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Lovatt, Ronald, 1928-. A history of the defence of Victoria and Esquimalt, 1906-1918 [microform] / by Ronald Lovatt. -- [Ottawa] : Parks Canada, 1985.

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Manning the Defences, 29 July - 5 August 1914

Little was done by the Canadian authorities to prepare for war at Esquimalt in the last weeks of peace in July 1914. Locally, a sense of foreboding gradually increased to near panic, fed by dramatic newspaper accounts of events in Europe and of German military and naval might. In their isolation the citizens of British Columbia felt their insecurity sharply. A few local naval and military men would act with the Provincial Premier to remedy the situation at the eleventh hour. Their efforts narrowly avoided disaster to provide an appreciable reinforcement to the defences.

Every citizen in British Columbia who could read and had access to a local newspaper was aware of the formidable details of the German East Asia squadron. To loggers, farmers, merchants and tradesman alike it seemed very clear that the aggressive, efficient and ruthless Hun would appear on the British Columbia coast as soon as war was declared, destroying merchant vessels and attacking ports, harbours and installations. There was no understanding of strategy or tactics or practicalities in this belief and it fed on itself and on rumour. Hard realities such as the known presence of three of the five cruisers of the German squadron on the China station and therefore several days steaming away, were ignored. Few, if any pondered the problem the German ships faced of obtaining adequate coal supplies for any lengthy voyage across the Pacific. No one stopped to consider that the coastal trade and the ports of British Columbia presented a less attractive target for a raiding cruiser or squadron than the trade routes and harbours of the China Sea, East

Indies, the Indian Ocean or the Pacific coast of South America. It did not matter that Esquimalt and Victoria, the two most likely German targets, were protected by coast defence batteries which could be quickly manned by a well trained and easily mobilised militia, unlike many other Pacific ports. It was easier and far simpler to think only of powerful enemy warships on the Pacific, just below the horizon, waiting to pounce on the rich pickings to be had on the open undefended British Columbia coast.

Some prominent citizens thought that way too, men who might have done much to calm the public or divert the energy of fear into more positive channels. Among such men was Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Gawlor Prior who had commanded the 5th Regiment, 1888-99, and was fully cognisant with the coast defences of Esquimalt and Victoria, was a former Member of Parliament and had been Premier of the Province, 1902-3. He later confessed that: "There was a feeling...that the German warships might come up the coast and lay Victoria and Vancouver under tribute. I was so thoroughly impressed myself that I took a war risk on my house and on my business property and I know many other businessmen did the same."<sup>1</sup> Mayor Stewart was telephoned day and night by worried citizens and later said: "The people were certainly very excitable. They were all on edge."<sup>2</sup> Some militia officers moved their families out of Victoria to the safety of the countryside. Bank managers in Victoria and Vancouver transferred large sums of money and securities to the neutral safety of Seattle.<sup>3</sup> Fear caused men to look to the protection of their personal property first. In the last days of peace it was too early for most men to think more positively in terms of an aggressive defence, of seeking out the enemy rather than waiting for his attack.

One man who did see things rather differently, and certainly more calmly, was Sir Richard McBride, the premier of

the province. An astute lawyer and clever politician, he had seized the opportunity offered during visits to London, England, in previous years to discuss the defence of British Columbia with the British authorities and subsequently had maintained a correspondence with Winston Churchill. His links with the Federal government in Ottawa on defence matters were strong, particularly with Sir Robert Borden, Minister of Defence. From his connections he had acquired an understanding of British naval strategy and the priority accorded to the defence of Esquimalt and the British Columbia coast in both London and Ottawa, the resources available for that defence, and the nature of the German naval threat to the coast. He was uniquely placed as premier to use this understanding to gain practical advantage for the province and was enough of a man of action not to hesitate to do so when he believed the circumstances to be favourable.

The root cause of the fear in British Columbia, the sequence of events in Europe, reached a critical point on Wednesday, 29 July, when Austrian artillery bombarded Belgrade twenty-four hours after Austria had declared war on Serbia. Within the next two days both Austria and Russia ordered full mobilisation, prompting Germany to step to the side of Austria and issue an ultimatum to Russia to demobilise. The flame of war had finally caught and burned brightly.

In Ottawa that same Wednesday, a warning telegram arrived at Naval Service Headquarters from the British Admiralty. It had been sent to all naval headquarters throughout the Empire. The contents warned that a state of war between Britain and Germany was imminent and ordered the precautionary stage of naval defence. The procedures, paper work and practical measures to be put into effect by the Canadian Naval Service on receipt of such an order had been defined previously in the War Book.<sup>4</sup> Duty naval staff turned to it and began work immediately, making arrangements for the control of all



shipping entering and leaving Canadian ports, for the detention of any enemy ship which might be in a Canadian port on the declaration of war, for the control of wireless stations and for the mobilisation of reserve naval personnel.

The news had not yet broken in Victoria when an informal evening meeting on a matter of considerable naval importance took place in the comfortable surroundings of the Union Club, a stones throw from the legislative buildings. A group of members and a guest were discussing submarines. Mr. J. V. Patterson, President of the Seattle Construction and Drydock Company, disclosed that his firm had recently built two submarines for the Chilean navy, that Chile was overdue on payments for them and that consequently both vessels were available for purchase. The Chilean navy had named the submarines Iquique and Antofagasta. They had been built to the patent design of John P. Holland of New Jersey. The prototype of the modern submarine, the type was common to the fleets of all the great naval powers of that time. Among Patterson's listeners were Captain W.H. Logan, surveyor to the London Salvage Association and Lloyd's representative in Victoria, and G.H. Barnard, Victoria's member of parliament. Logan had already seen the submarines during a visit to the company's yard the previous month. The possibility that the vessels might be acquired for the defence of British Columbia was raised and discussed. It was decided that Logan should carry the idea to Sir Richard McBride, the premier, the next day.

McBride was receptive to the idea of purchasing the submarines. A plan to do so was thrashed out in a series of meetings in the first three days of August in both Victoria and Esquimalt. The matter became official when the Senior Naval Officer Esquimalt, Lieutenant-Commander H.B. Pilcher announced his support for the plan and sought that of Naval Service Headquarters in a signal to Ottawa on 3 August.<sup>5</sup>

The submarine purchase was not the biggest nor the only concern of Commander Pilcher in those three days for the order to prepare H.M.C.S. Rainbow for war had been issued by Naval Service Headquarters on 1 August. The old cruiser was already seaworthy, having been prepared for fisheries patrol, but she lacked her full war complement, war stores and ammunition for her guns. The naval staff had arranged for modern ammunition to be sent by rail from Halifax, but railway peace time regulations had delayed its arrival. In the emergency old gunpowder filled shells, not nearly so effective but better than nothing, were loaded aboard from stocks in Esquimalt. An exchange of signals between her captain, Commander Walter Hose, Naval Service Headquarters and the Admiralty ended with an order from Ottawa which arrived at midnight 2-3 August.

You are to proceed to sea forthwith to guard trade routes North of Equator, keeping in touch with Pachena (a wireless station on Vancouver Island with a range of about 200 miles) until war has been declared. Obtain information from North Bound Steamers. Have arranged for 500 tons coal at San Diego. United States does not prohibit belligerents from coaling in her ports. Will arrange for credits at San Diego and San Francisco. No further news of Leipzig.<sup>6</sup>

The last confirmed sighting of the German light cruiser Leipzig was at Mazatlan, Mexico, on 30 July.

Rainbow sailed one hour after receiving her orders, at 1 a.m., 3 August, without waiting to complete her crew. Twenty-four hours later she was off Destruction Island, south of Cape Flattery, well placed to intercept northbound steamers. She was told by wireless of Britain's declaration of war. Course was immediately set for San Diego, changed for one for Esquimalt when a second signal was received announcing the arrival of the modern ammunition from Halifax, and changed back when a third message announced the sighting of the light

cruisers Leipzig and Nurnberg off San Francisco.

In Victoria, Premier McBride, pushed plans for the purchase and transfer of the two submarines to a conclusion without waiting for Ottawa's blessing. Time was short. The submarines had to be in British Columbia waters before Britain's ultimatum to Germany expired at midnight, 4 August, to avoid any neutrality regulations the American government might enforce. Working through his representative in Seattle, Captain Logan, McBride obtain Patterson's agreement to the purchase of the submarines by the Province of British Columbia for \$1,150,000.00. The Seattle Construction and Drydock Company agreed to have the submarines at a position five miles south of Trial Island, off Oak Bay, Victoria, by daylight, 5 August. A cheque was obtained by the premier, personally, and entrusted to Lieutenant Commander Bertram Jones R.N., a retired officer recalled to active war service, who was to go out to the rendezvous aboard the steamship Salvor accompanied by Lieutenant R.H. Wood, the chief engineer of Esquimalt naval dockyard and two navy artificers whose task it was to fully inspect the submarines before acceptance. When the plans were complete McBride sent a telegram to Sir Robert Borden, Minister of Defence, describing the arrangements.

The next day, 5 August, Borden replied:

Yesterday morning we communicated with Admiralty as to advisability of securing two submarines mentioned, and as to feasibility of manning them, as without crews they would be useless. They advise purchase provided crews could be secured. As this has been accomplished we appreciate most warmly your action which will greatly tend to increase security on the Pacific Coast, and send hearty thanks. Please advise us of their arrival.<sup>7</sup>

The arrangements worked smoothly. Manned by company crews, the two submarines slipped out of Seattle harbour without clearance papers at about 10 p.m. Under cover of darkness and

drifting fog, and using their electric motors to keep noise to a minimum until they were safely clear of the harbour, they made an uneventful passage to reach the rendezvous off Trial Island at 4:45 a.m. At 7 a.m., after a thorough inspection of both vessels, Lieutenant Commander Jones handed Premier McBride's cheque to Mr. Patterson, the naval reserve guard cheered to the accompaniment of the whistles of Salvor and her patrol launch escort, white ensigns were run up and no time was lost making for Esquimalt.<sup>8</sup>

The secrecy of the whole operation had been a major factor contributing to its success, but that same secrecy now threatened disaster of the worst kind. Unaccountably, no one had allowed for the state of war that now existed in British Columbia. The two vessels were heading unannounced for a naval port protected by coast artillery batteries manned by soldiers with strict instructions for dealing with any unidentified vessels trying to enter.

The 5th B.C. Regiment Canadian Artillery had been mobilised over a period of three days. On the first day, 2 August, four officers and 54 other ranks were ordered to report immediately to the drill hall on Menzies Street, Victoria. Most were dispatched promptly to the three 12-pounder batteries at Belmont, Duntze Head and Black Rock which were brought to an operational state within a few hours. The following day a second group of one officer and 51 other ranks was called to duty at Work Point Barracks, Esquimalt. Detachments of this group were sent to prepare the 6-inch disappearing guns at Macaulay Point and Fort Rodd Hill for action. On the third day, 4 August, the Regimental Headquarters, band and all remaining personnel assembled at Macaulay Point. There they were joined by two officers and 52 other ranks with a 12-pounder field gun who had come down from strike duty at Ladysmith.<sup>9</sup> By the evening of that day, the day the ultimatum ran out, the regiment was completely

mobilised with Belmont, Duntze Head and Black Rock batteries manned by 1 Company, commanded by Major R. Angus; Upper and Lower batteries, Fort Rodd Hill manned by 3 Company, commanded by Major J.C. Harris; Fort Macaulay manned by 2 Company, commanded by Major H.H. Woolison; and Regimental Headquarters with Lieutenant-Colonel W.M. Winsby under canvas on Macaulay Plain.<sup>10</sup>

5 Company Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery, the regular element of the garrison, had been mobilised to man Signal Hill Battery. Unlike the other batteries of the defences all was not well at that battery. In the last hours of peace of 4 August, it was discovered that both of the 9.2-inch guns, the most powerful in the defences, had defects which rendered them temporarily useless. Work to correct the faults was speedily put in hand with a party of volunteers formed from the most experienced, qualified men to be found in the garrison under the supervision of the garrison's Ordnance Mechanical Engineer, but lack of training and unfamiliarity with the equipment hampered the process. A near fatal accident occurred when the compressor system of one gun was pumped while the engineer was at work under the gun replacing faulty washers. Fluid squirted over him and he collapsed, overcome by fumes. He was hauled out by ropes attached to his feet.<sup>11</sup>

Even when the guns were finally in working order, the battery could hardly be termed operational. There was no position finder. Without this fire control instrument and its trained specialists the battery lacked the ability to engage targets at long ranges with pin point accuracy. There was also an acute shortage of ammunition.<sup>12</sup> The battery magazine contained considerably less shells and cartridges than the authorized scale allowed. Most importantly, the men manning the battery were inadequately trained. Peace time parsimony had restricted annual firing practice to such an extent that no more than two rounds had been fired in each of the two



years since the guns had been mounted. The battery was the only one in the defences with guns of sufficient calibre for engaging the cruisers of the German Pacific Squadron at longer ranges. It should have been ready and it wasn't.

At dawn on Wednesday, 5 August, the first day of war, the troops in the defences stood to. It was the routine drill in a coast battery and had been thoroughly practised in annual training. Officers and men quietly manned the guns and instruments and checked the ammunition at hand an hour before dawn. They waited, watching the light break on the calm sea and backdrop of mountains, until one hour after dawn and the order to stand down. Their silent vigil was a precaution against surprise attack at a time when enemy ships could approach under the cover of darkness and bombard or launch an assault force to make use of first light. Stand down was signalled when commanders were satisfied that the enemy was not in position offshore and no attack was imminent. Skeleton crews continued to man the batteries while the remainder were dismissed to washing, shaving and breakfast.

Private Lund, called to duty the previous day with the District Signals Detachment, started his shift in the Port War Signal Station tower near Duntze Head Battery at 4 a.m.<sup>13</sup> From the glassed-in lookout room at the top of the tower he had an excellent view of the Strait across Royal Roads and the examination anchorage. Almost automatically, he noted the examination vessel Malaspina about her duties. In the room below Chief Yeoman Harry Redding, Lund's supervisor, was conversing with other members of the detachment. A routine day had started in the signal tower.

The calm summer morning persuaded Corporal Harold Llewellyn to walk across from Duntze Head Battery after stand down to visit friends in nearby Black Rock Battery.<sup>14</sup> He strolled along the short path between the two batteries and was soon seated with one or two friends near the signaller and

the telescope sentry at Black Rock Battery. They chatted and watched with mild interest while the battery signaller exchanged practice messages with the signaller on the examination vessel using the old type morse code flags, short and long.

At 6 a.m., the Battery Commander of Duntze Head Battery telephoned his opposite number in Black Rock Battery with an invitation to come over for a cup of coffee.<sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Maxwell Kirkpatrick-Crockett was quick to accept. Neither he nor any member of his battery had had anything to eat for the past 24 hours due to the administrative confusion of the mobilisation and liquid refreshment had come from only source, the water stand pipe at the battery entrance gate. Crockett handed over command of his battery to Lieutenant A.E. Craddock and set off for Duntze Head with alacrity. The coffee and conversation were most enjoyable. Crockett began his walk back at about 7 a.m. in good spirits.

Far out in the Strait at 7 a.m., aboard Malaspina, the early morning routine was rudely interrupted by a lookout's yell of alarm. Routinely scanning distant water, he had spotted two warships, low in the water, heading for Esquimalt. No friendly warship was scheduled to be in the area. The reaction was prompt and dramatic. The captain ordered full speed and as an answering belch of smoke rose from the funnel the ship heeled with the helm hard over in a race for the safety of the harbour. On the bridge extension the signaller dropped his practice morse flags, seized a pair of semaphore flags and began a frantic message to the examination battery, Black Rock Battery.

The sudden cloud of black smoke above Malaspina's funnel and the rapid semaphore signals were both seen simultaneously by Private Lund and Corporate Llewellyn. Lund read the repeated signal "Two German submarines coming in"<sup>16</sup> and after a moment of stunned surprise shouted for Chief Yeoman Redding.

At Black Rock Battery, Llewellyn, the battery signaller and the telescope sentry all deciphered Malaspina's signal as "Two torpedo boats - German"<sup>17</sup> and joked at the shipboard signaller's agitated semaphore. The joking ceased abruptly when the alarm sounded in the battery. Llewellyn and his comrades ran hard for their guns.

The two 12-pounders in Black Rock Battery were manned and loaded within seconds. Lieutenant Craddock dispatched one of his sergeants immediately to find Lieutenant Kirkpatrick-Crockett. Hardly was this done when the telephone rang. Lund spoke to Lieutenant Craddock confirming the slighting of the two submarines.

Lund had had a busy few minutes since his first reading of Malaspina's signal and his shout to Chief Yeoman Redding. Redding had ordered him to report the signal to the naval yard commander. Calling the administration building and obtaining a second party after an irritating delay, Lund assumed he was talking to the naval commander and gave the message. A startled voice replied "My G----what are we going to do now?"<sup>18</sup> There was a short pause and then a different, sharp, British accented voice ordered: "Inform the battery commander, keep a sharp lookout to make sure of the identity of the craft and communicate with the yard commander as soon as identity is established."<sup>19</sup> Lund did as he was ordered. He telephoned Black Rock Battery and spoke to Lieutenant Craddock, reporting the signal and adding that as soon as his station had identified the submarines the battery would be informed. Craddock replied "If we do not hear from you by the time the submarines come within range we will commence firing."<sup>20</sup> Craddock intended to follow his standing orders. When his battery fired all others would join in immediately.

While Lunn was busy with telephone messages, Yeoman Redding had come up from below to use the powerful naval telescope. Through it he identified flags at the sterns of

the two vessels and then the flags as British. He called out: "They're British subs. They're flying the British White Ensign."<sup>21</sup> Lunn immediately telephoned the naval yard with the information. The response was: "Thank heavens!"<sup>22</sup> Later, he would claim that he also telephoned Lieutenant Craddock at Black Rock Battery in time to stop the battery opening fire. If he did make the call it is likely that his message did not stop the battery but merely reinforced the decision not to fire already taken by the Battery Commander.

The decision not to open fire was made at Black Rock Battery by Lieutenant Kirkpatrick-Crockett. His return stroll to the battery had been rudely interrupted by the appearance of one of his sergeants shouting: "Hurry up Sir. Two German torpedo boats are coming in to the harbour."<sup>23</sup> He covered the last few yards to his battery in record time. At his command position, he dispersed a small crowd that had gathered, ordered his men off the guns to avoid any trigger happy mistake, and went to the telescope. There he was joined by Major Dick Angus who asked what he "made of it."<sup>24</sup> Kirkpatrick-Crockett replied: "Look to me like C class submarines."<sup>25</sup> Angus then asked "Where have they come from?"<sup>26</sup> Kirkpatrick-Crockett guessed: "Possibly from Hong Kong"<sup>27</sup> and then confirmed "Most certainly they are not German."<sup>28</sup> At that moment the telescope view cleared so that Kirkpatrick-Crockett saw a man appear on the deck of one of the submarines and was able to recognise him as Lieutenant Wood, the engineer lieutenant of Esquimalt naval yard, and the flag he carried as a Union Jack. The message was passed to the other batteries: "Friendly Submarines."<sup>29</sup> The two vessels were allowed to pass into the harbour, unchallenged and unharmed.

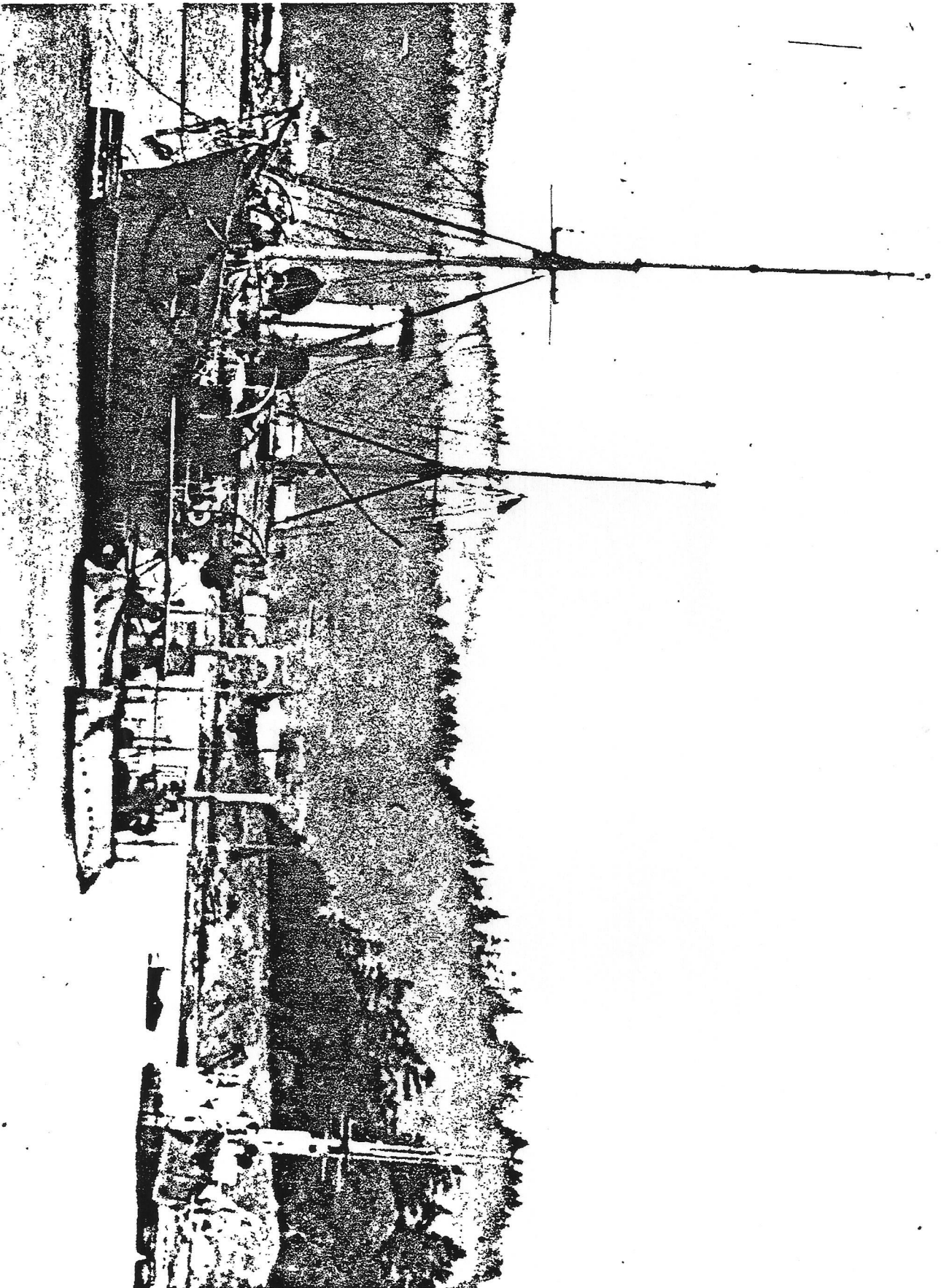
It was fortunate that Lieutenant Kirkpatrick-Crockett was in command of Black Rock Battery, the examination battery, as the submarines approached. In his own words: "I don't suppose there was another individual in the regiment had ever seen a

submarine before."<sup>30</sup> He had, many times, because his father had been the Admiralty photographer at Devonport, England, and he had assisted him before emigrating to Canada, getting to know the Royal Navy's ships at that major naval base "inside out."<sup>31</sup> He was exceptionally well trained in coastal gunnery too having completed five courses on Q.F. guns and a long course at the coast artillery school at Shoeburyness before emigrating. Because of his acknowledged expertise he had conducted the 5th Regiment's training during the previous two years on the orders of the Commanding Officer. The safety of the two newly purchased submarines rested entirely in his hands as they headed for Esquimalt. A less knowledgeable, less well trained officer might easily have given the order to fire in accordance with the Standing Orders which prescribed such action against any unnotified appearance of a submarine. Kirkpatrick-Crockett chose not to give the order basing his decision on his own identification of the incoming vessels. The plan to acquire two submarines for the defence of the British Columbia coast was successfully completed (See Figure 24).



Figure 24: H.M.C.S. Shearwater, submarine tender, with submarines H.M.C.S.s C.C.1 and C.C.2. H.M.C.S. Algerine, depot ship Esquimalt, in background. (Provincial Archives of British Columbia Visual Records Division Catalogue No. 41678).

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15 October 1912.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. FRHM 0079. Minutes of Meeting on 27 January 1912. Memos dated 30 January, 2 February 1912.
15. P.A.B.C. OBR 54. F.A. Robertson. "5th B.C. Regiment Canadian Garrison Artillery and Early Defences of the B.C. Coast." 1925, Chapter XX, pp. 27, 28.
16. 5th (B.C.) Field Battery R.C.A. archives. Report of 5th Regiment C.G.A. Annual Training Camp 1913.
17. P.A.B.C. OBR54. F.A. Robertson. "5th B.C. Regiment Canadian Garrison Artillery and Early Defences of the B.C. Coast," 1925, Chapter XX, pp 28-45.
18. 5th (B.C.) Field Battery R.C.A. archives. Regimental Order 5 November 1913.

Manning the Defences, 29 July - 5 August 1914.

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. G.N. Tucker, The Naval Service of Canada (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1952), I, p. 213. Hereafter cited as Tucker, Naval Service of Canada.
5. Ibid., p. 285.
6. Naval Service Headquarters to Hose, August 3, 1914, quoted in Tucker, Naval Service of Canada, I, p. 271.
7. British Columbia. Public Archives. Add. MSS. 347. McBride Papers. Box Vol. I, Telegram Borden to McBride, August 5, 1914.
8. Ibid. File 1/7. Report of Richard Ryan to McBride, 6 August 1914.
9. 5th (B.C.) Battery R.C.A. archives, Regimental Order 5 August 1914.
10. Ibid. Company Correspondence file, 1914.

11. British Columbia. Public Archives. Sound and Moving Image Cassette 1301, March 1962. Interview with Colonel J.Q. Gillan.
12. Ibid. Cassette 1306:1, May 1962. Interview with Major Kirkpatrick-Crockett.
13. The Daily Province (Vancouver), 8 February 1936.
14. The Colonist Islander (Victoria), 23 July 1967.
15. British Columbia. Public Archives. Sound and Moving Image Cassette 1306:1, May 1962. Interview with Major Kirkpatrick-Crockett.
16. The Daily Province (Vancouver) 8 February 1936.
17. The Colonist Islander (Victoria) 23 July 1967.
18. The Daily Province (Vancouver) 8 February 1936.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. British Columbia. Public Archives. Sound and Moving Image Cassette 1306:1, May 1962. Interview with Major Kirkpatrick-Crockett.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.

The Pacific Naval War, August 1914 - March 1915.

1. Tucker, Naval Service of Canada I, pp. 273-8, for an account of the German Squadron's operations.