within the War Committee. By issuing a significant number of orders-in-council, the War Committee frequently circumvented Parliament. Undemocratic though it may appear, such a system of executive authority was necessitated by the need to maintain secrecy and to obtain prompt action.

The membership of the War Committee was not firmly established until the middle of 1940. In addition to Ralston, Lapointe, and King, Norman Rogers was one of the initial members. Upon declining the National Defence portfolio, Ralston had recommended to King that he appoint Rogers.<sup>1</sup> King, who possessed immense respect for Rogers' abilities, agreed to offer the position to the former political science professor from Queen's. Rogers subsequently accepted the portfolio. Charles "Chubby" Power was another of the Committee's founding members. A bicultural Irish Canadian from Quebec, Power was the Postmaster-General for the first months of the war, later moving to the position of Minister of National Defence for Air. The west was represented on the Committee by T.A. Crerar, the former leader of the Progressives, whom King had persuaded to accept a Cabinet position with the Liberals in 1929.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the war, Crerar served in the capacity of Minister of Mines and Resources. Although not originally a member, Clarence Decatur (C.D.) Howe became one of the Committee's dominant personalities. As the Minister of Munitions and Supply, Howe demonstrated a singular aptitude for administration, being tenacious in achieving the results which he desired. Given the diverse backgrounds and the strong-willed natures of its members, it is not surprising that War Committee meetings were frequently characterized by turmoil and threatened resignations.

Almost before the War Committee could begin consideration of Canada's participation in the war, a difficult situation developed in Quebec. Maurice Duplessis, the province's Union Nationale Premier, called an election on September 25, hoping to be re-elected on a platform of refusing to cooperate with the national war effort.<sup>3</sup> Because of the weak organization of the pro-

vincial wing of the Liberal party and the direct attack that Duplessis had made upon the federal cabinet ministers from Quebec, Lapointe and Power decided to become directly involved in the campaign.<sup>4</sup> Joined by P.J. Arthur Cardin, the Minister of Public Works, Power and Lapointe publicly threatened to resign from office if Duplessis was not defeated. Duplessis attempted to make the danger of conscription the focal point of the campaign, but Lapointe, Power and Cardin diffused the effect of this tactic by pledging their determined opposition to compulsory military service.<sup>5</sup> Given this assurance the Quebec electorate soundly defeated Duplessis on October 25, electing a Liberal government led by Adelard Godbout. While the election results reflected the confidence that the moderate French-Canadians had in the federal Liberal government, the results also served as an indication of the limitations of Quebec's support concerning manpower policies.

The turbulent nature of the national political environment did not fail to make an impression upon Ralston. The new Minister of Finance perceived his rôle as being responsible for limiting Canada's commitments during the first stages of the war to those which were both necessary and affordable. With the 'phony war' in progress in Europe, Ralston was not about to jeopardize Canada's financial position until there was a clearer indication of what the country's most valuable contribution would be. Consequently, Ralston was very selective in consenting to requests from the United Kingdom for various forms of assistance.

The first major policy which the War Committee considered was initiated by a cable from Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, which asked for the support of the Canadian government in developing an extensive pilot training scheme for the Royal Air Force in Canada. At a meeting

of the War Committee on September 28, Mackenzie King outlined the contents of Chamberlain's cable, remarking that Canada's involvement in the plan would justify sending fewer, if any, men overseas.<sup>6</sup> Ralston agreed that a "greatly increased emphasis upon the air arm...might result in considerable modifications of the Canadian war programme in other respects."<sup>7</sup> The members of the Committee decided that it would be desirable to begin negotiations with the United Kingdom concerning the financing of the scheme.

Prior to beginning more serious deliberations in connection with the air training programme, Ralston had to attend to two other matters of significance. The first was to assist in appointing the commanding officer of the First Canadian Division which had been mobilized early in September to serve as an expeditionary force to the United Kingdom. On October 6 Ralston, Norman Rogers (now the Minister of National Defence) and King interviewed Andy McNaughton for the position. Ralston's former Chief of the General Staff made a tremendous impression upon King, and was subsequently offered the position, which he accepted.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the difficult relationship which Ralston and McNaughton had experienced during the comparatively peaceful years of 1929-1930, would only deteriorate under the stress of war.

The second item which required Ralston's attention was his need to obtain a seat in the House of Commons. He was seriously considering running in a by-election in a riding in the western end of Montreal when Providence intervened. On October 28, the safe Liberal constituency of Prince in Prince Edward Island became vacant when the sitting member died. Ralston consented to King's request that he stand for the nomination in Prince, where acclamation was almost certain.<sup>9</sup> King, who had been the member for Prince from 1919 to 1921, was delighted that Ralston was going to hold the same seat. Indeed, King was so impressed with Ralston at this point that he recorded in his diary that he would be pleased to have -

the next Prime Minister representing the constituency that had opened the way for the present Prime Minister to take office and would feel it most appropriate for him to be there. If I were designating tomorrow the man for Prime Minister, I would select Ralston without a moment's hesitation. Years ago, I felt the same way about him. He is the most unselfish man, I think, that I have met, a public spirit equal to Norman Rogers. <sup>10</sup>

Although King's prophetic powers failed him when speculating about his successor, he was correct in assuming that Ralston would have no trouble winning in Prince, where he was acclaimed on January 2, 1940.<sup>11</sup>

It was shortly after Ralston had learned of the opening in Prince that negotiations began concerning the air training scheme. An Air Mission from the United Kingdom arrived in Ottawa in late October to meet with the Canadian government. The British delegation was chaired by Lord Riverdale, a leading British industrial magnate. The mission also included Air Chief-Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and the Under-Secretary for Air, Captain Harold Balfour. Although the events which led to the formal agreement of the British Commonwealth Air Training Programme have been chronicled in detail elsewhere, it is important to understand Ralston's role in the process. Never the knee-jerk imperialist that some have mistaken him for, Ralston stubbornly refused to compromise Canada's financial stability.

The first formal meeting between the United Kingdom Air Mission and the War Committee was held on October 31. Before the representatives of the British government arrived in King's office Ralston warned his colleagues that Canada's contribution to the plan could not be determined until it was known what assistance Great Britain would require in other areas, especially concerning credits for munitions and supplies.<sup>12</sup> When the British Mission entered the meeting, Riverdale made some introductory comments

about the nature of the proposed scheme, commenting that the plan would cost approximately 888 million dollars by March 31, 1943.<sup>13</sup> Riverdale claimed that the British government was prepared to offer 140 million dollars to initiate the programme, with the governments of Australia and New Zealand assuming one-half of the remaining cost. Canada, therefore, would be responsible for 374 million dollars; Riverdale's suggested allocation of financial liability took Ralston by surprise. The Minister of Finance told the meeting that he was unaware of any previous discussions concerning the proportional sharing of cost, and asked Riverdale whether any of the co-operating governments had agreed to the figures which he had mentioned. After Riverdale admitted that he was simply offering a formula for consideration, King interjected that because the entire plan had originated with Chamberlain, it would be unfair to force the Canadian government into a decision. The Prime Minister impressed upon Riverdale that Canada would not exceed its resources in determining its war effort. Ralston then expressed his indignation over Riverdale's "bland assessment" of Canada's contribution to the scheme, and told the air mission that it would be impossible to come "within shooting distance" of the figures which had been suggested.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the BCATP was not a Canadian initiative was of primary importance to Ralston, who emphasized that "before the Canadian Government could commit itself as to what share of responsibility it might take for the Training Scheme, it would have to know the total financial requirements and what further financial contributions in this and other fields we would be called upon to make."<sup>15</sup> The only decision which the meeting produced was an agreement that the Air Mission should meet with Ralston, Howe and Rogers to elaborate upon the funding of the plan.

At the next meeting, held on November 3, Ralston outlined the financial position of the Canadian government to the British Air Mission. Canada had already allocated 36.3 per cent (1,490 million dollars) of its national income (3,575 million dollars) to various government expenditures. The government intended to increase its defence spending in 1940-41 to 352 million, almost doubling the department's 1939-40 budget of 190 million.<sup>16</sup> Because this would now involve 42 per cent of the national income, the Minister of Finance informed the British delegation that it would be impossible for Canada to make the sizeable financial contribution which had been requested. Consequently, the next few days were spent attempting to reduce the cost of the air training scheme.

By November 14, an agreement had been tentatively reached which would limit Canada's share of financial responsibility to \$313 million.<sup>17</sup> The War Committee placed two conditions upon its acceptance of the proposal. Palstone stipulated that the agreement was conditional upon a satisfactory outcome of the negotiations between Graham Towers, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, and the government purchasing authorities in the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> If Canada could not adequately supplement its national income through producing munitions for the British, Ralston reasoned, it would be impossible for the government to finance the BCATP. The second provision was put forward by Norman Rogers, who insisted that the U.K. government agree "that Canadian participation in the Air Training Scheme, as contemplated, should take priority, or preference, over all other Canadian commitments not already entered into."<sup>19</sup> Although Riverdale offered his support to the amended plan, the British government was not prepared to consent too quickly to the conditions that were required by Rogers and Ralston.

Over the following two weeks, more complications arose. The British



government was extremely reluctant to ensure that the air training programme would be given the priority which Rogers had requested. During the delay caused by the U.K.'s hesitation, the Australian representatives, who had come to Ottawa along with a delegation from New Zealand, decided that they wished to reduce their participation in the plan.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, a new formula for funding the plan was agreed upon just prior to the date that the Australian and New Zealand Missions were to leave Ottawa. Sir Gerald Campbell, the British High Commissioner to Canada, requested that the governments sign the agreement before the Australians' departure.<sup>21</sup>

The Canadian government, however, was still not satisfied with the lack of commitment that the British had given to the priority of the programme. At a meeting of the War Committee on November 27, it was decided that no formal consent would be given to the plan until the British government was less equivocal about the priority to be given to the scheme. Not surprisingly, Norman Rogers stressed the importance of avoiding any public mention of the condition which the Committee was attempting to extract from the U.K. government. Much to their disappointment the British, Australian and New Zealand delegations were told that the Canadian government could go no further than issuing a press release which revealed that "discussions had been completed, a basis of agreement had been arrived at and it was now being referred to the respective governments for decision."<sup>22</sup>

The British government finally issued the desired statement concerning the priority of the BCATP on December 7.<sup>23</sup> A new difficulty, however, immediately arose which once again delayed the signing of the final agreement. The Canadian government had been under the impression that distinct Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons would be formed with the ground crews provided by the British. At a meeting on December 14, Lord Riverdale informed the War-

Committee that if RCAF squadrons wanted to be recognized as such, then they would have to be serviced by Canadian ground crews in the field.<sup>24</sup> Ralston, King and the remaining members of the Committee were united in their opposition to Riverdale's proposal, claiming that it was inconsistent with existing agreements between the two governments. The meeting adjourned with Riverdale consenting to cable his government for further instructions.

Negotiations became very intense during the following two days. Mackenzie King wanted to announce that an agreement had been reached on December 17 because it coincided with his birthday and the scheduled arrival of the First Division of the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom. Success was almost achieved during a meeting in the Prime Minister's office on December 15. Riverdale and Brooke-Popham suggested a new method of allocating Canadian air squadrons which Rogers, Ralston and King found to be more acceptable. Ralston, however, was rather hesitant to accept any compromise in connection with the command of Canadian squadrons. King noted in his diary that:

Ralston kept coming back to the point of command and the care of our men. That when enlisting large numbers of pilots in Canada, the first thing they would ask would be whether they would be under a Canadian commander. Whether they could look to being in Canadian squadrons rather than in squadrons commanded by British officers. Ralston pointed out quite clearly that, unless there was very clear understanding on these matters on the say Canada should have, there would be a fear among our men that they would be sent into such places as Passchandaele in the last war, and their lives unnecessarily sacrificed. <sup>25</sup>

Ralston's observations notwithstanding, the British government disapproved of Riverdale's proposal, necessitating further discussion.

With pressure mounting daily to reach a solution, a breakthrough occurred on December 16. Unable to contact Riverdale, Ralston met with Gerald Campbell and Brooke-Popham. During the meeting, a rather ambiguous statement was prepared, which read:

On the understanding that the numbers to be incorporated or organized at any time will be the subject of discussion between the two governments, the United Kingdom Government accepts in principle as being consonant with the intention of Paragraph 15 of the Memorandum of Agreement, that the United Kingdom Government, on the request of the Canadian Government would arrange that the Canadian pupils when passing out from the Training Scheme, would be incorporated in or organized as units and formations of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the field. The detailed methods by which this can be done would be arranged by an Inter-Governmental Committee for this purpose under Paragraph 15. <sup>26</sup>

Riverdale and King were not able to meet to consider the new proposal until late that night, by which time Ralston had departed for Montreal. Although the statement accomplished little more than deferring administration of the problem to an inter-governmental committee, King and Riverdale agreed that it formed the basis of a solution to the impasse. Consequently the agreement was formally signed and an official announcement was made the following day.

The BCATP negotiations represented the first major test of Ralston's orientation towards policy since his return to the Cabinet. If anything is demonstrated by Ralston's behaviour during the attempt to reach an agreement, it is that Ralston was unwilling to subordinate Canadian autonomy in an effort to appease imperial interests.

Within the Cabinet, Ralston repeatedly sought to restrain expenditures. Later in the war, Ralston would almost disregard financial considerations in his effort to build an adequate army. The reason for Ralston's initial conservative orientation toward government expenditure is probably derived from the uncertain circumstances which characterized the late 1939 to early 1940 period. Ralston's two most senior advisors, Graham Towers and W. Clifford Clark, the deputy Minister of Finance, were concerned that allocating too large a proportion of the national income for war purposes would create a run on the banks.<sup>27</sup> In addition, it was not yet known to what extent the Canadian economy would expand as a result of munitions production, nor was there any lucrative trade agreement with the United States. With the 'phoney war'

still in progress in Europe, there was no immediate external threat. Consequently while his position would eventually be transformed by changes in these conditions, Ralston adhered to a policy of financial restraint during the first phase of the war.

Ralston outlined his philosophy of expenditure to his Cabinet colleagues in late November. In a letter which requested the estimates of the various departments for the 1940-41 fiscal year, Ralston stressed the importance of curtailing peace-time spending.<sup>28</sup> Ralston hoped that by limiting ordinary departmental budgets, more money would be available for the war effort. The Minister of Finance warned his fellow ministers that "as you are aware, the commitments we have already made for war purposes when added to the peace-time expenditures of Canadian governments represent so large a proportion of the national income that unless we can appreciably reduce our ordinary expenditures we should be faced with the possibility of rationing of imports and of consumption at a not distant date."<sup>29</sup>

The cautious attitude of the Finance Department was not meeting with universal support. Mitch Hepburn, the recalcitrant Liberal Premier of Ontario, was relentless in his criticism of the national war effort, claiming that 'the dollar is in the driving seat at Ottawa'.<sup>30</sup> Hepburn's sentiments were echoed by the federal Conservatives and some of the large English newspapers such as the Globe and Mail. Even within the government, some dissatisfaction became apparent when Wallace Campbell threatened to resign as Chairman of the War Supply Board. Campbell was upset because he alleged that Clifford Clark was not allowing the War Supply Board to place orders for requirements beyond the current fiscal year.<sup>31</sup> At a special meeting of the War Committee on December 8, C.D. Howe, who now had ministerial responsibility for the Board, stated that he was not aware of any difficulties in obtaining such orders.<sup>32</sup> As well, Norman Rogers indicated that the De-

partment of National Defence had not experienced any problems in receiving equipment and supplies. Although King was obviously concerned by the situation, he was reassured by all of the ministers which were present that Campbell's complaints were unjustified. Ralston concluded the meeting by reminding his colleagues that "he would be derelict in his duty as Minister of Finance if he failed to keep the matter of cost constantly in mind."<sup>33</sup>

As criticism about the government's war effort from various sources intensified, Mackenzie King sought some ammunition for a counterattack. The Prime Minister asked all of his Cabinet Ministers to outline the war activities of their respective departments. Ralston's response, while not very suitable for King's purpose, clearly reflected the philosophy of the Finance Department:

- 1) Guarding, conserving and strengthening the nation's financial and economic resources against dissipation for expenditures which can be reduced, deferred or eliminated in wartime;
- 2) Formulating policies regarding the restriction or contraction of peacetime expenditures in order to make room for war expenditures;
- 3) Examining every sort of proposal for out-of-the-ordinary expenditures with a view to appraising their merit in the light of war conditions;
- 4) Working out measures for raising money by way of taxation and by loans and organizing therfor.[sic]

34

Ralston's desire to maintain a tight ceiling on non-essential spending was soon to be the cause of friction within the Cabinet.

Before any serious differences of opinion could arise within the War Committee, a general election interrupted the normal functioning of the government. On January 18, the Hepburn government at Queen's Park had passed a resolution which condemned the national war effort.<sup>35</sup> Partially inspired by this open act of defiance, King discussed the advisability of an immediate dissolution of Parliament with the War Committee on January 22. The only minister who disagreed with this course of action was Ralston, who maintained that the government was correct in the policies which it had adopted, and

should simply present its case on the floor of the House.<sup>36</sup> Never noted for his political acumen, Ralston quickly acceded to the will of the majority. Consequently, on January 25, when Parliament met for the first time since the emergency session of September 1939, the Prime Minister dissolved the House.

The necessity of an election was questioned by many, especially by Dr. Robert Manion, the Leader of the Conservative party. Manion denounced the government for being opportunistic and afraid to face Parliament. After his initial reticence Ralston saw the need for an election. In a letter to his brother Mack, Ralston denied Manion's allegations of political cowardice, claiming that "the real situation was that this Parliament was nearing its end, and it would have greatly retarded our war effort if we had had to sit day after day in the House battling away on the question as to whether somebody had a greatcoat or as to the relative merits of Dependants' Allowances in this war as compared with the last, and then have to go out in an election campaign and do it all over again."<sup>37</sup>

Election campaigns were never very pleasurable experiences for Ralston, and the 1940 contest was no exception. Indeed, Ralston wrote to Mack that: "it was the worst campaign from the point of view of personal attack and abuse, I think that we have ever had, and I am certain, as I said on the platform more than once, that no Federal leader in any election since Confederation has been so loose in speech and has indulged in such lurid language and such bitter criticism as [Manion]."<sup>38</sup> Although Ralston's perception of the campaign may have been tainted by his partisanship, he was extremely sensitive about the personal abuse that his colleagues were being subjected to on the hustings. In his major contribution to the Liberal quest for re-election, Ralston delivered a national radio address which dealt entirely with defending the reputations of King, Lapointe and Rogers.<sup>39</sup>

Palston's distaste for the campaign notwithstanding, the Liberals won a landslide victory. After the polling booths had closed on March 26, it was revealed that the government had won 181 out of a possible 245 ridings. It was the largest majority of seats, awarded to a party to that date, with the Conservatives retaining only 40 constituencies. The Liberals were even more successful in Quebec, where they swept 64 of the province's 65 seats.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the clearest indication of the extent of the one-sided Liberal triumph is the fact that Palston managed to be re-elected in Prince. Palston, in no way disappointed that Manion had been defeated in his own riding, wrote to Mack to explain the outcome of the election:

Here is the secret of the result. It is told in a brief sentence or two in a letter which I had from Nettie this morning. She says 'Miss Moseley was talking to me about voting. She said that she had always been a Conservative but she voted Liberal this time because she felt that the Liberals had started with this war and perhaps were better fitted to carry it on rather than new blood. And also she didn't like the way Dr. Manion carried on his campaign: she thought he had taken his time to sling mud and she voted against him.'

Nettie says this may have been the reason for many a vote, and I think she is right.<sup>41</sup>

Although Palston's analysis may be overly simplistic, there is no question that the Liberals were given a decisive mandate to continue to prosecute the war effort.

Following the election, Palston's financial conservatism produced some controversy within the War Committee over two issues. The first problem concerned negotiations with the United States over the development of the St. Lawrence Waterway. Palston's initial opposition to the project had been expressed at a Cabinet meeting on January 18. At the time, Palston argued that it was unwise to divert funds, which were required for war-related purposes, to the St. Lawrence development.<sup>42</sup> King, however, stressed the importance of appeasing the neutral Americans, who were extremely enthusiastic

about the proposal. With the support of the rest of the Cabinet, a new draft treaty was drawn up with the Americans, which the War Committee considered on April 4. Ralston once again objected, claiming that it would cost the government sixty million dollars by 1950.<sup>43</sup> The Minister of Finance added that such an expenditure might adversely affect Dominion credit.<sup>44</sup> In spite of the financial liability, King re-emphasized the priority of maintaining positive relations with the United States. The Committee agreed with King, and decided to proceed with the new treaty.

The second controversial issue was of greater significance. Prior to calling the election, the Cabinet had decided to announce that a second infantry division would be mobilized and eventually dispatched overseas. Ralston had mildly questioned the decision, worrying that it would lead to pressure for a third and fourth division.<sup>45</sup> On February 12, the War Committee received a request from Major-General McNaughton that the two divisions should combine to form a Canadian Corps.<sup>46</sup> The Committee agreed to defer any commitment to such a proposal until after the election.

The matter was not given further consideration until April 2. Norman Rogers was about to leave Ottawa for London, and hoped that a decision could be made prior to his departure. Ralston opposed the formation of a Corps on financial grounds, arguing that it would be too expensive to support the additional headquarters and ancillary units.<sup>47</sup> Rogers was equally adamant that the proposal should be accepted. King intervened, contending that:

the Canadian public would wish to have a Corps, that the pride of the nation would demand that; also, that we owed it to McNaughton and the men who were prepared to give their lives, to let them have, in the way of formation, what they most desired. The people would expect us to be prepared to incur additional expense, if need be, for this national expression.<sup>48</sup>

Despite King's support for Roger's position, the discussion was resumed on the following day. Ralston believed that it would make more sense to use



the money to support the air and naval services. Although King did not disagree with Ralston's assertion, the Prime Minister still maintained that it was advisable to form a clearly defined expeditionary force.<sup>49</sup>

The issue was finally resolved at a meeting of the War Committee on April 4. Rogers and Ralston had worked together to draft a proposal for financing the ancillary units. The British government who also desired the formation of a Canadian Corps, would provide for all of the ancillary troops' initial equipment. The Canadian government would then assume the responsibility of maintaining the units for the duration of the war.<sup>50</sup> The plan was deemed acceptable by the other members of the committee who decided to proceed with the establishment of a Canadian Corps in England.

The controversy over the St. Lawrence Waterway and the formation of a Canadian Corps marked the final two occasions upon which Ralston would place top priority upon financial considerations. The German offensive had begun on April 9 with the conquest of Denmark and the invasion of Norway. By May 10, the blitzkrieg had begun and Winston Churchill had replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. As Ralston's awareness of the deteriorating situation in Europe increased, he became less concerned with limiting financial risks. By June 5 he was writing to Graham Towers that "these days we have to, and should, take chances."<sup>51</sup>

The War Committee moved quickly to accelerate its war effort on May 10. The dispatch of the 2nd Division was to be moved up one month, probably to some time in late June. As well, an infantry battalion would be sent to Jamaica, two destroyers would be used to protect oil refineries in the West Indies, and a RCAF Army Co-operation Squadron would be immediately sent to England.<sup>52</sup> On May 17 Rogers was able to report that the 1st Division would be

prepared to proceed to France on June 15.<sup>53</sup> It was also decided that a third infantry division should be formed, although it was not specified whether the division would serve at home or overseas. Further commitments were made by the War Committee on May 22 when it was agreed to comply with British requests to send an infantry brigade to Iceland and a rifle battalion to the West Indies.<sup>54</sup> Although the government had now quickly escalated its funding of diverse aspects of war-related activities, there is no evidence to suggest that Ralston opposed any of the above decisions.

The increased activity of the War Committee did little to satiate the growing appetite of the Conservative opposition for the introduction of more extreme measures. In late May, "the Conservatives" launched an offensive against King in Parliament, calling for Ralston to succeed him as Prime Minister. Percy Black, the Tory member for Ralston's home county of Cumberland, told the House on May 27 that "many people in this country are of the opinion that if [Ralston] were in control at the present time as Prime Minister, there would be a feeling of greater confidence."<sup>55</sup> The following day Herbert Bruce, a Tory from Toronto, resumed the attack against King. Bruce echoed Black's sentiments, maintaining that:

The Minister of Finance enjoys the respect and confidence of both sides of this house, as well as that of the people of Canada generally. With his splendid war record, his undoubted ability in finance and law, his well-known driving force and character, may I venture to suggest that he is the one man in the Prime Minister's cabinet...qualified and equipped to lead a war government.<sup>56</sup>

Ironically the Conservative members were under the mistaken impression that Ralston was being restrained by his War Committee colleagues.

Mackenzie King took the Conservatives' comments very seriously. The Prime Minister was rather paranoid about conspiracies being designed to have him removed from office. He believed that the Conservatives were attempting to force the formation of a national government and to bring about

the return of Arthur Meighen to the Commons.<sup>57</sup> On May 29, King recorded in his diary that he told the Cabinet:

what I had said to Ralston before the last elections, that I thought he was the one who ought to take over the leadership of the party. I believed many of the party would prefer him to me...That he had told me he would not consider anything of the kind. I wanted now, in his presence, to say that I was quite prepared to step out, even today, and recommend to the Administrator...the formation of a government under him if members of Council believed that would help in the present situation.<sup>58</sup>

The threatened resignation was one of King's favourite methods of dissipating criticism of his leadership. He resorted to the tactic often, and always with success. After stating his intention to leave office, King would inform his colleagues that it would be impossible for anyone else to form a viable government. The fact that King possessed no intention of stepping down was made clear by the concluding entry in his diary: "This was a deep-laid plot which affected the whole power of the Government, and I expected my colleagues to see that it was met in a formidable manner."<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the controversy, Ralston had never considered being disloyal to King. King was well aware that Ralston would not attempt to cooperate with the Conservatives, confiding to his diary that "they [the Conservatives] did not know Ralston, who was incapable of sharing in views of the kind."<sup>60</sup> At the end of May Ralston was working late in the Prime Minister's office when King indicated that he was too fatigued to handle the pressure. Ralston responded by informing his leader that his continued service was essential to the Allied cause.<sup>61</sup> If Ralston had possessed any desire to replace King, the Conservatives might have been more successful in creating dissension within the Cabinet. With Ralston's continued support of King assured, the challenge to King's leadership quickly evaporated.

Shortly after the Conservatives launched their assault against King in the Commons, a more serious crisis struck the Cabinet. While flying to a speaking engagement in Toronto on June 10, Norman Rogers was killed when his plane crashed near Newcastle.<sup>62</sup> The tragic death of the Minister of National Defence came at an inopportune time. Overseas, the British Army was about to be evacuated from the continent at Dunkirk. Italy, anticipating the collapse of France, had just declared its alliance with Germany. The deteriorating situation in Europe was placing additional pressure upon the War Committee, which was now faced with the threat of Canada being a target of external attack.

Mackenzie King lost little time in finding a replacement for Rogers. The Prime Minister was convinced that the only appropriate course of action was to have Ralston move into the National Defence portfolio. King believed that the appointment of Ralston "would forestall the fears which would arise, once the real situation becomes publicly known."<sup>63</sup> However, when King asked Ralston to change portfolios on June 13, the Colonel was not overly enthusiastic. Ralston explained to King that he enjoyed his responsibilities in Finance, and feared that National Defence would be too great a strain. King, as he had often done before, appealed to Ralston's sense of duty, even adding "that is what I felt Rogers would have wished."<sup>64</sup> Not surprisingly, Ralston consented to the change in departments.

Although King immediately made a public announcement that Ralston would become the Minister of National Defence, Ralston did not officially change portfolios until July 5. The delay was caused by Ralston's desire to present to Parliament the budget that he had been preparing. Once the budget was completed, Ralston suggested to King that James L. Ilsley become

the new Minister of Finance.<sup>65</sup> Ilsley, also a native of Nova Scotia, had been serving as the Minister of National Revenue. King accepted Ralston's advice and appointed Ilsley to the Finance portfolio on July 8, a promotion which included membership on the War Committee.

The appointment of Ralston as the Minister of National Defence was met with enthusiasm. The Toronto Star published a very positive article about the move, concluding that "Col. Ralston takes over the defence tasks with the complete backing and approval, apparently, of the whole of Canada."<sup>66</sup> The Winnipeg Free Press was equally supportive of the change, commenting that "it will be, we think, the opinion of those familiar with the duties and responsibilities of this office that this is more than a good appointment - it is the best appointment possible."<sup>67</sup>

The hearty endorsements placed a considerable amount of pressure on the new Minister of National Defence. The expectations of what Ralston could accomplish in his new portfolio were extremely high, and perhaps unreasonable. A story in the Toronto Star is representative of such undue optimism:

under the expanded war effort [Ralston] envisages there seems no doubt that, before long, every Canadian man and woman will be given full opportunity to take part in the battle against Hitlerism. That tremendous surge of national enthusiasm, which at some points now seems to be asking direction, will find itself harnessed and at work under the Ralston program.<sup>68</sup>

It is unlikely that even Ralston was aware of what the new 'Ralston program' would involve. With the 'limited liability' phase of the war now behind him, Ralston would be responsible for mobilizing the nation's manpower and resources at a greatly accelerated rate. The extent to which this could be achieved would become an issue which would consume the attention of the War Committee for the duration of the war.

## NOTES

### Chapter 2

1. Pickersgill, p. 26.
2. Neatby, p. 296.
3. Pickersgill, p. 35.
4. Norman Ward ed., A Party Politician: The Memoirs of Chubby Power, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), pp. 125-127.
5. Ibid., pp. 129-30.
6. Cabinet War Committee Records, Minutes, September 28, 1939.
7. Ibid.
8. Pickersgill, p. 38.
9. Ibid., pp. 25-26.
10. Ibid.
11. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, "By-Elections," 1940, p. 11.
12. Cabinet War Committee Records, Minutes, October 31, 1939.
13. Chubby Power, Memoirs, p. 199.
14. Cabinet War Committee Records, Minutes, October 31, 1939.
15. Ibid.
16. Granatstein, Canada's War, p. 52.
17. Ibid., p. 53.
18. Cabinet War Committee Records, November 14, 1939.
19. Ibid.
20. Granatstein, p. 54.
21. Cabinet War Committee Records, November 27, 1939.
22. Ibid.
23. Granatstein, p. 55.
24. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 14, 1939.
25. Pickersgill, pp. 51-52.

26. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
27. Granatstein, p. 97.
28. Letter, Ralston to Colleagues, November 22, 1939, King Papers, J1 Vol. 276, [PAC].
29. Ibid.
30. Pickersgill, p. 36.
31. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 8, 1939.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Letter, Ralston to King, January 5, 1940, King Papers, J1 Vol. 294 [PAC].
35. Pickersgill, p. 62.
36. Ibid., p. 63.
37. Letter, JLR to Mack, February 3, 1940, Ralston Papers, Vol. 32, [PAC].
38. Letter, JLR to Mack, March 28, 1940, Ralston Papers, Vol. 32, [PAC].
39. "Radio Address by Honourable J. L. Ralston," March 13, 1940, King Papers, J4 Vol. 327, [PAC].
40. All results obtained from Granatstein, p. 91.
41. Letter, JLR to Mack, March 28, 1940, Ralston Papers, Vol. 32, [PAC].
42. Pickersgill, pp. 61-62.
43. Ibid., p. 77.
44. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 4, 1940.
45. Granatstein; p. 81.
46. Cabinet War Committee Records, February 12, 1940.
47. Pickersgill, p. 76.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 4, 1940.
51. Granatstein, p. 97.

52. Cabinet War Committee Records, May 10, 1940.
53. Ibid., May 17, 1940.
54. Ibid., May 22, 1940.
55. Debates, Canadian House of Commons, May 27, 1940, p. 244.
56. Ibid., May 28, 1940, p. 305.
57. Pickersgill, p. 82.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Granatstein, pp. 94-95.
61. Ibid., pp. 123-24.
62. Pickersgill, p. 88.
63. Ibid., p. 91.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Toronto Star, June 14, 1940.
67. Winnipeg Free Press, June 14, 1940.
68. Toronto Star, June 14, 1940.



### Chapter III

#### The 1941 Army Programme

The most important task to confront Ralston in his first year as Minister of National Defence was the development of a coherent army programme. There were a number of factors which required consideration when determining the optimum composition of the Canadian Army. For example, it was necessary to assess how many troops were needed for home defence, and how many were available for service overseas. It was also difficult to judge how much manpower could be allocated to the armed services, because of the need to maintain the production of munitions, supplies, and foodstuffs. Within the services an appropriate balance had to be preserved in the recruitment for the army, air force, and navy. Other problems such as the most effective length of training and the size of reinforcement pools further complicated matters. All of these variables had to be resolved in a forum which evaluated that which was administratively advisable by that which was politically feasible. Consequently, it was virtually impossible for Ralston to remain in constant agreement with all of his colleagues in the War Committee.

The first major step taken in response to the surrender of France and the increased threat of external invasion was the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA). On June 17, the War Committee met to discuss the mobilization of persons and property for war purposes. To the mild surprise of those present, 'Chubby' Power and Ernest Lapointe indicated that they were in favour of compulsory military service for home defense. C.D. Howe and O.D. Skelton, King's close advisor and the Under-Secretary of State for

External Affairs, commented upon the importance of not conscripting skilled industrial workers, for fear that a shortage of war supplies might result. It was decided that a national registration would provide the most effective method of informing defence authorities about the availability of manpower for the armed forces.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of the meeting what was to become known as the National Resources Mobilization Act was drafted and introduced in the Commons the following day. The Act conferred broad powers upon the government, enabling it to use the nation's resources and manpower for the defence of Canada. In order to secure the support of the Quebec M.P.s for the Act, King reiterated his pledge that conscription would not be employed for purposes other than home defence.<sup>2</sup> After the Act had been passed by Parliament, it was decided that a national registration would be held in late August.

In the meantime Mackenzie King was attempting to diffuse the Tories' persistent demands for a national government by inviting prominent individuals from outside of the government to enter the Cabinet.<sup>3</sup> The only person to accept King's offer was Angus L. Macdonald, the Liberal Premier of Nova Scotia. Macdonald's appointment was part of a realignment of responsibility within the Department of National Defence. When Ralston had accepted the National Defence portfolio, he had indicated to King that he would require some assistance because the ministry was too large. Consequently, on July 12, Macdonald was named Minister of National Defence for Naval Services, and 'Chubby' Power, who was already the Minister of National Defence for Air, became the Associate Minister of National Defence.

With the new appointments Ralston became the senior defence minister, responsible for the Army and all issues which related to defending the country. In addition to the Air Force and the administration of the BCATP,

Power, as Associate Minister, assisted Ralston and served as acting minister in his absence. Although it would appear to be a confusing arrangement, Power recalls in his memoirs that:

no difficulty ever arose between Ralston, Macdonald and me about responsibility, authority or functions, largely because we were on good terms with one another. I often sat in with Ralston in matters dealing almost exclusively with the army, and he took part in the proceedings of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan Supervisory Board without the slightest conflict ever arising between us. 4

The ease with which the three ministers worked together may partially be explained by the similarity of their backgrounds; they had all served as infantry soldiers in World War I and were all former lawyers.<sup>5</sup> Ralston and Macdonald, who possessed the additional bond of Nova Scotia provincial politics, developed an extremely close relationship, which lasted for the duration of the war.

For much of July and August, the War Committee was preoccupied with the defence of Canada. As early as June 20, Mackenzie King had informed the Committee that the Canadian Charge d'Affaires in Japan had recommended that steps be taken to defend the Canadian west coast.<sup>6</sup> With the possibility of Japan becoming an adversary, both Canadian coasts were thought to be vulnerable to attack. On June 27, Lapointe and King urged the War Committee that top priority should be given to home defence. As a result the Committee agreed that no additional men or supplies would be sent overseas without very careful consideration.<sup>7</sup>

In accordance with the new policy, the disposition of Canadian troops was discussed on July 4. Power told the War Committee that the 2nd Division was no longer scheduled for despatch to the United Kingdom. The division, at the request of the British government, had already seen some of its troops sent to Iceland and Newfoundland. The remainder of the division was needed in Canada for home defence. Ralston was becoming increa-

singly concerned about the insufficient training which the volunteers were receiving. He told the Committee that Major-General Odlum, the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Division, believed that the troops required an additional three months' training before they were prepared for action.<sup>8</sup> Ralston was also worried about a British request that the entire 2nd Division be sent to Iceland. Such a move would necessitate the removal of all available artillery equipment to Iceland, which would cripple the training of the 3rd and 4th Divisions. Although Ralston's request for the extra three months of training was refused, the Committee agreed that no further troops would be sent outside of Canada until September 15 by which time the 3rd and 4th Divisions would have been trained for home defence.<sup>9</sup>

The British government, however, persisted in its request for the entire 2nd Division to be sent to Iceland to garrison the island. The War Committee reconsidered the matter on July 9, deciding that it would be possible to despatch an additional infantry brigade from the 2nd Division. Ralston told the Committee that Canadian troops should only serve in Iceland on a temporary basis. The British already had troops stationed in Iceland, and would remove them if Canada assumed responsibility for defending the island. In addition, the conditions in Iceland were not conducive to training because the troops were too scattered. Ralston concluded that, while it would be possible to send an additional brigade for an interim period, it should be done under the condition that the entire 2nd Division would eventually join the 1st Division in England.<sup>10</sup> The British consented to the stipulation, agreeing on July 15 to have the 2nd Division stationed in Great Britain rather than in Iceland.<sup>11</sup> As it turned out, units of the 2nd Division spent very little time in Iceland; the entire division arrived in England before the end of the calendar year.<sup>12</sup>

The emphasis which King and Lapointe had urged the War Committee to place on home defence was not entirely consistent with the attitude of the Canadian Chiefs of Staff. On July 26, Major-General Harry D. G. Crerar, the Chief of the General Staff, gave a report on home defence to the War Committee. Crerar totally discounted the possibility of an invasion, arguing that even if Great Britain was to fall, and the Royal Navy and Air Force were to be stationed in Canada, anything more than an occasional raid was unlikely. Crerar stressed that the priority of the Canadian government should be to resist a German invasion of Britain. When asked by Power whether more troops should be sent overseas, Crerar responded that they should be sent over as soon as they could be equipped.<sup>13</sup>

Satisfied by Crerar's explanation, the War Committee relaxed its restriction on not despatching troops overseas prior to September 15. Ralston reported to the Committee on August 13 that the 2nd Division, with the exception of one infantry brigade, was scheduled to depart within a week for service overseas. Home defence would be the responsibility of the 3rd Division, while the 4th Division would train throughout the winter.<sup>14</sup>

The concern over home defence was further dissipated by the Ugdensburg agreement, which was signed on August 17 by Mackenzie King and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States. The agreement established the Permanent Joint Board on Defence [PJBD], a committee which was designed to report to the respective governments on matters which related to the defence of North America.<sup>15</sup> The formation of the PJBD guaranteed the Canadian government of American assistance in the event of an attack. When King returned to Ottawa he "found Ralston in highest possible spirits."<sup>16</sup> In discussing the PJBD with Ralston, King recorded that the Minister of National Defence "said it had given new life to them all at the Defence Department."<sup>17</sup>

Liberated from the insecurity which had characterized home defence considerations, the Defence Department began considering the Canadian Army Programme for 1941. Ralston introduced the programme to the War Committee on October 1.<sup>18</sup> One of the salient features of the proposal was a recommendation that a corps of three divisions be completed overseas, and a reserve army be formed for home defence. Although it was only Ralston's intention to familiarize his colleagues with the plan at this time, there were already indications of opposition. Angus Macdonald questioned the wisdom of enlarging the army programme, warning that "it was possible that too much stress might be placed upon increased contributions of infantry."<sup>19</sup> King agreed with Macdonald, claiming that the United Kingdom had always stressed the priority of Canada's contribution to the air force. It was agreed to defer discussion of the programme until Harry Crerar could meet with the Committee.

Crerar attended the War Committee meeting of October 9, and elaborated upon the proposed army programme. The Chief of the General Staff reported that it would be necessary to raise a 5th and 6th Division, as well as two armoured divisions. Part of the increase in the size of the army, Crerar maintained, was due to recommendations which had been made by the PJBD. Ralston pointed out that the three service staffs had attempted to reduce any duplication between them which might result in added expenditures, but none could be found. Ilsley, the Minister of Finance, requested that he be given an opportunity to review the departmental estimates before any decision was made. He warned the three Defence Ministers, however, that their combined estimates totalled 1.3 billion dollars, a figure which could not be supported by current national production.<sup>19</sup>

While Ralston impatiently awaited Ilsley's report, he made another

controversial proposal to the War Committee.<sup>20</sup> Compulsory military training had commenced on October 9, but the training period was for a duration of only thirty days. Ralston believed that it was impossible to train soldiers adequately in one month. Consequently, he recommended to the War Committee on October 23 that the training period be extended to four months. He explained that "it was felt that four months was the minimum time within which trainees could be taught the fundamentals of soldiering."<sup>21</sup> According to Ralston's suggestion, the current training sessions would be suspended for three months after the second thirty-day period had been completed, with the four month training plan commencing in March of 1941.

The most vigorous opposition to the extension of the training period came from Angus Macdonald. The Minister for Naval Services argued that a four month military training programme was of no use to the Air Force and Navy. In addition, he objected to the philosophy upon which the recommendation was based:

The emphasis upon producing infantry in large numbers was... entirely wrong. From present indications there would be nothing to do with these men when they were trained... Under present conditions and conditions as he foresaw them, the needs of the Navy and the Air Force would continue to require first attention. <sup>22</sup>

'Chubby' Power, while less vehement than Macdonald, also had some reservations about the plan. He hoped that a 30-day plan could be incorporated within the four month scheme which would allow individuals to be selected for the Navy, Air Force, or essential industry after one month's training. Ralston, who could see nothing wrong with Power's suggestion, agreed to consult the Chief of the General Staff regarding its implementation. On October 31, Ralston was able to report that it would be possible to develop a plan which

would allow trainees to leave the programme after one month for the other services or war industry.<sup>23</sup> In spite of Macdonald's earlier protestations, the War Committee gave its approval to the amended proposal.

Discussions resumed concerning the ramifications of the estimates of the Army, Navy and Air Force on October 24. Clifford Clark, who had continued on as Deputy Minister of Finance after Ralston had changed portfolios, told the War Committee that total government expenditure in Canada must be held to 45% of the national income.<sup>24</sup> He estimated that the federal budget would require approximately 2 billion dollars for 1941, with the provinces and municipalities expropriating an additional 1 billion dollars. According to Clark, this would represent 60% of the national income. To achieve the 45% ceiling, either expenditures would have to be reduced, or the nation's productive capacity would have to be drastically increased. Ralston strenuously objected to Clark's philosophy. The Army Programme, Ralston contended, was designed to conform to military necessities, not to the nation's pocketbook. When Ilesley had introduced the most recent budget, Ralston reminded the War Committee "it had been made abundantly clear that the only limit upon Canada's war effort was a physical one, that of men and materials."<sup>25</sup> The Committee once again agreed to defer discussion of the subject until a clearer estimate of the nation's fiscal capacity could be made.

The fate of Ralston's 1941 Army Programme was still undecided when the Minister of National Defence departed for England on November 19. Ralston was visiting the United Kingdom to ensure that the army programme corresponded to the needs of the British. With C.D. Howe also scheduled to embark on a similar mission, Mackenzie King was reluctant to have Ralston leave, commenting in his diary "He is the most helpful of all the colleagues on the war effort."<sup>26</sup>

One of Ralston's responsibilities while in England was to arrange



with the British War Office for the formation of the 1st Canadian Corps. The delay in the despatch of the 2nd Division had necessitated the incorporation of the 1st Division within the 7th British Corps.<sup>27</sup> With the arrival of the 2nd Division, it was now possible to form a distinctly Canadian Corps. The only problem which remained to be solved concerned the funding of the British non-divisional units which would continue to be a part of the new Corps.<sup>28</sup> Mackenzie King hoped that the negotiations could be completed quickly, enabling him to make a public announcement on Christmas Eve. Ralston, unfortunately, was suffering from a severe bout of sciatica, and was confined for much of his visit to the Royal Masonic Hospital at Hammersmith.

In spite of Ralston's illness, he was able to arrive at a satisfactory agreement with the British War Office. At the meeting during which the deal was consummated, Maurice Pope, Crerar's senior General Staff officer in London, recalls that:

Though he was hobbling about on crutches and in much pain, I never saw Mr. Ralston in better form. Here the old corporation lawyer was at his best. Lucidly he put the case reflected in our formula, with a suave persuasiveness I had never before seen in him.<sup>29</sup>

After the meeting had reached its successful conclusion, Pope handed Ralston a draft of a telegram to Mackenzie King which would enable the Prime Minister to proceed with his desired announcement. Ralston, in pain and anxious to return to the hospital for treatment, quickly authorized the despatch of the cable. By this time, Ralston's penchant for detail and his inability to delegate menial work had reached almost mythical proportions. Consequently the facile manner in which Ralston had approved the telegram to King amazed Harry Crerar, who jokingly remarked to Pope: "well, by God, this is the first time the Minister has ever passed a page of foolscap without amending it."<sup>30</sup>

Although his illness and the formation of the Canadian Corps occupied much of his time, Ralston's main concern continued to be the Army Programme. As he told the House of Commons following his return to Ottawa, the purpose of his United Kingdom visit was "first, to set out what we were doing; second, to see if our programme was in step with their own, and, third, to get their views on how our contribution might be made most effective."<sup>31</sup> To achieve his goal, Ralston had a number of conferences with top British officials. The Minister of National Defence had detailed briefing sessions with the three British service ministers and their staffs: Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War; and Captain Margesson, who replaced Eden as Secretary of State for War during Ralston's visit. In addition, Ralston had three discussions with Sir Allan Brooke, the commander-in-chief of the British home forces. Ralston was also received on four occasions by Winston Churchill, with whom Ralston exchanged views on the broader issues of the war.<sup>32</sup>

The information which was obtained from the various British officials led Ralston, Crerar and McNaughton to make some revisions to the Army Programme. Anxious to have the programme approved as quickly as possible, Ralston sent a lengthy telegram to Mackenzie King, describing the amended proposals. The programme now involved:

- 1) the despatch during the first quarter of 1941 of the balance of corps troops now mobilized in Canada for Canadian Corps of two divisions;
- 2) the despatch of the 3rd Division and complement of Corps troops whenever the equipment situation in Canada permits, hopefully by May 1941;
- 3) the despatch in the first half of 1941 of an Army Tank Brigade for employment with the Canadian Corps;
- 4) the despatch by early autumn of 1941 of the Canadian Armoured Division;
- 5) the despatch of the 4th Division by the summer of 1942.

The programme differed from the one which Ralston and Crerar had previously presented to the War Committee in three respects. The first change was the addition of the Tank Brigade. Ralston had become convinced of the merit of forming such a unit following discussions with Crerar and McNaughton. It was felt that the inclusion of an armoured formation in the Corps would accentuate the effectiveness of the infantry divisions. As well, the Tank Brigade could make use of the Mark III infantry tanks which were about to be produced by Canadian industry. The second alteration involved the postponement of the 4th Division's scheduled departure for England until 1942. The continued presence of the 4th Division in Canada led to the final revision, because it would no longer be necessary to raise a 6th Division for home defence in the 1941 fiscal year.

Ralston concluded the telegram to King with a plea for the swift authorization of the programme:

I trust these reasons will approve themselves to you. I would prefer to make my report to War Committee of Cabinet in person but on the other hand time is passing rapidly and there is so much to be done that I feel it is important that even days be not lost in making staff plans. I have therefore felt justified in authorizing Crerar to wire [Department officials in Ottawa] indicating that I would be making the recommendations above and instructing [them]... to make confidential study and plans in advance so that not a moment may be lost when approval has been given. <sup>34</sup>

Ralston's optimism regarding the War Committee's support for the revised Army Programme was misplaced. During his absence, Ralston's colleagues had become increasingly adverse to expanding the army. On December 18, MacKenzie King told the War Committee that he perceived the navy, air force and war industry to be more important than the army.<sup>35</sup> Macdonald went further than King, claiming that it would be absurd to increase the size of the army under current conditions. Ralston's position was attacked again at a meet-

ing on January 2, when expenditure controls were discussed. King precipitated a torrent of opposition to the Army Programme by repeating his opinion that emphasis should be placed on air and sea power. 'Chubby' Power agreed with King, suggesting that the British should be informed that the Canadian government would not raise any more army units. After Macdonald reiterated his denunciation of the utility of infantry, T.A. Creer questioned the need for the 5th and 6th Divisions.<sup>36</sup> Although no decisions were made prior to Ralston's return, the majority of the members of the War Committee had developed a deeper aversion to the Army Programme.

Ralston finally arrived back in Ottawa on January 24. The eight weeks which Ralston had spent overseas coincided with the German's aerial bombing of Britain. When Mackenzie King welcomed him home, Ralston confided to the Prime Minister that conditions in Britain were much worse than public perception would indicate, and "that he had come back, he would not say anglicized, but filled with more admiration for the people of England than ever, and feeling that everything possible should be done to help win."<sup>37</sup> Ralston believed that one way in which Canada could be of tremendous assistance to Britain was in the supply of manpower. Even though Germany was prepared to invade at any time, the British had been forced to send large quantities of troops to other theatres of war, such as North Africa.

Later that afternoon, Ralston gave a report of his findings in the United Kingdom to the War Committee. To a large extent, he repeated the sentiments which he had earlier expressed to King. According to the minutes of the meeting, Ralston did not equivocate in his advice to the Committee:

as regards the army, he had not realized before visiting the United Kingdom how great was the need for men. The position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces

[Sir Allan Brooke] had impressed this upon him. Shortage of manpower had resulted from requirements in the Mediterranean, and the heavy demands of war industry. His conclusions as to how Canada could best help in regard to the army had been embodied in the telegram which he had sent from London, outlining his recommended programme for the Canadian Army for 1941....

A Canadian Corps of three Divisions, with the army tank brigade and ancillary troops, would constitute appropriate and useful assistance, this year, for the defence of Britain. <sup>38</sup>

Ralston concluded his remarks by strongly urging the acceptance of the Army Programme.

The War Committee intensely scrutinized Ralston's proposed programme for two days, beginning on January 27. The first item to be discussed, while not part of the actual Army Programme, was considered to be essential by the General Staff. Although the extension of the compulsory training sessions to four months had been approved in principle on October 31, the General Staff had encountered some difficulty in adhering to the stipulation that the original thirty-day plan be retained for those who wished to volunteer for one of the other services. On January 27 Ralston outlined the General Staff's new scheme, which allowed individuals to volunteer for active duty in the navy or air force after they had trained for two months. It would also be possible for key war industry personnel to be withdrawn at the request of their employers after they had completed a mandatory two months of training. Ralston anticipated that, by calling up men of twenty-one years of age every month, 64,000 troops would be trained per year. <sup>39</sup>

The General Staff's revised proposal did not initially meet with general acceptance. Predictably, Angus Macdonald voiced his opposition to the entire philosophy of a four-month training programme, maintaining that the thirty-day plan was adequate. T.A.Crerar expressed the concern that

the production of supplies might be adversely affected, and suggested that it would be more advantageous to simply have a recruiting campaign when reinforcements were required. The direction of the debate was reversed, however, when Mackenzie King implied that he supported the new four-month scheme. Ralston then reassured the Committee that the trainees would only be used for home defence, where they would provide a competent reserve army which could replace the active formations which were sent overseas. The discussion was concluded when Harry Crerar, the Chief of the General Staff, told the meeting that the proposal was 'absolutely essential'.<sup>40</sup> The Committee approved the amended four-month training programme the following day.<sup>41</sup>

The War Committee could now concentrate exclusively upon the 1941 Army Programme. On January 27 Ilsley was able to announce that the Department of Finance had established a 1.3 billion dollar ceiling for war-related expenditures. Ilsley claimed that the 1.3 billion dollar limit would represent such a large proportion of the national income that Canadians would be forced to make sacrifices which they might be unwilling to accept. With the combined estimates of the three services and the Department of Munitions and Supply totalling 1.5 billion dollars, Ilsley insisted that it would be necessary to reduce the proposed expenditures by 200 million dollars.<sup>42</sup> The Committee agreed that Ilsley, Howe, Power, Macdonald and Ralston should hold a private meeting to attempt to arrive at a formula for decreasing their respective estimates, and report back to the full Committee the following afternoon.

Financial limitations were not the only restraining force being placed on the Army Programme. Before the meeting adjourned on January 27, Harry Crerar was requested to elaborate upon some of the reasons for expanding the Army. Angus Macdonald told Crerar that the General Staff was

placing too much emphasis on land troops. In response Crerar pointed out that Sir Allan Brooke, the British Chief of the Home Forces, had stressed how urgently men were needed to meet the possibility of a German invasion. The Tank Brigade was also a high priority, Crerar maintained, because it would be impossible to equip the Armoured Division prior to 1942.<sup>43</sup> Although it is unlikely Crerar and Ralston convinced the War Committee of the military necessity of the army programme, no one was prepared to offer any further objections. The only future obstacles which had to be overcome to secure the programme's adoption would be financially based.

When the War Committee reconvened the following day, Ilesley reported that no progress had been made at the meeting with the three defence ministers and Howe.<sup>44</sup> None of the ministers were prepared to reduce their estimates, proposing instead to ask Parliament for 1.3 billion dollars, and hope that various delays in the respective programmes would reduce the need for funding by 200 million dollars. King immediately objected to this procedure, claiming that excessive spending could disrupt national unity.<sup>45</sup>

Ralston attempted to explain his position by demonstrating that it was unlikely that all three service programmes would be completed within the next fiscal year. Therefore, they could be passed in their entirety, while only budgeting for the 1.3 billion dollar ceiling. In the event that the spending limit was exceeded, it could be covered by an anticipated increase in the national income. King continued to be unimpressed by this revolutionary departure from the established procedure of estimate approval. With the support of Ilesley, Crerar and Macdonald the Prime Minister insisted that the programmes be devised to fit within the expenditure limit. The War Committee then agreed that Ralston, Howe, Power, and Macdonald should meet once again to decide how the reductions should be allocated.

Ralston could not abide by the War Committee's decision. Convinced of the necessity of the entire Army Programme, Ralston told the Committee before it adjourned on January 28 that:

so far as the Army was concerned he did not propose to alter the programme which had been submitted, or eliminate any projects therein contained. By addenda to his draft estimates, he would, however, readjust total figures so as to bring about required reductions. 46

Surprisingly Ralston's decision to decrease the numbers involved in his estimates, without making any corresponding amendments to the Army Programme, did not create any undue concern on the part of the War Committee. On January 29, Ralston informed his colleagues that he had reduced the Army's anticipated expenditure by over 100 million dollars, subject to the reservation which he had expressed at the preceding meeting. Without the objection of a single member of the Committee being raised, the Army Programme finally received official authorization.<sup>47</sup>

The struggle for approval completed, Ralston was now faced with the responsibility of administering the programme. Ralston's task was to be continually complicated by the anti-army orientation of his colleagues. As demonstrated by their reluctance to allocate financial support to an expanded army, the majority of the War Committee were not committed to the maintenance of a large land force. With the political anathema of conscription always paramount in his mind, Mackenzie King sought to avoid the establishment of too many infantry units overseas, where the casualties were always the greatest. Consequently, Ralston was always at a disadvantage in attempting to procure increasingly scarce manpower resources for service within the Army.



## NOTES

### Chapter 3

1. Cabinet War Committee Records June 17, 1940.
2. Pickersgill, p.96.
3. Ibid. p. 100.
4. Chubby Power, Memoirs, pp.188-89.
5. Newspaper clipping, "Our Triumverate of Defence", Ralston Papers, vol. 55, [PAC].
6. Cabinet War Committee Records, June 20, 1940.
7. Ibid., June 27, 1940.
8. Ibid., July 4, 1940.
9. The 4th Division was mobilized at the War Committee meeting of July 4, although Ralston revealed that there would not be enough artillery to equip four divisions until 1943.
10. Cabinet War Committee Records, July 9, 1940.
11. Ibid., July 15, 1940.
12. Most of the 2nd Division arrived in England during the first week of September. See: Swettenham, McNaughton, vol. 2, p.154.
13. Cabinet War Committee Records, July 26, 1940.
14. Ibid., August 13, 1940.
15. Ibid., August 20, 1940.
16. Pickersgill, p.137.
17. Ibid.
18. Cabinet War Committee Records, October 1, 1940.
19. Ibid., October 9, 1940.
20. On October 10, and again on October 23, Ralston emphasized to the War Committee the importance of obtaining immediate approval for the Army Programme.

21. Cabinet War Committee Records October 23, 1940.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., October 31, 1940.
24. Ibid., October 24, 1940.
25. Ibid.
26. Pickersgill, p.153.
27. Although the 7th British Corps was also comprised of units from Great Britain and New Zealand, McNaughton was still made Corps Commander.
28. Maurice A. Pope, Soldiers and Politicians, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p.155.
29. Ibid., p. 157.
30. Ibid.
31. Debates, Canadian House of Commons, March 11, 1941, p.1421.
32. Ibid., pp.1421-22.
33. Telegram, Ralston to King, January 5, 1941, King Papers. J1 Vol. 314, [PAC].
34. Ibid.
35. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 18, 1940.
36. Ibid., January 2, 1941.
37. Pickersgill, pp.156-57.
38. Cabinet War Committee Records, January 24, 1941.
39. Cabinet War Committee Records, January 27, 1941.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., January 28, 1941.
42. Ibid., January 27, 1941.
43. Ibid.

44. The individual department's estimates were as follows:  
Army, 766 million; Navy, 191 million; Air Force, 452 million; and  
Munitions and Supply, 91 million. See: Cabinet War Committee Records,  
January 28, 1941.

45. Cabinet War Committee Records. January 28, 1941.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., January 29, 1941.

## Chapter IV

### The Politics of Principle

The approval of the army programme represented only a temporary success for Ralston. From the time of the programme's inception, Ralston was hampered in its administration by declining voluntary enlistment and a lack of support from his fellow War Committee members. The problem was complicated by recurring demands from the General Staff for further expansion of the Army at home and overseas. The Conservative opposition was very critical of what it perceived to be the government's lack of commitment to the Army, and eventually began to press for the introduction of conscription for service overseas. A series of events, beginning with a recruiting shortage in April 1941, caused Ralston to become increasingly distressed over the low priority which King allocated to the Army within the context of the total war effort. By July 1942, Ralston's concern over the Prime Minister's attitude towards the Army had escalated to the point where he believed that he could no longer serve in the King government. The deterioration of the relationship between King and Ralston was representative of a profound difference in the character of the two men. King was politically astute, and would delay and compromise rather than confront a contentious issue. Conversely, Ralston was decisive with a decided preference for quick action over vacillation. As Mackenzie King was well aware, Ralston had not returned to public life in 1939 to refine the practice of conciliation.

The first major indication that the Army was experiencing diffi-

culty in fulfilling its recruiting requirements came at a War Committee meeting in April 1941. Ralston told the Committee that over the preceding three months a total deficiency of 6,900 men had developed. To offset the problem, Ralston suggested that graduates from the compulsory training programme be retained for home defence, thus releasing volunteers from such duties for overseas service.<sup>1</sup> Recruiting had fallen behind, Ralston explained, largely because of the increased demand for personnel which was created by the new Army Programme.<sup>2</sup> The General Staff had anticipated that the increased need for reinforcements would be met by members of the Reserve Army volunteering for active service. Ralston admitted, however, that the response of the reserve units had not met expectations. Ironically, only the French-Canadian units had produced a sufficient number of reinforcements.<sup>3</sup> Under the circumstances, the War Committee agreed to Ralston's proposal that individuals trained under the National Resources Mobilization Act be compelled to serve in home defence units.

Although Ralston was successful in having his recommendation adopted, a rather ominous discussion developed at the meeting. In commenting upon the shortage of recruits, Ralston noted that: "conscription for overseas service was impossible from the point of view of national unity; otherwise it might be the proper policy to meet the whole situation."<sup>4</sup> Despite Ralston's recognition that conscription was 'impossible', Mackenzie King became extremely agitated, telling the Committee that conscription "would not only create divisions in the country, but it would in the Government; that there would have to be another Government if that step were taken; that the people had returned us with the understanding that there would be no conscription for overseas."<sup>5</sup> King, who was virtually paranoid about

the conscription issue, distrusted heavy demands on the nation's supply of manpower. As King recorded in his diary on April 23. "I have felt from the start that Ralston was allowing his men to have us take on more than we really should have in the Army, having regard to what we are doing in the air and the Navy."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the policy of conscripting NRMA men for home defence, the War Committee decided to launch a national recruiting campaign.<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie King was strongly in favour of such an appeal being made, hoping that it would lessen demands for more extreme measures.<sup>8</sup> Ralston was also supportive of the plan to begin an intense solicitation for army recruits. The campaign which was to commence on May 11 was confidently announced by Ralston in the House of Commons:

I feel it is part of the day's work of the Department of National Defence to get these men. It is part of the day's work to get these men in, have them realize their duty and realize the need. And I have little doubt that we will be successful, and that the number of men required will be obtained.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of Ralston's optimism, it was not to prove to be an easy task to reach the appeal's goal of approximately 30,000 volunteers.

Although all of Ralston's recommendations for resolving the Army's recruitment shortage had adhered to the government's policy of voluntary enlistment for overseas service, Mackenzie King was becoming increasingly uneasy. On April 30 and May 9 the Prime Minister convened meetings of the War Committee in an effort to solidify the government's position on obtaining recruits for the army. King used the opportunity to clearly state his belief that the production of weaponry should take precedence over 'mere numbers' of troops.<sup>10</sup> King, usually noted for his penchant to equivocate, was explicit in his opposition to conscription:

The present government could have no thought of conscription for overseas service under any circumstances. There should be no misunderstanding on that score. The compelling reasons for this stand, on the part of the government were the maintenance of unity within Canada, and the eventual need of men on this continent.<sup>11</sup>

Ralston's response to King was logical and utilitarian. He acknowledged that the demands of war industry had inhibited recruiting. The Minister of National Defence pointed out, however, that there were fewer men now engaged in active service than there were at the same point during World War I. While on March 31, 1916 there had been 275,000 active volunteers, there were now only 254,000 such men.<sup>12</sup> Given the increase in the nation's population, Ralston reasoned that it should still be possible to raise more troops. Although Ralston differed with King on the priority that should be given to the Army in the war effort, the two were not seriously at odds over conscription. Ralston told the Committee on May 9:

that he was equally opposed to conscription for overseas service, at present, but felt that it would be a mistake to say now that such a policy would never be necessary under any possible circumstances. The government had consistently adopted the attitude that they would meet new situations as they arose. Personally he would not wish to commit himself, on this subject for all time... in any event there was now no need for compulsion to obtain all the men needed for overseas service. Canada had not yet scratched the surface of her supply of manpower as was shown by a comparison of numbers of men raised for service abroad during the last war.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously Ralston was not advocating the use of conscription to meet the existing manpower needs of the Army. He was, however, unwilling to forever dismiss compulsion as a possible method of reacting to future emergencies.

Any remaining doubts that Mackenzie King may have had about Ralston's commitment to the policy of voluntary enlistment should have

been erased by the remarks of the Minister of National Defence in the House of Commons on May 12. Herbert Bruce, a Toronto Conservative, precipitated the outburst from Ralston by suggesting that voluntary recruitment was not effective and that "selective compulsory enlistment is the only fair and efficient way to meet the complex needs of Canada."<sup>14</sup> Ralston immediately responded to Bruce by emphasizing the need to maintain national unity :

I say to my hon. friend in all seriousness that at this time there is no need of advocating a system such as he suggests. I am advised that there are men in this country and plenty of them to fill all our requirements, with regard to the navy, the army, the air force and industrial production.... I point out to him that this country in 1917 was seared, was divided, by the very issue which he mentions. We have unity in this country, and I ask my hon. friend to try to help us preserve it, rather than attempting to drive a wedge of disunion into a war effort of which I think Canada ought well to be proud. <sup>15</sup>

Political partisanship aside, Ralston's comments reflected a sincere desire to make the system of voluntary enlistment work.

If anything, Ralston was becoming somewhat overly zealous in his attempt to procure the recruits voluntarily. On May 20, Ralston told the War Committee that recruiting had been hindered because the Canadian forces had not yet been actively engaged. "It was unfortunately true", Ralston lamented, but, "it would be of great assistance if opportunity were to be offered for Canadians to meet the enemy, even in small scale operations."<sup>16</sup>

Ralston warned that the lack of activity that the Army was experiencing in England was causing a serious deterioration of morale. T. A. Crerar and Power agreed with Ralston arguing that the success of the recruiting campaign was contingent upon some form of action overseas.

The proposal did not receive the endorsement of King who maintained that it was wrong to 'sacrifice life to arouse public sentiment'.<sup>17</sup> The Prime Minister reminded the Committee that the British High Command was responsible for the employment of Canadian troops. If the British would consent to the



use of Canadian troops outside of the United Kingdom, King conceded that he would not stand in the way. Consequently, it was decided to send a telegram to the British government which stated that the Canadian government was prepared to have the 3rd Division serve outside of the United Kingdom, if the War Office deemed such a move advisable.<sup>18</sup> The British, however, preferred to have the 3rd Division arrive in England as scheduled. As a result the recruiting campaign had to proceed without the benefit of any spectacular publicity from overseas.

The appeal for additional volunteers was not progressing as well as Ralston had hoped. On June 3, he reported to the War Committee that only 20% of the goal of 32,434 men had thus far been obtained.<sup>19</sup> It was decided that all of the Members of the House should work together with their district committees in an effort to stimulate the recruiting process.

In spite of the recruiting problems, Ralston advised that the War Committee should proceed with a further expansion of the Army. On June 5, Ralston requested that authority be given for the mobilization of a 5th Division. The new division was required to ensure that there would be two full divisions left in Canada following the despatch of the 3rd Division and the Armoured Division.<sup>20</sup> 'Chubby' Power supported Ralston's proposal, pointing out that there was more manpower available than had originally been anticipated. Initially reticent about Ralston's Army Programme, Power was now convinced that an army of five infantry divisions, an armoured division and a tank brigade was consistent with the nation's resources. The Chief of the General Staff, Harry Crerar, told the Committee that because there were already eight infantry battalions available for the new division, only 8,000 additional men would be required.

Mackenzie King was not convinced. The Prime Minister feared that the mobilization of another division could lead to conscription or would create too great a strain on the economy. The navy, air force, and war industry, King maintained, were still the first priorities. T.A. Crerar and Lapointe agreed with King, arguing that equipment was far more important than a large army. The increased emphasis upon the infantry remained a mystery to Angus Macdonald, who continued to advocate the production of more ships and airplanes. Although Harry Crerar demonstrated that only one out of every ten Canadian men between the ages of 19 and 45 was currently in one of the services, the authorization for the 5th Division was deferred for further consideration.<sup>21</sup>

Mackenzie King was becoming increasingly distressed over the sluggish results of the recruiting campaign and the pressure to expand the army. On June 10, the Prime Minister met privately with Macdonald and Ralston to attempt to moderate the demands of the Defence Department. As was his custom King began the discussion by threatening to resign, and advising either Ralston or Macdonald to prepare to become his successor. King recorded in his diary that he explained to his two Defence Ministers:

That I thought there was such a difference growing up between the Defence Department and the Civil Government in matters of policy generally that I could not longer hold the two together. That I could see there was a growing pressure for conscription. That I would be pleased to be out of the fight altogether before that battle came; also that I could not countenance the country being committed to projects it was incapable of carrying out....I also thought [my experience] had given me a certain degree of political wisdom and of judgment but, when I saw that judgment being put to one side and matters pressed from other angles, I could not think of continuing to be put in a false position.<sup>22</sup>

After Ralston and Macdonald had given King the expected reassurance of the indispensability of his leadership, the Prime Minister went on the offensive. King emphasized that his resignation would cause civil war and

a total disruption of the war effort. The meeting, according to the Prime Minister, was a success:

I could see they both realized just where the Government was likely to be if either of them were left to take responsibility of leadership, and Macdonald said I was quite right in not having Canada take on things she could not do. I could see clearly that the mischief is in the Defence Department dealing so exclusively with Government matters. <sup>23</sup>

King's perception aside, there is no evidence to suggest that Ralston was dissuaded from his commitment to the army as a result of the meeting.

While King and the majority of the members of the War Committee were being critical of Ralston for being too receptive to demands for the Army's expansion, the Conservatives began to denounce him for not advocating more extreme measures. In the House of Commons on June 13, Herbert Bruce quoted the letter that Ralston had written to the Halifax Chronicle in 1917, in which he had endorsed the policy of conscription. Bruce asked Ralston to explain whether "he considers the situation today less critical than it was in December, 1917."<sup>24</sup>

Ralston responded to Bruce by emphasizing a number of differences between 1917 and 1941. In December of 1917, there had been numerous recruiting drives and tens of thousands of casualties. Reinforcements had been in such short supply that the fifth division was dismantled. In June of 1941, however, there had been only about 700 casualties, the Army had not yet seen action, and they were in the midst of their first recruiting campaign. In addition, Ralston's personal position was considerably different. When he had written the telegram in 1917, Ralston was in the emotional position of a battalion commander who had witnessed the decimation of his troops at Passchendaele. Ralston concluded his comparison

of the conflicting circumstances by acknowledging the damage that conscription had done to national unity:

The condition then and the condition now cannot be compared. We are at this time engaged in the first intensive campaign for recruits since this war began - the very first. And I ask my hon. friend, in all seriousness as a citizen of Canada: why raise this question of conscription at this time? He knows that in 1917 it split Canada from top to bottom. <sup>25</sup>

Ralston, whatever his attachment to the Army, was well aware of the many liabilities of conscription.

The easiest method for Ralston to relieve the pressure which he was experiencing from his Cabinet colleagues on one side, and the Tories on the other, was to have the recruiting campaign achieve its desired result. The situation was partially ameliorated on June 22 when the Cabinet was advised that Germany had attacked Russia. The new German offensive virtually erased the possibility of an invasion of Britain, thus easing the Canadian position. Coincidentally, the recruiting drive began to gather momentum. On June 24 Ralston was able to inform the War Committee that, although only 53% of the total quota had been attained, "there was no need to be discouraged as to the campaign's ultimate outcome."<sup>26</sup> Ralston's optimism was proven to be justified when, on July 15, he announced to the Committee that the goal of 32,000 men had been exceeded. <sup>27</sup>

With the recruiting appeal successfully completed, Ralston immediately resumed his request for the mobilization of an additional infantry division. Ralston told the War Committee that, in the time that had elapsed since his initial recommendation on June 5, the Armoured Division had received the designation of the 5th (Armoured) Division. A new division, therefore, would become known as the 6th Division. The 6th Division, Ralston reiterated, would be essential for home defence after the 3rd Divi-

sion and the 5th (Armoured) Division were despatched overseas. Because of existing infantry battalions, it would only be necessary to obtain 5,400 additional men to form the new division. The recruits, whose deployment was to be restricted to Canadian soil, could be drawn from the compulsory training programme. Mackenzie King continued to be reluctant to approve of any further expansion of the army. He told Ralston and the Committee that air superiority was preferable to a large army. Ever fearful of the possibility of conscription, King succeeded in having a decision about the division once again deferred.<sup>28</sup>

The War Committee met to resolve the issue of the mobilization of the 6th Division on July 29. After Ralston had repeated his reasons for recommending the formation of the Division, he pointed out that a report by the Adjutant-General indicated that there were 700,000 men between 19 and 45 years of age who were still available for the services. According to Ralston: "this meant that, after allowing for the requirements of the Navy and the Air Force, there was sufficient manpower available in Canada to permit of the mobilization of eight divisions (six overseas and two Home Defence) and their maintenance for a period of five years from December 31, 1942."<sup>29</sup> While the current proposal only involved six divisions, Ralston hinted that the eventual deployment of the 4th Division overseas would necessitate a 7th Division for Home Defence. It was appropriate to emphasize the need for a large army within the war effort, Ralston argued, because the German Army had 250 divisions, compared to Britain's 60.

Mackenzie King remained dubious. The Prime Minister continued to believe that the army should be a low priority in comparison the navy, air force and war industry. Unfortunately for King, he could not oppose

the 6th Division without reneging on previous commitments. It had already been confirmed that the 3rd and 5th Divisions were to serve in the United Kingdom, and an arrangement with the PJBD required Canada to provide two divisions for home defence. Consequently King reluctantly agreed to have the 6th Division mobilized. With the exception of Power, the remaining members of the War Committee shared King's reservations about an expanded army. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Committee's approval for the 6th Division was subject to the condition that no further increases be made by the army.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly after the decision to proceed with the 6th Division, Mackenzie King embarked upon his first visit to the United Kingdom since the outbreak of the war. While in England, King had several conversations with both Churchill and McNaughton. The Canadian Prime Minister was pleased to learn that Churchill did not believe that conscription would be necessary in Canada.<sup>31</sup> King's spirits were further elevated when McNaughton indicated that: "this was a war of production of supplies and that what we should do in Canada is to get a complete survey of our labour and have it proportioned in the way that would be of greatest service."<sup>32</sup>

King was somewhat alarmed, however, at the antipathy that McNaughton possessed for Ralston. On August 28, King asked the Commander of the Canadian Corps whether a visit from Ralston would be beneficial. King noted McNaughton's response in his diary:

You have asked me a straight question and I will give you a straight answer. I do not think it would... Ralston took far too much in the way of details into his own hand. That they all found him rather difficult. That he wanted to do too much, and had got out of his own Ministerial sphere into matters beyond it.<sup>33</sup>

King, who 'could see that there was real feeling there', resolved to attempt

to dissuade Ralston from venturing overseas.<sup>34</sup>

Upon his return to Ottawa, King gave the War Committee a report of his visit. He impressed upon the Committee Churchill's comment that there was no reason to introduce conscription in Canada. As well, King used Churchill's remarks to question the emphasis upon a large Canadian Army, claiming that the Prime Minister of Britain believed that "the most effective contribution which could be made by Canada was in the field of supply and in the production of the urgently needed implements of war."<sup>35</sup> Ironically King could not foresee that Churchill would become one of the most influential advocates of the Army's next expansion.

King had not forgotten McNaughton's hostility regarding the prospect of a visit from Ralston. On September 10, King requested that Cabinet ministers limit their trips to the United Kingdom, under the pretense that the public should not receive the impression that Britain was directing the Canadian war effort.<sup>36</sup> The Prime Minister admitted to his diary, however, that "I was really trying to persuade Ralston not to go over at present."<sup>37</sup> Ralston, oblivious to the motivation behind King's edict, insisted that it was essential that he proceed to England. It was Ralston's intention to confer with McNaughton about the role of the Canadian Corps and the most effective deployment of the 4th Division.<sup>38</sup> Although King made an earnest attempt to at least have him delay the trip, Ralston was adamant that he depart before the weather deteriorated.

There is no evidence to suggest that Ralston's visit to England in early October caused any undue friction to develop with McNaughton. The only indication of any disagreement came at a meeting between Ralston,

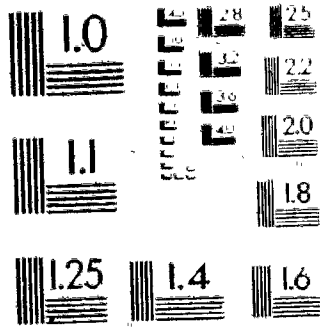
McNaughton and Harry Crerar. Crerar suggested to McNaughton that it might be possible to have the Canadian Corps, either in whole or in part, actively engaged in the Middle East. McNaughton responded that the Corps should remain in England for the winter, and if it was to participate in an operation, it should do so as a full Corps.<sup>39</sup> Although the question of splitting the Army would become more contentious as the war progressed, Ralston did not express any dissatisfaction with McNaughton's position in 1941. The most ominous occurrence in relationship to Ralston's difficulty with McNaughton came after Ralston had returned to Ottawa. When reporting upon his visit, Ralston told the War Committee that McNaughton's health was declining, making it advisable to begin considering a possible successor for the Commander of the Canadian Corps.<sup>40</sup>

The most significant aspect of Ralston's 1941 trip to the United Kingdom involved a discussion with the British Secretary of State for War, Captain Margesson. Ralston had made clear to Margesson that the Canadian government considered Canadian troops to be available for service wherever and whenever the British War Office deemed it appropriate. Margesson was able to convince Ralston that, until the military situation was seriously altered, the optimum role for the Canadian units was to remain in Britain. Although the Canadians were to continue to serve a defensive function, Margesson suggested that the provision of an additional armoured division would represent 'a most helpful contribution'.<sup>41</sup> Ralston, who had favoured the conversion of the 4th Division to an armoured formation prior to his departure overseas, returned to Canada determined to have the Division transformed and despatched.

Unfortunately for Ralston and the Liberal government, recruiting was once again failing to meet requirements. In the four months since the recruiting drive, only 24,000 men out of a total quota of 37,000 actually enlisted.<sup>42</sup> Immediately after his return from England, Ralston attempted to explain to Parliament the reasons for the shortages in recruits. The Mini-



2 OF / DE 2



ster of National Defence told the House that enlistments for the Army had been adversely affected by the expansion of the air training plan and war industry. As well, Ralston emphasized that there existed a mistaken impression throughout the country that additional men were not necessary because there had been no casualties. Ralston vowed that he would overcome the recruiting difficulties, explaining to the House:

Here is the situation as I see it. The government of Canada, pledged to a full-out war effort, has authorized the mobilization of the first division, the second, third, fourth, and fifth armoured division, and the brigade groups of a sixth division... The first duty we have is to keep up and maintain these formations... It is a pledge given by the government of Canada in the name of the people of Canada themselves who have the obligation to see to it that the men in these units are backed up to the limit and that the Canadian Army which has been authorized is kept strong and reinforced. <sup>43</sup>

The deficiency in recruiting was accompanied by renewed pressure for conscription. As early as October 9, Mackenzie King had become alarmed by the frequency with which editorials endorsing conscription were appearing in the Globe and Mail, the Montreal Gazette, the Financial Post and Maclean's. King's paranoia caused him to suspect a conspiracy, believing "that these papers represent the interests that have been after me from the start, and are the ones pressing for conscription."<sup>44</sup> By November 5 King's concern about conscription had increased to such a level that he assembled the Liberal caucus to ensure its support for the policy of voluntary enlistment. At the meeting, King threatened to either call an election or have a plebiscite if he detected that his followers were prepared to support compulsory overseas service. Not a single member of the caucus voiced any reservation concerning the government's manpower policy, indicating to King that, temporarily at least, the party was united.<sup>45</sup>

King's satisfaction with caucus solidarity was quickly dissipated by Arthur Meighen's sudden return as the leader of the Conservatives. Meighen had accepted the Tory leadership on November 12, and issued a manifesto the following day which called for the formation of a national government and for the introduction of conscription. King, intensely distraught by the resurrection of his arch rival, summoned the caucus for an emergency session. The Prime Minister recorded in his diary that he

spoke of the situation being exactly 1917 over again. We were confronted by the same leader, being opposed by the same forces. The issue, National Government and conscription - the same motives behind; control of financial interests, the same. The effort would be to destroy me as it had been to destroy Sir Wilfrid .... How I had seen Sir Wilfrid's colleagues, one by one, leave him to join forces opposed to him. 46

Although he was pleased by the caucus' uniform denunciation of Meighen, King lived in constant fear that he was destined to suffer Wilfrid Laurier's fate.

It was within this explosive environment that Ralston attempted to obtain approval for a further expansion of the Army. In spite of the recruiting deficit, Ralston had become convinced of the merit of converting the 4th Division into an armoured division and despatching it overseas. Undeterred by the War Committee's previous decision to make no more commitments to send troops to Britain, Ralston included the proposal for the revised role of the 4th Division in the 1942-43 army programme. Introduced to the War Committee on November 19, the army programme was the cause of continuous controversy until early in 1942.

Before the War Committee began serious consideration of Ralston's new programme, Ernest Lapointe, who had been hampered by poor health for some time, passed away. The loss of Lapointe forced King to attempt to find a new French-Canadian lieutenant. It took the Prime Minister only three days to

decide upon Louis St. Laurent, a corporate lawyer from Montreal, as Lapointe's successor. St. Laurent accepted Lapointe's Justice portfolio and soon became an influential member of the War Committee.

The conflict over the army programme gathered momentum when the War Committee began a detailed examination of Ralston's proposal on December 2. To demonstrate that the country could provide the manpower for an additional division, Ralston referred to a report of the Labour Supply Investigation Committee. The report indicated that over 600,000 men could still be provided for the armed forces, if changes were made to existing labour policies, such as the introduction of a large number of women into the work force.<sup>47</sup> The combined recruiting requirements of the three services as of March 31, 1943 would be 214,000.<sup>48</sup> Ralston reassured his colleagues that the army programme was designed with the understanding that existing and future formations could be maintained by voluntary enlistment.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the War Committee members were skeptical. Howe argued that no further formations should be agreed to when it was difficult to procure enough recruits for previously authorized units. T.A. Crerar agreed, commenting that the provision of various vital supplies to the United Kingdom should take precedence. The critical objection was raised by King, who asked whether the Department of National Defence could guarantee that the necessary recruits could be obtained voluntarily. Ralston responded that while it was not possible to offer such an assurance, every effort was being made to have the voluntary system work. Ralston reminded the Committee, however, that he believed: "that need rather than a policy of no conscription should be the criterion upon which judgment should be based."<sup>50</sup>

The discussion of the army programme was resumed the following day.

The new Chief of the General Staff, Kenneth Stuart, attended the meeting to respond to the Committee's objections to the programme. Stuart had become the Chief of the General Staff after Harry Crerar had been appointed the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Division. Stuart was the quintessential bureaucrat, possessing a well-refined ability to tell his superiors what they wished to hear.<sup>51</sup> Mackenzie King conducted the interrogation of Stuart, asking if the army programme would necessitate conscription and whether there would be any further requests to expand the Army. Stuart replied that the programme was designed to comply with the policy of voluntary recruiting. The additional manpower requirements were not large enough to influence the issue of conscription. Stuart concluded by assuring King that the new programme represented the 'visible ceiling' in the expansion of the Canadian Army.<sup>52</sup> King was considerably appeased by Stuart's promises, noting in his diary that "these statements from the Chief of Staff impressed me very much and helped to meet the difficulty that has been the only real one which presents itself, namely that of resorting to conscription to get numbers required."<sup>53</sup> In spite of King's admiration for Stuart, consideration of the army programme was referred to the full Cabinet.

Before the Cabinet could meet to discuss the programme, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, bringing the Americans into the war. With the United States as a formally declared ally, Mackenzie King believed that Britain's dependence upon Canadian troops should decrease.<sup>54</sup> As well, the entry of Japan into the conflict as an enemy caused some concern about the defence of the Pacific coast. Although Stuart and Ralston were confident that existing army formations could adequately defend Canada, King continued to be dubious.<sup>55</sup> King felt that, with the altered circumstances, home defence should take priority over the despatch of units overseas. While the American involvement in the war was a prerequisite for an Allied victory, it created an increased dichotomy of opinion between King and Ralston over the army programme.

The Cabinet was of minimal assistance in reconciling matters. During the three meetings which were held on December 9, 10 and 16, Ralston tenaciously adhered to the policy that he had advocated to the War Committee. The army programme, Ralston maintained, did not exceed the country's manpower capacity. If, however, the recruits could not be obtained voluntarily, conscription should be considered to be a viable option.<sup>56</sup> King remained equally reluctant to authorize a programme which could lead to conscription. At the meeting on December 16, King was able to delay a direct confrontation by suggesting that no decision be made until a report was available from the newly constituted Cabinet Manpower Committee which was chaired by J. T. Thorson, the Minister of National War Services.<sup>57</sup>

Although King was relieved that a rupture of Cabinet solidarity had been temporarily averted, he was becoming increasingly concerned about Ralston's intransigence. The Prime Minister noted his feelings in his diary on December 16:

Ralston...is becoming very rigid and I find it difficult, except because of commitments he has already made to some in the [Defence] Department, to understand his attitude. It lacks vision and statesmanship altogether. I do not forget that he is thoroughly sincere in believing that the war can only be won across the ocean and that it will be the Army that will be looked to in the end. The mistake he makes is that another division, or two from Canada will not compensate for what will be lost in the more effective actions in other directions.<sup>58</sup>

The conflict between King and Ralston was somewhat ameliorated on December 18. The preceding day the Manitoba legislature had passed a resolution which requested that the federal government introduce conscription. King, who had been considering the possibility of a plebiscite on conscription, decided that the Manitoba resolution justified an appeal to the nation, King believed that the plebiscite would serve two functions.

First, it would deprive the Tories of an issue when Parliament reassembled in January. Second, it would ease the tension with Ralston. King told Ralston on December 18 that the Defence Minister could proceed with orders for the army programme, although it would remain to be determined whether the units would serve in Canada or overseas. King and Ralston agreed that the plebiscite could be approached from the perspective that they considered conscription to be unnecessary and inadvisable, but, if an emergency arose, it would be beneficial to have the government released from its pledge of no conscription for service overseas.<sup>59</sup>

Ralston's assertion that Britain continued to require additional manpower from the Canadian Army was strengthened during a visit by Winston Churchill to Canada at the end of December. Churchill had come to North America primarily to discuss strategic arrangements with Franklin Roosevelt and various American officials. After completing his business in Washington Churchill came to Ottawa to attend a meeting of the War Committee. Before the meeting, King and Churchill had an opportunity to discuss the military situation in Britain. Much to King's dismay, Churchill indicated that, American assistance notwithstanding, further Canadian troops would be very helpful.<sup>60</sup>

The optimism which King had once possessed regarding Churchill's attitude towards Canadian military support was further eroded at the War Committee meeting on December 29. Confident that he had been accurate in his appraisal of the situation, Ralston remarked to the Prime Minister of Great Britain that:

The Army Programme, for the next year, was now under consideration. Its recommendations included the conversion of an infantry division and its despatch to Britain as a

second armoured division. The U.K. Secretary of State for War had, on an earlier occasion, expressed to him the view that a second armoured division would constitute, on the part of Canada, the most desirable form of additional army contribution. Had Mr. Churchill any comment to make? <sup>61</sup>

Churchill did not equivocate in his response. He told the War Committee that armoured divisions represented the top priority of the army, and: "if Canada were to send another armoured division to Britain, it would certainly be most welcome and would constitute a most valuable addition to forces now there."<sup>62</sup> The following day King promised Churchill that Canada would provide Britain with an additional armoured division.<sup>63</sup>

King's informal commitment to Churchill was confirmed by the Cabinet on January 5 when the army programme was approved. King emphasized that the overseas Army should now be regarded as complete. Ralston, while expressing the hope that it would not prove necessary to undertake any further expansion, regretted that it would be impossible to make such a guarantee. It was agreed to announce that the government believed that the programme could be administered without resorting to conscription. If, however, voluntary enlistment did not provide a sufficient number of recruits, Ralston could reserve his right to consider 'further measures'.<sup>64</sup> The Cabinet, therefore, had decided to accept the army programme, while postponing the debate on conscription. Equanimity had temporarily been restored.

At this point in the war, Ralston's philosophy was quite simple. The government should mobilize and despatch overseas as large an army as the nation's manpower capacity would permit. As he had indicated in the House on November 5, it was the moral obligation of the government to reinforce and maintain every unit that was authorized.<sup>65</sup> Ralston had been reluctant to proceed with his proposed army programme for 1942-43 under the condition that voluntary enlistment would be the only method for obtaining



recruits, because he feared that it might result in a reinforcement shortage. The Minister of National Defence was not, however, advocating conscription. Ralston told Mackenzie King on January 6 that "he was prepared to take his stand against conscription on the score that it would divide the country and might impair our war effort in that way. He added that he had already stated that twice and thought he was the only member of the cabinet who said publicly a word to that effect."<sup>66</sup> His opposition to conscription notwithstanding, Ralston's top priority was to ensure that he was able to reinforce the divisions which he had been responsible for forming.

The next six months were to prove to be very trying for Ralston. The plebiscite to release the government from its pledge not to introduce conscription for overseas service, which Mackenzie King had suggested as a means of reducing tension within the cabinet, was publicly announced in the Speech from the Throne on January 22. The plebiscite, to be held on April 27, asked the Canadian electorate: "Are you in favour of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service?"<sup>67</sup> The results of the plebiscite would not bind the government to a particular course of action but, if a favourable verdict was received, the government would be free to implement whatever manpower policy it deemed appropriate. Ralston began to suspect that the plebiscite was simply a means of deflecting criticism from the government and would not be used to help ensure the continuity of the war effort.

In an effort to better understand the ramifications of the plebiscite, Ralston and Angus Macdonald met with Mackenzie King on January 31.

Ralston and Macdonald were concerned that, even if the plebiscite passed, King would refuse to implement conscription if the voluntary system of recruiting failed to produce the required numbers of men. King's response to his two Defence Ministers was a classical example of circumlocution:

I said I thought...we would have to take the situation, to which an attempted enforcement of conscription would give rise, into account, as well as results which would be obtained from its enforcement. In other words, that the effect of every act would have to be considered in relation to the totality of opinion. 68

Not surprisingly, Ralston and Macdonald were not overly reassured by the Prime Minister's reply.

Before the plebiscite was held, the composition of the Canadian Army was once again revised. On March 6, General McNaughton issued a report to the War Committee. McNaughton indicated that, with the addition of the armoured division and tank brigade provided for in the Army Programme, it would now be possible to form an Army headquarters of the two Corps. According to McNaughton:

When the present programme was complete, the Canadian Army overseas would constitute a self-contained, well-balanced force, suitable for its present role in the defence of the United Kingdom, and for future employment on the Continent. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff [Brooke] was in full agreement with development on these lines. General Brooke agreed that, in view of their present and prospective roles, the Canadians should be kept together; at the same time the possibility of separate employment of Canadian formations, if and when required, had not been excluded. 69

McNaughton emphasized that the role of the Canadian army would continue to be to defend the United Kingdom against the threat of an invasion. On March 11, the proposal to form an Army headquarters, comprised of two corps, one with three infantry divisions and two tank brigades, and the other with two armoured divisions, was approved by the War Committee. 70

The domestic Army underwent a more fundamental transition. The success which Japan was enjoying in the Far East necessitated the expansion of home defence. The mobilization of home defence units was not very controversial, because the recruits could be obtained through the compulsory training programme. With the approaching despatch of the 4th Armoured Division overseas, it was intended that the 6th Division serve as its replacement on the Atlantic coast. On March 20, Ralston recommended that authority be given for the mobilization of the 7th and 8th Divisions to protect the Pacific coast. The War Committee gave its approval without a single objection being recorded.<sup>71</sup>

When the plebiscite was held on April 27, the Army had virtually reached its maximum level of expansion. The results of the plebiscite were quite decisive, with sixty-three percent of the electorate voting to release the government from its pledge of not introducing conscription for overseas service. In Quebec, however, the verdict was reversed. While over 82% of eligible Ontarians issued an affirmative response to the plebiscite, 73% of those voting in Quebec replied in the negative.<sup>72</sup> With the opposition to conscription concentrated both geographically and racially, it was inevitable that the issue would continue to represent a political problem.

Ralston believed that, in spite of the regional dissent in Quebec, the results of the plebiscite necessitated resolute action by the government. Although he was not pressing for the immediate adoption of a policy of compelling recruits to serve overseas, Ralston was convinced that it would no longer be appropriate to delay if an emergency arose. He was to tell the House on June 23:

I myself have no doubt about what the vote meant. I do not say that it was a direction to the government to put into effect compulsory service for overseas. But what I do believe, and what I think the vast majority of the people of this country believe, is that the voters considered and expressed themselves to this effect to the government: raise the men in any way you think necessary to help win the war. And underneath that declaration was a definite indication of a green light to the government to go full speed ahead. <sup>73</sup>

As a result of his perception of the significance of the plebiscite Ralston became intolerant of any equivocation about the provision of manpower for the overseas army. Mackenzie King did not share Ralston's interpretation of the ramifications of the plebiscite. When the Cabinet met to reconsider its position following the events of April 27, it became apparent that King was reluctant to proceed too quickly. The Prime Minister recommended that an amendment to the National Resources Mobilization Act should be introduced in parliament to repeal Section 3, the section which limited conscription to home defence. It was King's intention to announce that conscripts could now be forced to serve anywhere in the northern half of the western hemisphere. The government would not, however, introduce conscription for overseas service before returning to parliament for a vote of confidence.<sup>74</sup> Ralston disagreed with only one aspect of King's proposed course of action, but he did so vehemently. If the need for conscription developed, Ralston argued there would be no time to have a second debate in parliament. In voting to repeal Section 3, parliament would have already expressed its confidence in the government's ability to determine whether or not conscription was required. Ralston could not abide by a policy which would involve vacillation when prompt action could prove to be pivotal.

In fairness to King, the Prime Minister was in an awkward position.

P.J.A. Cardin, perhaps the most influential Minister from Quebec, was firmly opposed to having Section 3 repealed under any circumstances. Consequently when King announced on May 8 that parliament would be asked to rescind the limitation on using conscription exclusively for home defence, Cardin resigned from the Cabinet.<sup>75</sup> Louis St. Laurent quickly replaced Cardin as the ranking French-Canadian member of the Cabinet. While St. Laurent supported King's proposed amendment of the NRMA, he was unyielding in his commitment to returning to parliament before conscription for overseas was invoked. The moderate members of the Quebec caucus were in agreement with St. Laurent, but several others were more sympathetic to Cardin's position. There was little opposition from the English-Canadian Cabinet ministers to the condition that a vote of confidence in parliament was a prerequisite for the imposition of conscription for overseas.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the only colleague to express any support for Ralston was Angus Macdonald.

King was prepared to gamble that he could appease the vast majority of his caucus while maintaining the loyalty of Ralston and Macdonald. The Prime Minister, having refined the technique of appealing to Ralston's sense of duty, resorted to the tactic once again on May 6. "I said they [Ralston and Macdonald] were both too good patriots to precipitate a crisis in the country such as their withdrawal from the Government would involve. Our business was to keep the Government united and to meet one step at a time."<sup>77</sup> Ralston perceived his responsibility differently. It was no longer acceptable to do what was politically expedient in place of fulfilling a moral obligation to support the volunteer army. For this reason, Ralston continued

to be relentless in his opposition to having a second debate in parliament.

The intransigence of Ralston and Macdonald forced King to do what the Prime Minister could do best - delay. Hopeful that the need for conscription would never materialize, King suggested to the Cabinet on May 8 that it was unnecessary to make any firm commitment to return to Parliament for a vote of confidence. On May 12, the Prime Minister recalled in his diary that he 'explained' his rather ambiguous position to the full caucus:

It was impossible to say what conditions might be when it became necessary to introduce conscription, and if, and when, it should become necessary, I thought it better not to give our opponents the weapons to use that we were still being limited in our power to take a certain step. I emphasized however that I thought they knew my attitude well enough toward Parliament to realize the position I would take, and I thought that, by the time any action became necessary, all would fully understand the situation and matters would be made so clear by events that the question of a second debate might not arise at all; that, as long as I was the head of the government I was not likely to take any action myself without appreciation of the conditions. <sup>78</sup>

While Ralston was temporarily satisfied with the new compromise, the Minister of National Defence should have been alarmed by the emphasis which King placed upon the caucus realizing which route was most likely to be adopted.

For Ralston, conscription was a military rather than a political problem. On May 11, he sent a letter to King requesting that no statement be currently made in Parliament concerning the need, or lack thereof, for compulsory service overseas, claiming that "with us in this Department that is primarily a military question and I ought to have Stuart's view."<sup>79</sup> Stuart's perception of the situation was obtained at a meeting between the Chiefs of Staff, King, St. Laurent, and Ralston on May 13. King called the meeting primarily to impress upon Stuart that the General Staff should not

interpret the plebiscite as a mandate for conscription. Stuart assured the Prime Minister that the Army continued to believe that it could meet its commitment through voluntary enlistment. Only if the Army was to become involved in intense fighting with heavy casualties, Stuart warned, could the need for conscription be precipitated.<sup>80</sup> Ralston concurred with the comments of his Chief of Staff, hoping only to guarantee that he would not be encumbered by any procedural obstacles in the event of a crisis.

Over the next month, Ralston's attention was diverted from the question of the most advantageous method of implementing conscription by a couple of unrelated events. On May 25, Ralston was in Winnipeg to address the opening session of a Canadian Legion convention. He told the delegates that "the result of the plebiscite showed unmistakably that the people of Canada are willing to go to any length which the government considers necessary to effect a total war effort for total war and gives the government a free hand."<sup>81</sup> Much of his speech dealt with the multifarious demands that the war effort was placing on Canadian manpower; the navy, the air force, war industry, and agriculture were no less important than the army in conducting 'modern' warfare. In spite of his remarks, the convention passed a resolution calling for the immediate introduction of conscription for overseas service.<sup>82</sup>

When Ralston returned to Ottawa, his attention became focussed upon matters relating to home defence. On June 3, the Japanese had successfully attacked Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians, making the Pacific coast more vulnerable. The War Committee was convened for emergency meetings on June 3 and June 4 to consider the possibility of taking additional measures to increase the security of the coast. King was extremely agitated. He

was worried that the three defence ministers had neglected home defence in their eagerness to assist in the European conflict.<sup>83</sup> On June 4 Ralston was able to report that the Chief of the General Staff was confident that no further army reinforcements for the Pacific coast would be required to meet the estimated scale of operations. It was essential, Ralston added, to determine the defence capabilities of the Americans in Alaska before devising an adequate method of protecting the British Columbia coast.<sup>84</sup> Ralston expressed a desire to visit British Columbia so that he could confer with Stuart about the situation. King, certain that the motivation behind Ralston's proposed trip was symptomatic of his inability to delegate authority, persuaded the Defence Minister to remain in Ottawa.<sup>85</sup> The tension was ultimately dissipated by the assurances of the General Staff and the guaranteed support of the Americans.

The cabinet had scarcely recovered from the threat of a Japanese attack, when the controversy over the procedure to introduce conscription was revived. After the debate on the second reading of Bill 80 (the bill which repealed Section 3 of the NRMA) had been in progress for two days, Mackenzie King began to suspect a possible alliance between the Quebec Liberals and the C.C.F. King was concerned that the government's reluctance to promise to return to parliament before invoking conscription was going to result in a coalition of anti-conscriptionist forces. Consequently King told the full cabinet on June 12 that it:

would see the position the party was being placed in because of our not agreeing to come back to parliament. That it was apparent we were going to lose both the C.C.F. and Social Credit party and, from Quebec and Ontario, some of our own following. I then said I thought it was absolutely necessary that when the time came, if it did come, to put conscription into force, parliament's approval should be given.<sup>86</sup>



Ralston responded to King by suggesting that it would be acceptable to seek a vote of confidence from Parliament if an Order-in-Council, authorizing conscription, was signed before returning to the House. King asserted that he would resign before adopting such a policy. With the exception of Macdonald, the remainder of the Cabinet demonstrated no disagreement with the Prime Minister.

After the Cabinet meeting had concluded, Ralston and King met privately. In what must have been a fascinating conversation, Ralston immediately suggested that he would have to resign. According to King's diary, Ralston told the Prime Minister that: "You and I do not see eye to eye; have not for some little time and I think the thing to do is to get out at once."<sup>87</sup> King, always suspecting a conspiracy, asked Ralston if 'men of means' were influencing him to attempt to force King's removal from office. Following Ralston's denial of the allegation, he was tempted by King with the idea of replacing him as Prime Minister: Ralston categorically refused the offer. Having exhausted his favorite tactics for dealing with dissenters, King requested that Ralston delay his resignation until the conditions of the situation became somewhat clearer. Not wishing to be unduly hasty, Ralston consented. King concluded in his diary that Ralston's motivation for being so stubborn was because:

He just wants to have his own way and is prepared to sacrifice me or the party to have it; justifying no doubt his conscience in that this is a war where men are being slain and that conscription is necessary for victory. He does not see the political aspect, using that word in its best sense at all. <sup>88</sup>

It is quite likely that Ralston possessed a corresponding lack of confidence in Mackenzie King's ability to appreciate the military 'aspect'.

Prior to Ralston's scheduled participation in the debate on the second reading of Bill 80, the Defence Minister had another meeting with King. No progress was made during the discussion, and Ralston implied

that King could anticipate a letter of resignation within the next two days. Once again, King attempted to persuade Ralston to postpone any decision until the debate on Bill 80 had concluded.<sup>89</sup> Although he gave no guarantees, Ralston acquiesced to King's plea.

Ralston made his contribution to the lengthy parliamentary debate on June 23. After reminding his fellow M.P.s of the indispensable role that the Canadian Army was performing in the war effort, Ralston commented upon the significance of revoking Section 3 of the NRMA. "When the section is repealed", Ralston told the House, "nothing is left for Parliament, and the proper course is that the government should not shrink from the responsibility for which it has asked, but should act on that responsibility and act as it deems best in the light of the power given by that section."<sup>90</sup> To return to Parliament for a vote of confidence was unacceptable because:

it would be regarded as evasion; it would be regarded as a shrinking from responsibility. All we are doing in this debate, having spent weeks at it as it is, would then be merely an idle gesture, because we would then have to come back once more to debate the whole question before exercising the power which we had expressly asked Parliament to confer upon us, and which had been so conferred.

Ralston, after being so emphatic in his public denunciation of the policy of requiring further approval from Parliament prior to implementing conscription, was now even less likely to compromise with King.

The superficially trivial conflict between King and Ralston acquired a critical status on July 7. That morning King assembled the full Cabinet to announce that he intended to terminate debate on Bill 80 later that day. The Prime Minister told his colleagues that, during his concluding remarks to the House, he would state that "once Cabinet decided for conscription, should that become necessary, [he] felt it would be necessary for [him] to be assured of the confidence of Parliament before

attempting to enforce the decision...."<sup>92</sup> King's promise to restrict a second debate to two or three days did not placate Ralston. He protested, once again asserting that it would be possible to sign an Order-in-Council authorizing conscription before receiving a second vote of approval. King dismissed Ralston's suggestion on the grounds that it would represent an insult to Parliament. Council adjourned at 2:30 without any further progress being made.<sup>93</sup>

For the remainder of the afternoon Ralston reflected upon his future course of action. Although Ralston's overly concise diary offers no indication of the feelings which the Defence Minister was experiencing, it is not difficult to assess what must have been foremost in his mind. As was discussed previously, Ralston had returned to the Cabinet in 1939 on an interim basis. He possessed no ambition to continue in public office following the termination of hostilities, and had undergone a considerable financial loss in consenting to King's request to accept a portfolio. Now in his sixties and suffering from repeated bouts of sciatica, Ralston was beginning to feel the strain of his self-imposed work week of sixteen hours per day, six days a week. The personal discomfort he had experienced during the Hong Kong controversy and the constant struggle to secure the War Committee's commitment to the army must have further eroded Ralston's will to persevere. He was prepared, however, to tolerate such adversity if he could convince himself that he was adhering to policies which were morally justified. To Ralston, King's insistence on going back to Parliament represented the worst form of political expediency, something that was simply not acceptable under the circumstances. Consequently, Ralston drafted a letter of resignation.

The letter to King in which Ralston outlined the reasons for his resignation contained few surprises. Ralston succinctly stated his objections to the Prime Minister's recommended procedure:

Suffice it to say that it seems to me that the repeal of Section 3 now and this long debate preceding it will be just an idle gesture and of no practical effect whatever in enabling the Government to act if, before acting, we must go back to Parliament again. It would appear like saying to Parliament and the people, "Although you have given us full authority to act on this very matter of compulsory overseas service we won't act unless and until Parliament reiterates that grant of authority by another vote after another debate." In other words, after the people and Parliament have untied our hands we would ourselves be tying them again.<sup>94</sup>

Since the question of principle separating the two men seemed irreconcilable, Ralston concluded that his resignation was necessary to preserve "the confidence and the intimate relations so essential to association in Government."<sup>95</sup>

When Ralston delivered his letter of resignation to King later that evening, the Prime Minister had no opportunity to consider the matter. King was preoccupied with delivering the concluding speech to the debate on the second reading of Bill 80. King assured Ralston, however, that he could meet the Defence Minister's objections.<sup>96</sup> After agreeing to discuss the matter the following day, King made his speech to Parliament. In his diary he expressed some dismay over the absence of applause when he announced that he would come back for a vote of confidence before enforcing conscription. The vote on second reading was held at the conclusion of King's speech. Only the C.C.F. and eleven French-Canadian Liberals opposed the bill, which received a majority of 104 votes. Ironically, King estimated that his pledge of returning to Parliament only influenced the votes of approximately five to ten members.<sup>97</sup>

Before his scheduled afternoon meeting with Ralston on July 8, King discussed the situation with Louis St. Laurent. The Minister of Justice advised King that the best tactic, designed to avoid the resignation, would be to attempt to make Ralston feel responsible for precipitating a general election in a time of crisis.<sup>98</sup> King concurred with St. Laurent's strategy, realizing to what extent appeals to Ralston's sense of moral obligation had been effective in the past.

During the one-and-a-half hour meeting with Ralston, King employed every means possible to dissuade his senior defence minister from leaving the government. Convinced that a resignation of such magnitude would create a very precarious political environment, King implied that he would involve the British monarch and Churchill before accepting Ralston's request to relinquish his portfolio. As well, King once again intimated that he was prepared to allow someone to succeed him as Prime Minister.<sup>99</sup> When neither of these announcements proved to have much of an effect upon Ralston, King adopted St. Laurent's recommended strategy. The Prime Minister emphasized that Ralston's resignation would inevitably necessitate an election, an occurrence which would negatively influence the war effort.<sup>100</sup> As St. Laurent had predicted, Ralston became less obstinate. He conceded that he would reconsider his resignation if King would write a letter which explicitly stated that the Defence Minister could act as he deemed appropriate. Consequently Ralston consented to make no decision until the Prime Minister had drafted a letter.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, when the meeting adjourned, King assured Ralston that there was no cause for alarm because: "I had never at any time blocked him in any of the recommendations that he had made. I had supported him in getting the Army to the size it is: I had tried to uphold him in every way."<sup>102</sup> Mackenzie King must have possessed a very selective memory.

To some extent, Ralston's position was further complicated by additional requests for manpower by the overseas army. After King and Ralston's meeting on July 8 the War Committee convened to consider a re-organization of the Canadian Army Overseas. Due to revisions in the structure of British divisions, General McNaughton had requested that Canadian Divisions be similarly reconstituted. Although precise estimates were not available, the transformation of the divisions would involve an increased demand for men, perhaps as many as 30,000. Ralston admitted to the Committee that "although gross enlistments for the active army had been up during the last three months, the curve was now downwards."<sup>103</sup> The availability of eligible manpower was further restricted, Ralston lamented, because many general service volunteers could not be despatched overseas without seriously disrupting home defence units. The Committee agreed to further explore the matter in relation to the general manpower situation.

C. D. Howe was becoming increasingly distressed over the 'general manpower situation'. The Minister of Munitions and Supply believed that the army programme was diverting too many men from essential war industry. When Ralston suggested at the War Committee meeting on July 8 that more men might be required for the overseas army, Howe could no longer restrain his frustration. On July 11, Howe drafted a vitriolic letter to Ralston:

My department is at its wits' end to decide on steps to protect essential war production in the face of the call to service of men extending upward to age 40. It seems to me that some revised practice must be adopted, as the present machinery is wholly inadequate to prevent many essential key men being taken out of munitions production and put in the Army. The plan of postponement of service which has been operative to this date now becomes wholly inadequate to meet the situation, and we are already faced with drastic reductions in production of strategic materials.... I feel sure that it is not the purpose of the government to destroy munition production at a time when our programme is just approaching its ob-<sup>104</sup>jectives, but nevertheless, such a process is under way.

It is difficult to assess what effect Howe's criticism of the army had upon Ralston. Howe had never been one of the more vocal opponents of the expansion of the army. If Howe was developing a greater antipathy for the Army, Ralston may have concluded that his resignation would leave the army in an extremely vulnerable position in the War Committee. Consequently, Howe may have inadvertently revived Ralston's will to persevere.

On the night of July 9 Mackenzie King invited Ralston to his office to discuss the draft letter which the Prime Minister had prepared. Ralston read the letter in King's presence, but requested that he be given another day before making any comments. According to Ralston's diary, the letter provided the Defence Minister with full freedom of action and urged him not to resign, stressing the undesirability of causing an election.<sup>105</sup> Before Ralston withdrew from King's office, the two men once again reviewed the issue of going back to Parliament, but no original thoughts were expressed. When the meeting had concluded, King reflected in his diary that: "I am perfectly sure that Mrs. Ralston is doing all in her power to have him quit before he breaks down, and that in all probability she is pressing him very hard to take advantage of this occasion. She has never wanted him to be in public life."<sup>106</sup>

The following day, which was a Friday, Ralston asked King that he be given the weekend to deliberate upon the question of his resignation. He told King quite bluntly that he thought it was unfair to place the full responsibility for necessitating an election on his shoulders. Furthermore, Ralston noted in his diary that he informed the Prime Minister that the "sole question, to my mind, was freedom not to follow course he proposed,

and whether I was really needed."<sup>107</sup> Following their conversation, King retired to Laurier House to write the final draft of the letter which he hoped would convince Ralston to remain in the Cabinet.

Ralston received King's letter on the morning of July 11. In the seven pages of the document King responded to the various points which Ralston had raised in his letter of resignation. For Ralston, however, the critical passage consisted of the second half of the concluding paragraph:

Should you be willing to withdraw your letter...I should like you to feel that you would not thereby be limiting, in any way, your right to take, at any future time, whatever course of action you may feel necessary and in the national interest. I should also like you to feel that by remaining a member of the government, you would not thereby be bound in any way by this personal undertaking I have given with respect to being assured of the confidence of the House of Commons before resort is had to conscription for overseas service by a Ministry of which I am the head. 108

Although King had granted him the freedom of action which he considered to be essential, Ralston continued to be cautious. Before arriving at a final verdict concerning his resignation, Ralston decided to discuss the matter with Power and Macdonald.

The meeting with these two men was held on the morning of July 13 and helped to convince Ralston not to resign. Although no record of the meeting exists, the structure of Ralston's diary would suggest that it was during this meeting that Ralston made his final decision to stay on as the Minister of National Defence:

July 13th - Discussed with Power and Macdonald  
Monday  
Morning Finally decided, in view of his [King's] assurances as to expediting action after decision and freedom to act, and to avoid appearance of quitting in midst of pressing activities, would not press. 109



After Ralston had resolved not to resign, Power and Macdonald assisted in writing a letter to King which outlined Ralston's reasons and conditions for remaining in the government. In his memoirs, 'Chubby' Power recalls that he believed that the final draft of the letter "was pretty stiff, but I think King will accept it."<sup>110</sup>

Ralston had the letter delivered to the Prime Minister on the following day. Never one for equivocation, Ralston was concise in his correspondence to King. He succinctly stated that he had not altered his views on the question of going back to Parliament, but he had been sufficiently reassured by King to justify his continued service to the government. It is worth noting the manner in which Ralston presented the situation to King:

I have no objection to Parliament being 'acquainted' with the Government's decision at any time. The informing of Parliament is not the point. What I object to is promising that the decision will not be enforced until Parliament has voted on it again.

My general concern was the major difference in attitude between us, as indicated by what I considered to be the dilatory procedure you proposed. What you have said to me in our discussion since I wrote you has reassured me to some extent regarding your general attitude of readiness to expedite action when [a] decision is made, although I must say definitely that I adhere to my views about the harmful effect of promising to go back to Parliament before acting.

My particular concern is that when a decision is made it shall be put into effect just as promptly as possible. In our discussions since the writing of my letter you have assured me that you would see to it that there would be no delay in obtaining Parliamentary action when a decision is made, and you have told me that you consider that any debate should be curtailed to not more than two days. In your speech you intimate that the lapse of a week after decision should suffice to obtain Parliamentary action even in case Parliament is not sitting when the decision is made.

It is difficult to determine at the moment whether and to what extent even this lapse of time or the method which you propose to pursue might affect the efficient and expeditious prosecution of the war; and, holding the views which I expressed in the House and in my letter, I feel that I must retain my liberty to take at any time whatever stand I think proper in the national interest, and your letter assures me that I am free to do that.

Meanwhile we are in the midst of a multitude of activities in connection with the Army Programme both in Canada and overseas, and there are many problems which arise from the rapid expansion which has had to be undertaken in the light of war developments. The only hesitation I had when I sent you my letter was that it might have the appearance of quitting when the going was hard. I think you know, however, that I have no desire to shirk responsibility. In view therefore of your assurance as to your own general attitude and on the understanding indicated in your letter that I will not be bound to the course you have outlined, nor limited in any way in my right to take at any future time whatever course of action I may feel necessary and in the national interest, I am prepared not to press my resignation for the present. 111

As Power had predicted King accepted the terms of Ralston's letter. Significantly Ralston did not withdraw his letter of resignation, allowing the Prime Minister to keep it on file. Although the letter would play an important role in the conscription climax of October 1944, a tenuous truce had been temporarily achieved.

Ralston's threatened resignation was symbolic of much more than a question of parliamentary procedure. Ever since the first recruiting shortages had been experienced in April 1941, Ralston had grown increasingly uneasy about King's commitment to maintaining the army. The Prime Minister's consistent opposition to the 1942-43 army programme and to other expansions of the army intensified Ralston's insecurity. While King suffered from a fear of conscription that bordered on paranoia, Ralston

possessed the apprehension that King's philosophical orientation would prevent the necessary support for the overseas Army. For Ralston, King's, behaviour following the 1942 plebiscite confirmed this suspicion. King's insistence on returning to Parliament for a vote of confidence was, to Ralston, representative of the Prime Minister's general attitude of antipathy toward the Army.

The reconciliation between King and Ralston in mid-July of 1942 should not be perceived as an indication that the two men had resolved their differences. Indeed, Ralston would have left the Cabinet had King not granted him the freedom to dissent from government policy in the future. As long as the overseas Army could be adequately maintained through voluntary enlistments, there would be no threat to the alliance between King and Ralston. The Minister of National Defence favoured the voluntary recruiting method, but would not hesitate to introduce conscription if it became otherwise impossible to reinforce the existing units. As he had publicly stated in the House of Commons on November 5, 1941 the government and the people of Canada had a moral obligation to support the volunteer Army. Mackenzie King perceived the priorities differently. The disruption of national unity that conscription would create could only be justified if it could be demonstrated that a policy of compulsion for overseas service was necessary to win the war. It was this essential dichotomy of opinion between King and Ralston which ultimately resulted in the conscription crisis of 1944.

NOTES

Chapter 4

1. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 23, 1941.
2. House of Commons Debate, April 28, 1941, p. 2295.
3. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 23, 1941.
4. Ibid.
5. Pickersgill, p. 219.
6. Ibid., p. 220.
7. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 25, 1941.
8. Pickersgill, pp. 219-20.
9. House of Commons Debates, April 28, 1941, p. 2297.
10. Cabinet War Committee Records, April 30, 1941.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., May 9, 1941.
14. House of Commons Debates, May 12, 1941, p. 2729.
15. Ibid., pp. 2729-30.
16. Cabinet War Committee Records, May 20, 1941.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., June 3, 1941.
20. Ibid., June 5, 1941.
21. Ibid.
22. Pickersgill, p. 221.
23. Ibid., p. 222.
24. House of Commons Debates, June 13, 1941, p. 3951.
25. Ibid.; p. 3952.

26. Cabinet War Committee Records, June 24, 1941.
27. Ibid., July 15, 1941.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., July 29, 1941.
30. Ibid.
31. Pickersgill, p. 238.
32. Ibid., p. 259.
33. Ibid., p. 262.
34. Ibid., 263.
35. Cabinet War Committee Records, September 10, 1941.
36. Ibid.
37. Pickersgill, p. 265.
38. Cabinet War Committee Records, September 10, 1941.
39. Swettenham, McNaughton, vol. 2, p. 184.
40. McNaughton was suffering from a chest infection, causing him to miss two months of duty, beginning in November, 1941. See: Swettenham, McNaughton vol. 2, p. 187, Cabinet War Committee Records, November 6, 1941.
41. Cabinet War Committee Records, November 6, 1941.
42. House of Commons Debates, November 5, 1941, p. 4115.
43. Ibid., p. 4116.
44. Pickersgill, p. 273.
45. Ibid., p. 275.
46. Ibid., p. 282.
47. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 1, 1941.
48. The 214,000 total included: 104,000 Army; 96,800 Air Force; and 13,000 Navy. See: Cabinet War Committee Records, December 3, 1941.
49. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 2, 1941.
50. Ibid.
51. Stuart also took pride in his ability to manipulate his superiors, including Ralston. See: Pope, Soldiers and Politicians, p. 215.

52. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 3, 1941.
53. Pickersgill, p. 304.
54. Ibid., p. 312.
55. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 7, December 10, 1941.
56. Pickersgill, pp. 306-07.
57. Ibid., p. 312.
58. Ibid., p. 313.
59. Ibid., pp. 313-15.
60. Ibid., p. 325.
61. Cabinet War Committee Records, December 28, 1941.
62. Ibid.
63. Pickersgill, p. 326.
64. Ibid., pp. 334-35.
65. House of Commons Debates, November 5, 1941, p. 4116.
66. Pickersgill, p. 336.
67. Granatstein, Canada's War, p. 217.
68. Pickersgill, p. 345.
69. Cabinet War Committee Records, March 6, 1942.
70. Ibid., March 11, 1942.
71. Ibid., March 20, 1942.
72. Granatstein, Canada's War, p. 227.
73. House of Commons Debates, June 23, 1942, pp. 3550-51.
74. Pickersgill, pp. 366-67.
75. Ibid., pp. 369-71.
76. Ibid., p. 369.
77. Ibid., p. 368.
78. Ibid., p. 374.

79. Letter, Ralston to King, May 11, 1942, King Papers, J1 vol. 33C, [PAC].
80. Pickersgill, pp. 376-77.
81. Winnipeg Free Press, May 25, 1942.
82. House of Commons Debates, June 15, 1942, p. 3341.
83. Pickersgill, pp. 379-80.
84. Cabinet War Committee Records, June 4, 1942.
85. Pickersgill, p. 379.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 382.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 387-88.
90. House of Commons Debates, June 23, 1942, p. 3554.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Pickersgill, p. 393.
93. Diary notes, July 7, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].
94. Letter, Ralston to King, July 7, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].
95. *Ibid.*
96. Diary notes, July 7, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].
97. Pickersgill, p. 395.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-99.
100. Diary notes, July 8, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].
101. *Ibid.*
102. Pickersgill, p. 400.
103. Cabinet War Committee Records, July 8, 1942.
104. Letter, Howe to Ralston, July 11, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 113, [PAC].

105. Diary notes, July 9, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [ PAC].
106. Pickersgill, p. 401.
107. Diary notes, July 10, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [ PAC].
108. Letter, King to Ralston, July 11, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].
109. Diary Notes, July 13, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [ PAC].
110. C.G.Power, Memoirs, p.144.
111. Letter, Ralston to King, July 13, 1942, Ralston Papers, vol. 84, [PAC].



## CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have traced the development of Ralston's policies with regard to the Canadian Army and its role in World War II. Because of his unique experiences prior to entering the Cabinet in 1939 Ralston was in a singular position to administer a fundamental aspect of the Canadian war effort. As a front-line battalion commander in World War I, Ralston had suffered the loss of his brother under tragic circumstances and had witnessed the annihilation of many of his comrades. While Ralston had received a first-hand lesson in the horrors of war, he had formed a profound loyalty to the volunteer soldier. In his post-World War I political endeavours, Ralston constantly concerned himself with veterans' affairs.

By 1939, Ralston had clearly retired from politics. Indeed, he was so committed to leaving political life that he refused to run in the 1935 election, when a prominent cabinet portfolio was a virtual certainty, and subsequently declined a Senate appointment. When he consented to King's invitation to return to the Cabinet in 1939, Ralston acted out of duty as opposed to ambition. Unencumbered by a concern for re-election, Ralston had little patience for political expediency when it conflicted with what he believed to be administratively necessary.

During his tenure as Minister of Finance (from September 1939 to July 1940) Ralston demonstrated a desire to restrict Canada's contribution to the war while the international situation remained uncertain. From his tough negotiating with the British regarding the financial responsibility of the British Commonwealth Air Training Programme to his opposition to

Norman Roger's proposal to form a Canadian Corps, Ralston consistently adhered to a policy of limited liability. However, as the 'phoney war' quickly transformed into the German blitzkrieg of Europe, Ralston relaxed the financial restrictions which he had imposed upon government spending.

Ralston's altered perception of Canada's role in the war coincided with his appointment to the National Defence portfolio. Convinced that Canada's front-line lay in the defence of the vulnerable British Isles, Ralston sought to expand the overseas army in the 1941 army programme. Ralston's belief that the British were in urgent need of additional manpower was confirmed during a visit which he made to the United Kingdom in late 1940. Upon returning to Canada, Ralston encountered considerable opposition from his War Committee colleagues to the army programme. Led by Mackenzie King, the majority of the War Committee objected to an increased emphasis upon the army, arguing that munitions production, agriculture, the navy and the air force should all receive priority in the allocation of manpower. Not submissive by nature, Ralston fought vigorously to secure the adoption of his programme. After several lengthy debates in the War Committee, Ralston was ultimately successful.

The struggle over the 1941 army programme represented the first phase of a deteriorating relationship between King and Ralston. As voluntary recruiting sagged and demands for the expansion of the overseas army continued, Mackenzie King's paranoia about conscription intensified. At the same time, Ralston was attempting to mobilize as large an army as the nation's manpower capacity would permit. Although Ralston remained committed to the policy of voluntary enlistment, he could not guarantee that the 1942-43 army programme would never necessitate conscription. Although the 1942 plebiscite had been designed by King to assist in reducing the tension created by the conscription issue, it only served to heighten Ralston's apprehension about King's political

exploitation of the army. Ralston, convinced that the government had a moral obligation to support and reinforce the volunteer army, could not countenance indecision on the issue. When Mackenzie King insisted that Parliament be consulted prior to implementing conscription, even though it had already consented to repeal Section 3 of the NRMA, the attitude of the two men diverged to such an extent that Ralston tendered his resignation. Ralston consented to stay on, however, when King assured him that he could disassociate himself from government policy at any point in the future.

When the 1942 conscription crisis subsided, the fundamental difference of opinion which separated Ralston from King continued to exist. Although it remained latent for the next two years, it re-emerged during the reinforcement shortage in October 1944. When it became apparent that existing overseas army infantry formations could not be adequately reinforced through voluntary enlistment, Ralston recommended that 15,000 trained NRMA recruits be despatched to overcome the deficiency. King, still resolute in his opposition to conscription, responded to Ralston's proposal by producing the 1942 letter of resignation and accepting it. Less than one month later King's efforts to circumvent the use of conscription ultimately proved futile when he was forced to implement precisely the policy which he had dismissed Ralston for suggesting.

It would be fair to say that Ralston received little consolation from the irony of the situation. The long hours and the constant pressure of his ministerial responsibilities took a severe toll upon Ralston's health. Although he returned to his law firm following his abrupt departure from

the Cabinet, Ralston never physically recovered from the strain of his five years in office. In May 1948 Ralston died of a heart attack while saying his nightly prayers. While some might question Ralston's judgment in building such a large army, no one can deny his sense of sincerity, dedication, and sacrifice. Perhaps the greatest tribute that one could pay to James Ralston would be to admit that he adhered throughout his public life to his personal motto, "Character is what you are when nobody is watching".

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Archival Material

W. L. Mackenzie King Papers. Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript number MG26, series J1 and J4.

James Layton Ralston Papers. Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript number MG 27 III B 11.

Privy Council Office Records, Cabinet War Committee Records. Public Archives of Canada.

#### Published Diaries and Memoirs

Pickersgill, Jack W. The Mackenzie King Record: Volume 1, 1934-1944. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960.

Pickersgill, Jack W. and Forster, D. F. The Mackenzie King Record: Volume 2 1944-1945. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960.

Pope, Maurice A. Soldiers and Politicians. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Power, Charles G. The Memoirs of Chubby Power: A Party Politician. Edited by Norman Ward. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966.

#### Newspapers

Amherst News and Sentinel, 11 August 1942.

Financial Post, 16 September 1939.

Globe and Mail (Toronto), 7 September 1939.

Halifax Herald, 14 December 1917.

Toronto Star, 14 June 1940.

Winnipeg Free Press, 14 June 1940, 25 May 1942.

Journals and Periodicals

Charlesworth, Hector. "Ralston is Back." Saturday Night, September 16, 1939, p.5.

O'Leary, Gratton. "Canada's Man at Naval Parley." Saturday Night, January 11, 1930.

Maclean's. "Defenceman", December 1, 1941, p.14.

Time. "Canada at War", May 8, 1944, p.8.

Election Result Material

Canadian Parliamentary Guide, (Ottawa) 1909, p.164; 1914, p.423; 1917, p.373; 1922, p.413; 1927, pp.253,330,461; 1942, p.313.

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1940, pp.536-37.

Simerl, Loren M. "A Survey of Canadian Provincial Election Results, 1905-1976." In Politics Canada, pp.599-637. Edited by Paul Fox. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1977.

Other

Canada. Parliament. Parliamentary Debates (Commons)

May 27, 1940, pp.243-45;  
March 11, 1941, pp.1419-32;  
April 1941, pp.2295-97;  
May 12, 1941, pp.2729-30;

June 13, 1941, pp.3951-53;  
November 5, 1941, pp.5114-16;  
June 15, 1942, p.3341;  
June 23, 1942, pp.3550-57.

Secondary Sources

Bothwell, Robert and Kilbourn, William. C.D.Howe: A Biography. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1979.

Burns, E.L.M. Manpower in the Canadian Army 1939-1945. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1956.

Dawson, R. MacGregor. The Conscription Crisis of 1944. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961.

Granatstein, Jack L. Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-45. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Granatstein, Jack L. The Politics of Survival. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.

Conscription in the Second World War, 1939-1945,  
The Frontenac Library, Geoffry Milburn (ed.) Toronto:  
McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Hitsman, J.M. Broken Promises. Toronto:  
Oxford University Press, 1977.

Neatby, H. Blair. William Lyon Mackenzie King: 1924-1932, The Lonely Heights, vol. 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963.

Stacey, C.P. Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945. Ottawa: The Queen's Printer for Canada, 1970.

Swettenham, John. McNaughton, vols. 1,2,3. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969.

Thomson, Dale C. Louis St. Laurent: Canadian. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967.