

**STORM IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC:
THE ST. PIERRE AND MIQUELON AFFAIR
OF 1941**

by

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ABSTRACT

About twelve miles to the south of Newfoundland's Burin Peninsula, there are two small islands, called St. Pierre and Miquelon which have belonged to France for nearly four centuries. In June of 1940 when France succumbed to the onslaught of the Nazis, the territory, like all other French holdings in the New World, fell under the control of the Vichy French government. But on December 24th, 1941, the Islands were seized by a Free French Naval task force acting under the direction of Charles de Gaulle, who had ordered this action not only in direct contradiction to the expressed wishes of the Allies, but also after having specifically assured them that he would not attempt to undertake such a move. The result was a serious diplomatic crisis, the ramifications of which far outweighed any importance the Islands themselves may have had. For by seizing this territory de Gaulle had brought himself into direct conflict with U.S. policy regarding the Western Hemisphere and, in addition, created great difficulties between the Allies over the issue of U.S. recognition of Vichy, versus British support for de Gaulle.

This thesis, then, will examine the events which led up to this crisis, and will attempt to ascertain what significance, if any, it had on the conduct of the war as a whole.

RÉSUMÉ

A environ douze miles au sud de Burin Peninsula dans la province de Terre-Neuve, se trouvent deux petites îles appelées St. Pierre et Miquelon qui appartiennent à la France depuis presque quatre siècles. Au mois de juin 1940, lorsque la France succomba à l'attaque des nazis, ce territoire, comme toutes les autres possessions françaises dans le Nouveau Monde, tomba sous le contrôle du gouvernement de Vichy. Mais, le 24 décembre 1941, la marine des Forces françaises libres s'empara de ces îles, agissant sous la direction de Charles de Gaulle. Ce dernier avait ordonné cette opération sans tenir compte de la volonté des Alliés, qui s'étaient prononcés contre, et après leur avoir expressément affirmé qu'il ne tenterait pas une telle action. La conséquence en fut une sérieuse crise diplomatique qui dépassa de loin l'importance que pourraient avoir eu les îles en elles-mêmes. Car, en s'emparant de ce territoire, de Gaulle s'était directement opposé à la politique des États-Unis relativement au continent américain. En outre, il fut à l'origine d'importants différends parmi les Alliés sur la question de la reconnaissance par les États-Unis du gouvernement de Vichy, alors que l'Angleterre soutenait de Gaulle.

Nous examinerons donc dans cette thèse les événements qui ont abouti à cette crise et nous essaierons d'établir, le cas échéant, quel en fut l'impact sur le déroulement de la guerre.

PREFACE

As dusk settled over Washington, and the last shimmering rays of a brilliant sunset cast a glowing light upon the throng gathering on the south lawn of the White House,¹ Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill prepared to address the crowd that would soon greet them in the twilight. It was Christmas Eve, 1941. America was at war. A scant 17 days earlier, Pearl Harbor lay burning and in ruins. Churchill, upon hearing the news, determined at once to set out for Washington, and was now, to the surprise and delight of the public, the President's guest for this grim holiday season. In the Far East, Manila, Hong Kong and Malaya fought bravely on in the face of Japanese fury, while the Russians desperately defended Moscow and Auchinleck advanced in North Africa.² The whole world was indeed, to quote Churchill, "locked in deadly struggle".³

In the face of such calamities, the fate of two tiny, insignificant islands, just off the coast of Newfoundland would seem to pale by comparison. Yet on the same day that these two great leaders opened the Yuletide festivities in Washington events occurred in this distant corner of the North Atlantic which would seriously disrupt "Arcadia", the first great conference of the war. For the two islands, which belonged to

¹ Toronto Globe and Mail, December 25, 1941, p. 13.

² New York Times, December 24, 1941, p. 1.

³ Churchill, Sir Winston S., The Grand Alliance, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977, p. 670.

Vichy France, were also coveted by Charles de Gaulle, who, without warning and in direct contradiction to the expressed wishes of the Allies, seized the Islands by force of arms early on the morning of December 24, 1941. What followed was an important diplomatic crisis, which not only threatened to disturb the inchoate development of the active wartime alliance between Britain and the United States, but also placed considerable strain on the relations between the United States and Canada, and in addition, almost led to the resignation of the U.S. Secretary of State and rendered the possibility of cordial relations between Charles de Gaulle and the Roosevelt administration all but impossible. There is no question then, that the crisis which resulted from the seizure of St. Pierre and Miquelon had the potential of doing real harm to the Allied cause, and did, in some respects, seriously affect other, more important aspects, of the war.

I have chosen, therefore, to look into this affair because I thought it deserved further examination, and because it appears that it has been two decades since the last major works which dealt extensively with the event have been published. Moreover, what work has been done on the crisis, has not as yet, to my knowledge, made use of recently published material from the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa.⁴ It is for this reason

⁴ The two most important works which deal with the crisis include Douglas Anglin's The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affaire, A Study in Diplomacy in the North Atlantic Quadrangle, and W.A. Christian's Divided Island, two excellent accounts which were written in the mid-1960's, prior to the publication of the Department of External Affairs documents.

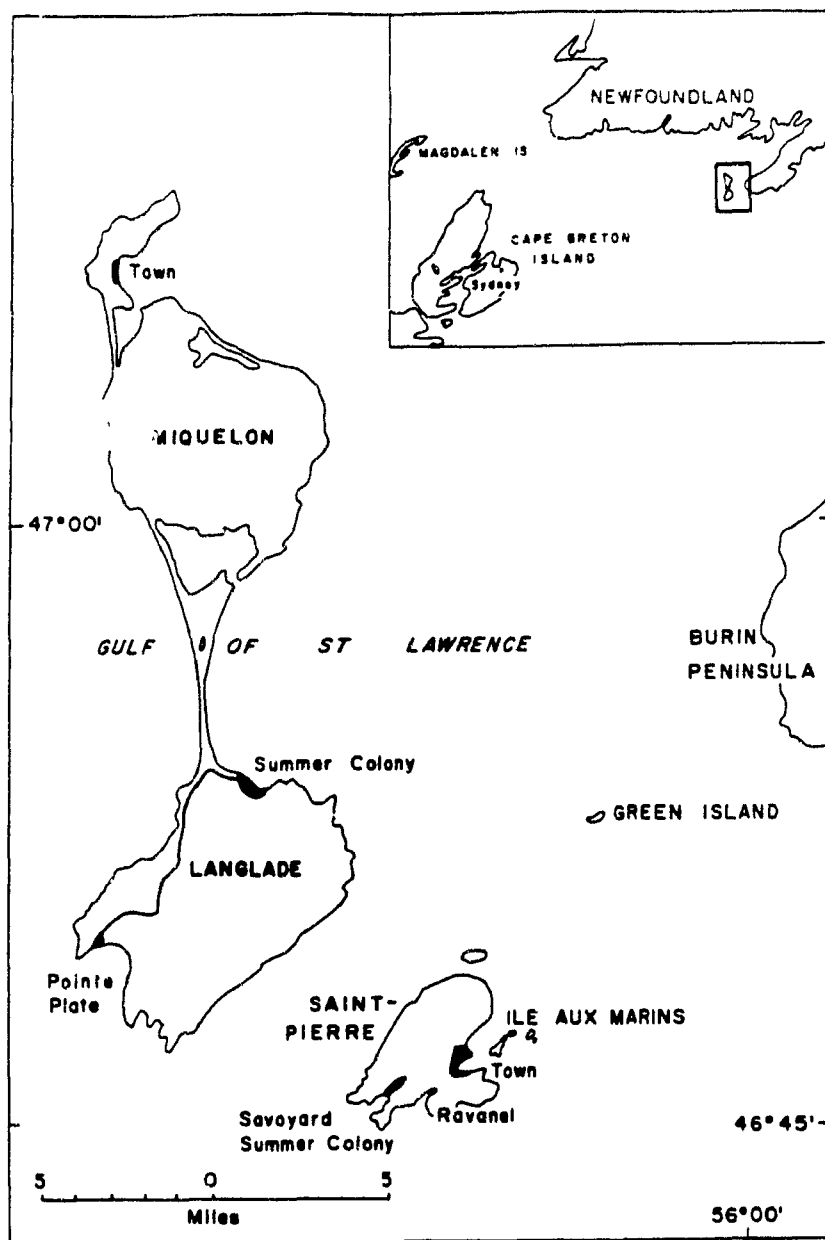
that I have paid particular attention to these documents, which not only shed new light on Canada's role in the affair, but also contribute to a better understanding of de Gaulle's motives for taking the Islands, and reveal the considerable extent to which communication between the White House and State Department had broken down at the very moment when the crisis reached its climax. The other chief primary sources from which I have gathered my material include the Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, the Great Britain Cabinet Office Cabinet Minutes and Memoranda for the war years 1939-1945 (CAB 65/1-57, CAB 66/1-67) and the various memoirs of the individuals involved.

I must also confess to having looked into this crisis out of a natural curiosity as to how these two islands, all but unknown to most of humanity, could suddenly be thrust to the forefront of the world's attention at the very time when Roosevelt, King, and Churchill faced the daunting responsibility of trying to forge a military alliance strong enough to defeat the seemingly invincible power of the Axis.

In closing, I would like simply to extend my thanks to Henri M. Bybelezer for providing me with a copy of his doctoral dissertation, British Policy Towards Free France 1940 - 1942, which proved to be an invaluable source for the British side of this story, and also to extend my thanks to Professor Robert Vogel of McGill University for all of his help and encouragement in seeing this project through to its conclusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
PREFACE	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
MAP	vi
CHAPTER I INTO THE MAELSTROM	1
CHAPTER II CRISIS OVER VICHY	34
CHAPTER III THE "PETIT COUP DE MAIN"	60
CHAPTER IV "THE BUSINESS MUST BE SETTLED"	86
CHAPTER V RETURN TO OBSCURITY	132
APPENDIX	149
I CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE ADMINISTRATOR OF ST. PIERRE AND MIQUELON, JULY 1940	
II STATEMENT BY ADMIRAL MUSELIER	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	153



Source: Christian, W.A. Divided Island, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969.

CHAPTER I

INTO THE MAELSTROM

St. Pierre and Miquelon, the two principal islands which make up this tiny archipelago, lie just 12 miles to the south of Newfoundland's Burin peninsula, in a formidable sea, which has claimed some 530 odd ships in the 4 centuries that these islands have belonged to France. St. Pierre, the smaller of the two islands, is a mere two miles wide and five miles long, with some 3,500 inhabitants of Breton and Norman descent, most of whom live in the village of the same name. Miquelon is much larger, some 83 square miles, but has a sparse population of only 500 people.¹ Aside from their distinction as being the oldest colony of France, and the attention they have occasionally attracted over fishing disputes or the running of rum,² the Islands, over the years, have remained relatively isolated, wholly French, and intensely loyal to their Mother Country.³

¹ MacLean's, January 1, 1941, article by C. Rawlings, p. 11.

² During Prohibition. St. Pierre became a virtual smuggler's paradise, where European wines and spirits were stored in vast quantities and then shipped illicitly to the U.S. and Canada. France benefitted too, from the huge tax revenues she collected from the Islands' trade in this precious commodity. (Rannie, W.F., St. Pierre and Miquelon, Beamsville, Ontario: Rannie Publications, 1966, pp. 72-77, Maclean's, January 1, 1941, p. 11.)

³ Rannie, p. 12, Christian, W.A., Divided Island, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 1, National Geographic, Dec. 1941, p. 743, Muselier, De Gaulle Contre le Gaullisme, Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1946, p. 247.

But the Second World War shattered the isolation which kept St. Pierre and Miquelon blanketed in obscurity. Suddenly, the territories became part of the larger struggle for the North Atlantic and their importance increased with the intensity of that battle. Indeed, as early as the 29th of March, 1940, the possibility of the U.S. Army using the Islands as a base for operations appeared in a War Plans Division (WPD) memo. Here, tiny St. Pierre and Miquelon, were likened to Newfoundland, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands and Trinidad as areas of "real military value to the United States"⁴ which might be acquired or occupied for the protection of U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere. The reasons for this were quite simple. St. Pierre and Miquelon are located in close proximity to the North Atlantic shipping lanes, at the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and, like Newfoundland, held some potential as a possible base for naval or other military operations.

The general interest which the Islands generated at the outbreak of the war turned to genuine anxiety, however, when the territory fell under Vichy control following the disaster in France. Almost immediately after France signed the armistice with Germany, questions began to arise in various capitals about what to do with St. Pierre and Miquelon. On June 27, 1940, for example, Newfoundland's Commissioner for Justice, L.E. Emerson, addressed a memo to Canada's Under-Secretary of State for

⁴ Conn and Fairchild, Framework of Hemisphere Defense, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, p. 45.

External Affairs, Dr. Skelton, noting that the collapse of the French government made it necessary for the governments of both Canada and Newfoundland "to consider the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon as a possible source of danger to the allied cause."⁵ Emerson stressed the need to assess immediately the situation on the Islands and noted that, should the local population prove friendly to the Axis, the potential "element of danger ... would certainly not be negligible."⁶ He therefore suggested that officials from both governments visit the Islands as soon as possible and even cautioned the Canadian Secretary that "steps" might have to be taken "to control the Islands" should there be any doubt as to the "complete loyalty" of the St. Pierreais to the allied war effort.⁷ Nor was Emerson's the only voice to raise such concerns. Two days later, C.G. Power, the Canadian Minister of National Defense for Air, told Pierrepont Moffat, the U.S. Minister in Ottawa, that "if he had his way Canadian troops would occupy [St. Pierre]" and on July 1st, Rear Admiral P.W. Nelles, Chief of the Canadian Naval Staff, suggested in a memo to the Minister of National Defense that Canada consider "setting up a system of administration" in the Islands

⁵ External Affairs document #570, vol. 8, Commissioner of Newfoundland to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 27th, 1940, p. 723.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

"for the duration of the war."⁸ But the Canadian government was not as yet prepared to take such steps. For one thing, it was doubtful that the Americans, who were very touchy about unilateral action of this kind anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, would approve; it was also too early to seriously consider occupation, although some officials acknowledged that the possibility could not "be entirely overlooked".⁹ Canada was, however, willing to take up Mr. Emerson's suggestion of sending representatives to the Islands and by July 3rd, discussions had begun with Mr. Emerson as to what sort of official representation should be sent to the Islands.¹⁰

The tenor of these talks changed, however, with the news on July 4th of the British attack on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir. On that same morning the Governor of Newfoundland sent an urgent telegram to the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, telling him of the "increased apprehension" felt in Newfoundland "as to the position of St. Pierre and Miquelon" in view of the "latest information", which included not only the news of the British attack in North Africa, but also the knowledge that the French armed Sloop the Ville d'Ys was now stationed in the harbour at St. Pierre. Faced with the

⁸ External Affairs document #574, vol. 8, Minister of National Defense for Air to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 5th, 1940, p. 728.

⁹ External Affairs document #571, vol. 8, Memorandum by Legal Advisor, July 3rd, 1940, p. 725.

¹⁰ Ibid.

possibility of open hostility between Britain and France, the Governor suggested that Canada consider what "suitable naval and military action should be taken to prevent the island or French vessels there from hostile action against us or British shipping." Moreover, the presence on the island of the Ville d'Ys was, he noted, "serious from our point of view and renders early action all the more necessary."¹¹

In Ottawa, the reaction to the news at Oran was no less serious, although the Canadian government was not quite as alarmed as Newfoundland about the presence of the Ville d'Ys in St. Pierre. Admiral Nelles, in a memo to Secretary Skelton, noted that the sloop was "not a very efficient fighting unit"¹² and suggested that before resorting to belligerent measures, her captain be approached in a peaceful manner, and that he be told that the Royal Canadian Navy (R.C.N.) has "no wish to inflict upon him any of the unfortunate actions that has been found necessary to take against the French navy in other parts of the world ... and that we suggest ... he should sail for Halifax at his earliest convenience" where he will be "amongst friends and

¹¹ External Affairs document #572, vol. 8, Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 4th, 1940, p. 726.

¹² Built in 1916, in England, the Ville d'Ys carried three 3.9 inch guns and, according to Nelles, could only manage to do about twelve knots. Prior to the war, she had served as a fishing patrol vessel on the Grand Banks. On learning of the French request for an armistice, she immediately left St. John's and sailed for St. Pierre where she remained until the 2nd of November, 1940. (External Affairs document #573, vol. 8, Chief of Naval Staff to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 4th, 1940, p. 727.)

in complete safety."¹³ Diplomatically, the department of External Affairs pressed ahead with its plans to send a delegation to St. Pierre, and by July 14, had reached an agreement with Newfoundland on the composition of the committee and on the text of the communiqué to be sent to the Administrator of the Islands, M. de Bournat.¹⁴

In general, Canada's chief concerns included M. de Bournat's relations with the Pétain government, the economic and financial position of the Islands, the position of the Ville d'Ys and the "necessity of an understanding that the Islands will not be available for enemy use."¹⁵ With respect to the Ville d'Ys, the Canadian representative, Commander J.W.R. Roy, was to stress the "impossibility of leaving this vessel, armed and at liberty in so strategic a position," suggesting as alternatives, that she be demobilized or proceed immediately to a U.S. or Canadian port to be interred for the duration of the war. In addition, Roy was also instructed to stress the need for an understanding that M. de Bournat "will keep in constant touch with our naval authorities and report instantly any suspicious development."¹⁶ Newfoundland concurred with these points, and was also anxious to

¹³ External Affairs document #573, vol. 8, Nelles to Skelton, July 4th, 1940, p. 727.

¹⁴ See appendix I.

¹⁵ External Affairs document #583, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, July 17th, 1940, pp. 734-5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

achieve some measure of control over the Islands before the Administrator might receive any assistance from the United States. This possibility was of special concern to Newfoundland, not only because such aid would reduce the diplomatic leverage the two countries would have with respect to St. Pierre, but also because of her distinct fear of an eventual American takeover of the colony which Newfoundland believed would be devastating to her fishing industry.¹⁷ It was for this reason, then, that her government repeatedly suggested in its communication with Canada that the U.S. be informed of the special geographic and historical relationship Newfoundland had with St. Pierre and Miquelon, and that because of that relationship, Newfoundland be considered the most likely candidate to oversee the administration of the Islands should that become necessary.¹⁸ But while Ottawa recognized these concerns, it was felt at the Department of External Affairs at the time that due to Washington's sensitivity over matters in the Western Hemisphere, the effect of mentioning any possible takeover of the colony would simply be "to arouse misgivings in Washington as to our ultimate intentions in regard to the Islands." The Canadian government, therefore, insisted instead that Washington be told that Canada and Newfoundland were in communication with the Islands solely "for the purpose of examining ... economic and

¹⁷ External Affairs document #648, vol. 8, Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, May 21, 1941, p. 808.

¹⁸ Ibid.

other problems, ... and to obtain an assurance that they will not be used for hostile purposes," all the while stressing that neither government had any "intention of occupying the Islands or interfering with the local government."¹⁹

On St. Pierre itself, M. de Bournat had in fact decided to approach both Canada and the United States about the possibility of receiving funds drawn from French assets frozen in Montreal and New York for the support of the colony.²⁰ Indeed, the situation on the Islands was in fact deteriorating. Supplies of coal and potatoes were low, and other items, such as flour, were down to roughly a 3 months supply. Trade with the North American continent was also difficult because the St. Pierrais had always purchased their goods with dollars, which were now in short supply, and because all transportation to and from the colony had ceased with the French government's general order following Mers-el-Kebir, to fire upon any ship or plane passing within 20 miles of French territory.²¹ It is not surprising, then, that a good deal of the concern which revolved around St. Pierre and Miquelon at this time in Ottawa, as well as St. John's, was economic. It was well known that the Islands had been receiving heavy

¹⁹ External Affairs document #576, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Governor of Newfoundland, July 12th, 1940, p. 730.

²⁰ External Affairs document #589, vol. 8, Commander Roy to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 22nd, 1940, p. 742, Macleans, January 1, 1941, pp. 11-12.

²¹ External Affairs document #575, vol. 8, Government of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 10th, 1940, p. 72°.

subsidies from France. And Newfoundland, in its initial report on the Islands, had stressed the fact that it alone could not shoulder the heavy financial burden that administration of the Islands would entail. It was also understood that the colony was now completely cut-off from France and that de Bournat had not even managed as yet to establish any direct contact with the Pétain government.²² Serious questions, then, had arisen in both Ottawa and St. John's as to who would eventually support the colony and how it was to maintain itself for the duration of the war.

The meetings between M. de Bournat, commander Roy and J.H. Penson, the representative from Newfoundland, took place on the 17th and 18th of July after a polite exchange of notes²³ in which safe conduct was assured for the S.S. Belle Isle²⁴ and M. de Bournat indicated that he would receive "avec plaisir ... le visite des représentants des Gouvernements amis du Canada et de Terre-Neuve."²⁵ Commander Roy, in his report to the Under-Secretary of State following the meetings confirmed that the

²² External Affairs document #570, vol. 8, Memo from Newfoundland's Commissioner to U.S. Secretary for External Affairs, July 27th, 1940, p. 724.

²³ See appendix I.

²⁴ The SS Belle Isle was a ship from the Canada Steamship Lines which maintained a regularly scheduled stop at St. Pierre from St. John's and Halifax. The ship discontinued her service to the Islands, however, following the British attack on Mers-El-Kebir. It was resumed shortly after these meetings took place.

²⁵ External Affairs document #580, vol. 8, Administrator, St. Pierre and Miquelon, to Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 15th, 1940, p. 733.

1 Administrator had "received no definite communications from the Pétain government and consequently did not know where it stood or what authority they would eventually recognize."²⁶ He also confirmed that there was a shortage of food and fuel on the Islands, that some sort of financial arrangement would have to be made, and that in his judgment the territory offered "few facilities to the enemy as a base" because of the lack of an adequate harbour, the unsuitableness of the Islands for air bases, and because the territory could "easily be reconnoitered by air from Canada."²⁷ With respect to the Ville d'Ys, Roy reported that its presence presented M. de Bournat with "a difficult problem" since the ship was in fact "under the jurisdiction of [an] admiral at Martinique and not under his."²⁸ The Administrator, nevertheless, seemed to indicate that he would allow the ship to proceed to the United States, where it could be interned, provided that he had secured the consent of her C.O., and that he had received a formal request that she do so from the Canadian government.

Roy also noted the presence on St. Pierre of a "low

²⁶ External Affairs document #589, vol. 8, Commander Roy to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 22nd, 1940, p. 740.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Admiral Robert was stationed in Martinique as Commander of all (Vichy) French Naval Forces in the Western Hemisphere. He would soon become Vichy High Commissioner for the same territory.

powered"²⁹ wireless transmitting set which, though its reception was "world wide", was used for communication with Miquelon. Cable communication running to and from St. Pierre, he indicated as landing at "either North Sydney, Canso, Bay Roberts, or Heart Content," where, "subject to technical difficulties, ... censorship could be exercised ..."³⁰ (The question of uncensored communication from the Islands to the Vichy government would become much more serious later on.) Finally, the report indicated that Commander Roy had secured a written guarantee from the Administrator stating that the "Islands would not be used for any purpose by the enemy" as well as the information that M. de Bournat was intent on visiting both Ottawa and Washington and would leave St. Pierre by the Belle Isle on the 20th of July.

These talks, which Mr. Roy said were conducted in an amiable manner, soon led to further understandings in Ottawa between the Canadian government and the Administrator of St. Pierre and Miquelon. With respect to financial matters, it was agreed in the ensuing discussions in Ottawa that Canada would release the

²⁹ A report nearly a year later, in May of 1941, indicated that the wireless was in fact quite powerful and was being used for sending and receiving messages with Vichy. Some of these messages were in code, which it was assumed the Germans could read, but even the transmission of something as seemingly innocuous as a weather report would eventually be regarded as unacceptable, since such information might assist German U-boats in their efforts to find Allied convoys. (Bybelezer, H.M., British Policy Towards Free France, unpublished doctoral dissertation, St. John's College, Cambridge, October 1978, p. 276.)

³⁰ External Affairs document #589, vol. 8, Commander Roy to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 22nd, 1940, p. 743.

250,000 dollars that the territory had on deposit in Canadian banks, on the condition that the "money made available would be used for the purchase of Canadian goods."³¹ This action, as well as M. de Bournat's successful acquisition of a considerable quantity of Canadian dollars from the French Embassy in Washington (under less than legal means³²) relieved Canada of the prospect of having to send aid to the Islands and settled the colony's financial needs for some time.³³ And so, with his financial problems solved for the moment, M. de Bournat was able to report to the Canadian authorities in Ottawa on the 31st of July that both he and the French Legations in Ottawa and Washington were in complete agreement as to the "necessity of maintaining cordial relations between St. Pierre and Miquelon and Canada" and that they would continue to do "everything possible to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of such relations."³⁴

The friendliness of these discussions and the apparent

³¹ External Affairs document #629, vol. 8, Memorandum by Counsellor (Keenleyside), October 22nd, 1940, p. 791.

³² H.L. Keenleyside, in a memorandum dated October 22, 1940, noted that the dollars had been purchased in the "black market" in New York. (External Affairs document #629, p. 791)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ External Affairs document #600, vol. 8, Keenleyside to Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, July 31st, 1940, p. 755.

willingness of M. de Bournat and M. de Lageneste³⁵ to recognize Canada's concerns with respect to St. Pierre and Miquelon, seemed to indicate to the Canadians at least that reasonable progress in any discussions over the affairs of the Islands could be expected in the future, and even led Under-Secretary Skelton to report to the British High Commissioner in Ottawa that the results of the talks thus far were "satisfactory particularly from the standpoint of defense."³⁶

But there were still a number of outstanding issues to be resolved. The Ville d'Ys, in spite of the formal request of the Canadian government, had not left St. Pierre or been demobilized. And new questions had been raised with respect to the fate of the French North Atlantic fishing fleet which had now retired to St. Pierre with some 1,500 to 2,000 men,³⁷ and a large quantity of North Atlantic cod. This catch, which Newfoundland estimated at 300,000 quintals of fish, was a serious threat to the North American market and both Newfoundland and Canada were anxious that it not be sold licitly or illicitly in any area which might affect their markets. In London, there was concern too, lest the

³⁵ M. de Lageneste was the First Secretary of the French Legation in Ottawa.

³⁶ External Affairs document #601, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to British High Commissioner, August 1st, 1940, p. 757.

³⁷ The arrival of these men was a real problem for M. de Bournat, who had no pay for these restive sailors, but had to feed them and keep them in line. This he eventually accomplished by opening the Islands' wine stores to the men, while advising the mothers of St. Pierre to keep their daughters "under lock and key". (MacLean's, January 1st, 1941, p. 25.)

fish end up in German hands through Vichy, Spain or even Portugal. Given these problems the attempts to find a market for the cod proved difficult, and it was not until the trawlers left the Islands later that year that the issue was finally resolved.

As for the ships, London was adamant that they be requisitioned for the allied war effort and even requested that, should the fleet attempt to leave St. Pierre, the Canadians seize it by force of arms. But Mackenzie King would have none of this. For him, such a move was an act of war which would have serious ramifications on Canadian-French relations, as well as serious effects within Canada itself, where Canadian unity might suffer should the French population within Canada react unfavourably. The Ville d'Ys also proved to be a difficult problem. Indeed, as early as the 27th of July (and in spite of M. de Bournat's earlier assurances), it was clear that the recommendation of the Canadian authorities, that the ship proceed to an American or Canadian port to be interned, would not be carried out. This, said M. de Lageneste in a discussion at the time, was impossible "on principle" since it was against the terms of the armistice which "precluded any such action or the demilitarization of the vessel." It was then suggested that the ship proceed to Martinique. Both M. de Lageneste and M. de Bournat were agreeable to such a suggestion (particularly M. de Bournat who was responsible for feeding her crew) but because neither of them had the authority to issue such an order, the matter was referred to Admiral Robert in Martinique and to the French Ambassador in

Washington for approval. The answer was not long in coming. On July 27, M. de Lageneste telephoned H.L. Keenleyside, Counsellor for the Department of External Affairs, to tell him that the French government had instructed him to issue a statement saying that the Ville d'Ys would remain at St. Pierre until further notice.³⁸ Mr. Keenleyside acknowledged the statement but noted his "personal opinion" that from Canada's point of view it would be far better for the sloop to leave "the Gulf of St. Lawrence or Canadian waters entirely."³⁹

In response to Canada's unease over this matter, French officials on this side of the Atlantic, repeatedly tried to assure the Canadians that the vessel was harmless and had no hostile intent. It was pointed out, among other things, that the captain of the Ville d'Ys had been instructed to ignore the order of the Pétain government following Oran to fire on any ship or plane passing within 20 miles of French territory, and that in any case, this order had since been rescinded and been replaced by a new one which specifically instructed all French vessels not to attack or interfere with British shipping.⁴⁰ Moreover, it was

³⁸ He was also instructed to give his personal guarantee that the ship would "not interfere in any way with any British or Canadian ship." (External Affairs document #597, vol. 8, Keenleyside to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 27th, 1940, p. 753)

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ External Affairs documents #588, vol. 8, Memorandum by Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 20th, 1940, p. 739, and #590, vol. 8, Memorandum by Keenleyside, July 23rd, 1940, p. 745.

also pointed out that the French Embassy in Washington had recommended to the Vichy government that the sloop a) be disarmed, or b) be sent to Martinique, but that the authorities at Vichy had remained adamant that she stay in St. Pierre and even implied that the removal of her guns was a "question of honour rather than of substance."⁴¹ By the 8th of August it was decided at the Department of External Affairs to accept the French assurances for the moment, and not to press the matter further, except to state that the government "would reserve the right to take any action that might be found necessary for the security of Canadian interests."⁴²

Newfoundland, however, remained apprehensive. On the 24th of August, in a dispatch from its Governor to Dr. Skelton, Newfoundland noted with approval the statement by de Bournat that the French authorities on St. Pierre were intent on maintaining cordial relations between the Islands and Canada, while at the same time expressing the hope that "a solution may shortly be found resulting in the removal of the potential danger which this armed vessel on our shore still represents."⁴³ By the 9th of September, it looked as if Newfoundland's hopes would be

⁴¹ External Affairs #600, vol. 8, Keenleyside to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 31st, 1940, p. 755.

⁴² External Affairs document #606, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister (King), August 7th, 1940, p. 762.

⁴³ External Affairs document #610, vol. 8, Governor of Newfoundland to Secretary of State for External Affairs, August 24th, 1940, p. 767.

fulfilled, for it was then reported that the French Legation in Ottawa had indicated that the vessel would sail for Martinique by the middle of that month. But on the 23rd of September she was reported still in the harbour at St. Pierre and there were even indications that her presence was now causing trouble on the Islands themselves. "A near riot", it seems, had broken out in St. Pierre between pro and anti Gaullist supporters over the presence of the sloop in the harbour. This early indication that there was considerable support for de Gaulle within the colony was not lost on the British, and coincided almost exactly with a rising interest in the territory at the Dominions Office in London⁴⁴ where a policy of exerting general economic pressure on French colonies which remained loyal to Vichy now held sway. The result was that the British, who were sympathetic to Newfoundland's concern over the Ville d'Ys, and who were still trying to get their hands on the French trawlers stationed at St. Pierre, began to urge the Canadian government to assist a pro de Gaulle coup on the Islands.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ External Affairs document #613, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, September 12th, 1940, p. 770.

⁴⁵ It was eventually determined by various sources on the Islands, that the general population was strongly in favor of de Gaulle. The Administrator, other key officials, and a small group of wealthy businessmen, however, remained staunchly loyal to the Vichy regime. (External Affairs document # 629, vol. 8, Memorandum by Keenleyside, October 22nd, 1940, p. 792, and document #659, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister in the U.S., June 25th, 1941, pp. 825-26.)

The suggestion was that Canada and Newfoundland begin to exert economic pressure on the Islands, stop coaling the Ville d'Ys, and send a representative from Newfoundland to the colony to advise the Administrator of the advantages of rallying to de Gaulle, which would result in immediate financial assistance from Great Britain. Canada, however, rejected all but the British suggestion to stop coaling the Ville d'Ys (which in any case had recently been refurbished with fuel) on the grounds that it saw no need for a change in the administration of the Islands until there was "substantial evidence" of "real danger".⁴⁶ Moreover, the Canadians insisted that since de Gaulle "had no force in this area" any Gaullist take-over "could only be effected by military occupation by United Kingdom or Canadian forces" which would have to be followed up by financial assistance, mainly from Canada.⁴⁷ This, Under-Secretary Skelton felt, was "wholly unnecessary and ill advised"⁴⁸ and could only result in a serious breach of Canadian-French relations, to say nothing of the reaction of the United States which would no doubt raise objections to the move on the grounds that it was contrary to earlier Canadian assurances that Canada had no intentions of taking over control of the Islands.

⁴⁶ External Affairs document #620, vol. 8, Memorandum, October 14th, 1940, p. 781.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ External Affairs document #613, vol. 8, Dominion Secretary to Governor of Newfoundland, September 10th, 1940, p. 770. (Note placed in a covering memorandum by Dr. Skelton.)

But the British continued to insist that a coup was possible, "without external assistance", and, as the evidence mounted that the French trawlers and their cargoes were about to leave St. Pierre, they reiterated their demands that the Canadians seize any ship attempting to leave, that both Canada and Newfoundland apply economic sanctions, and that a representative be sent to St. Pierre to speak to the Administrator "on the lines set out" earlier.⁴⁹ Newfoundland agreed and supported the British position that the "urgency of the matter of the trawlers" meant that the "best course would be not to delay action pending consideration of the wider issues".⁵⁰ But the Canadians would not go along,⁵¹ and there is some evidence to suggest that they were beginning to resent being prodded on the issue by the British. Indeed, by the third week of October, Under-Secretary Skelton reported to the Canadian minister in Washington that Canada was "being pressed to take action" on St. Pierre "which would be contrary to our understanding with the United States and would be

⁴⁹ External Affairs document #621, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, October 18th, 1940, p. 783.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ King, writing in his diary about the British insistence that the Canadian Navy seize the trawlers, noted with satisfaction that he was "positive" that his refusal to do so was the right course, since it "proves the wisdom of our maintaining strong the position of a nation making its own decisions and not having decisions made by the British Admiralty through its control of all naval forces." (Pickersgill, J.W., The Mackenzie King Record. I: 1939-1944, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960, p. 147.)

contrary also to the ordinary rules governing the intercourse of two states [Canada and France] that are mutually at peace."⁵²

One result of this British pressure, however, was that the Canadian government began once again to insist that the Ville d'Ys leave the Islands. In fact, the French Minister in Ottawa was called to the Department of External Affairs to discuss the matter no less than four times in the month of October alone--with two of the interviews being conducted by Primer Minister Mackenzie King himself. But before either the issue of the trawlers or the sloop became any more serious, the news arrived in Ottawa that most of the trawlers had sailed for Casablanca on the 19th and 20th of October and that the Ville d'Ys had been ordered by the Vichy government to leave St. Pierre no later than November 5, 1940.

This changed the complexion of the situation entirely. With the Ville d'Ys gone, St. John's no longer had to worry about any potential naval threat from the Islands, and the North African destination of the trawlers, not only silenced "Newfoundland's perturbation"⁵³ about the cod, but also relieved Canada of all possible responsibility for seizing the ships since they were now in waters outside of Canada's jurisdiction. One further effect was that British interest in the Islands, as well as their

⁵² External Affairs document #626, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister in the United States, October 19th, 1940, p. 788.

⁵³ External Affairs document #627, vol. 8, Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, October 21st, 1940. p. 789.

enthusiasm for a Gaullist takeover, which had already suffered as a result of the fiasco at Dakar, fell off almost entirely. This, no doubt, was a welcome development in Ottawa, for the Department of External Affairs had opposed every British initiative concerning the Islands from mid-September on. Now, with the trawlers removed, and the Ville d'Ys in Martinique, the Canadian government could finally settle on the policy that it had been developing in July, which was to keep a watchful eye on the colony, maintain good relations with its administrator, make sure it was fed, and leave well enough alone.

* * *

Washington's interest in St. Pierre and Miquelon in the Summer of 1940, differed from that of Britain's or her two North American Dominions, in the sense that the foremost concern of the United States was that status of the Islands as a colony of France not change as a result of the war. This position was directly tied to U.S. strategy concerning the defense of the Western Hemisphere, which demanded not only that "potential Old World enemies" of the United States "must not obtain control over any territory in the Western Hemisphere, either by force or negotiation" but also demanded that to "avoid any pretext for military attack, the United States also opposed the defense of French, Dutch, and Danish possessions by friendly belligerents,

and insisted that those lands should be defended as necessary by the United States or other Latin American forces."⁵⁴

There were many other reasons for this U.S. position. In the first place, such a policy was a logical extension of the Monroe Doctrine, which called for no intervention in the Western Hemisphere on the part of any non-American power. In the second place, German clandestine activity in Latin America had reached such menacing proportions that the U.S. administration genuinely feared that any effort on the part of the Allies to defend or occupy any European possession in the Western Hemisphere would result in an effort by the Germans to undertake similar action. Finally, there was the position of the United States with respect to its Latin American neighbours. Here, Roosevelt's careful adherence to the "Good Neighbor" policy in the decade preceeding the war, enabled the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, to obtain not only Pan-American recognition for the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, but also an agreement signed in Panama in September 1939, which stipulated that should the sovereignty of any European possession in the Western Hemisphere be threatened, the republics would meet immediately to consult with one another on the best course of action to be taken.

It is not surprising, then, that Washington's initial reaction to Canada and Newfoundland's interest in St. Pierre and Miquelon, was to seek assurances from Ottawa that neither government would attempt to take unilateral action on the Islands

⁵⁴ Conn and Fairchild, p. 414.

without consulting the government of the United States.⁵⁵ The Canadians, in fact, had already experienced the extent of U.S. sensitivity over this issue when, following the German occupation of Denmark, they had suggested that a small expeditionary force be sent to Greenland to defend it against possible German aggression. This announcement, which was made just days after the German invasion, immediately ran afoul of the State Department, which three days later informed the Canadian minister in Washington that the U.S. Government was "extremely anxious that no such action of this kind be taken" To do so, insisted the Department, would be to provide some "larger countries" with the very excuse they needed for the absorption of colonial territories held by other occupied European nations.⁵⁶

Nor was Canada the only country to run into difficulty with the Americans over this issue. Britain, on the same day the Nazis began their thrust into the Low Countries, infuriated the Americans by sending a small number of British and French troops to the Dutch Islands of Curaçao and Aruba to protect vital oil refineries there from possible sabotage by German nationals living on these Islands. Secretary Hull, upon learning of this action, immediately called in British Ambassador Lothian and in a rather heated exchange, told him that such activities were

⁵⁵ Moffat, J.P., The Moffat Papers, edited by N.H. Hooker, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 322.

⁵⁶ FRUS (Foreign Relations of the United States), vol. II, 1940, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1959, Memorandum by Dunn to Secretary of State (Cordell Hull), pp. 358-59.

unacceptable from the point of view of the United States, as well as from the point of view of the other American republics, who, Hull insisted, will be likely "to construe this action as assumption of more or less jurisdiction by the British over Curaçao, regardless of the real intention of the British to the contrary."⁵⁷

But the vehemence with which the Americans upheld their right to determine what went on in the Western Hemisphere, reached new heights when France fell beneath the weight of German armour. Indeed, within hours of learning of the French request for an armistice, Secretary Hull instructed his ambassador in France to inform Marshall Pétain of the "President's desire" that France, in her pursuit of an agreement with Germany, "bear in mind the traditional policy of the United States with regard to the Western Hemisphere."⁵⁸ This policy, Hull continued, would make it impossible for the U.S. "to recognize any transfer or to acquiesce any attempt to transfer any geographic region of the Western Hemisphere from one non-American power to another..."⁵⁹ Moreover, Hull insisted categorically that the United States had the right, in cooperation with the other Latin American republics, to establish an "inter-American trusteeship" for

⁵⁷ FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Memorandum of conversation by Secretary Hull, May 10, 1940, p. 730, and Hull, C., Memoirs of Cordell Hull, New York: MacMillan Co., 1948, vol. I, pp. 814-15.

⁵⁸ Frus, vol. II, 1940, Secretary of State to Consul in Bordeaux, June 17th, 1940, pp. 493-94.

⁵⁹ Ibid. The same statement was also sent to Berlin and to Rome.

French possessions in the Western Hemisphere for the duration of the war "should conditions in the judgment of this government make such a step necessary."⁶⁰

What most concerned the Americans was the possibility that the Nazis might attempt to acquire French territory in the Western Hemisphere under the terms of the armistice about to be negotiated. Particularly worrying was the Island of Martinique, which was not only strategically located, but also the site where several French warships were stationed, including the aircraft carrier Béarn with 106 American-made planes, two French cruisers, and 245 million dollars worth of gold bullion. Secretary Hull, well aware of the potential danger this island and other French possessions represented, immediately called for an "urgent consultative meeting" of the American republics as stipulated by the agreement already achieved in Panama.⁶¹ The result was the Conference of Havana, which was held between the 21st and 30th of July, 1940.

But the situation on Martinique would not wait for the convening of this conference. On July 5, two weeks before the meetings were held, the British began a blockade of the island, which not only threatened the already tense relations between Britain and France following Oran, but also threatened to cause

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ FRUS, vol. V., 1940, Secretary of State to Chiefs of Diplomatic Missions in the American Republics, June 17th, 1940, p. 181.

"real trouble" with the Americans.⁶² Roosevelt, in fact, was so determined to see to it that the British not attempt to seize any French warships or occupy the island that, within 24 hours of the start of the blockade, he had sent a heavy cruiser and six destroyers to the region to keep an eye on things. Secretary Hull, meanwhile, tried to reach an accommodation with both sides by suggesting that the French ships be sent to American ports for interment while the planes be returned to their manufacturers in order that they might then be released to the British.⁶³ But the French, who were constrained by the terms of the armistice and were under considerable German pressure not to allow the aircraft to take part in the battle of Britain, rejected these suggestions. More negotiations followed, and in spite of the best American efforts, the matter remained at an impasse until the fall, when the French finally agreed to allow American observers on the island to make sure it remained "neutral" for the duration of the war.⁶⁴

In the meantime, the Havana Conference recognized that "it would be contrary to the interests of the American republics to

⁶² FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Memorandum of conversation by Secretary of State, July 5th, 1940, p. 506.

⁶³ FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Memorandum of conversation by Under-Secretary of State (Welles), July 8th, 1940, pp. 506-7.

⁶⁴ Langer and Gleason, The Challenge to Isolation, New York, 1952, pp. 690-1, Logan, John A., No Transfer: An American Security Principle, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 342-3. The planes, however, were never returned nor were the ships disarmed, where they remained with the gold for the duration of the war.

permit the European possessions in the New World to become a subject for barter in the settlement of European differences." Moreover, the Conference also recognized that the "use of these possessions to promote systems alien to the inter-American system could not be countenanced."⁶⁵ As such, it was determined that "any effort ... to modify the existing status of these possessions whether by cession, by transfer, or by any impairment whatsoever in the control heretofore exercised would be of profound and immediate concern to all the American republics."⁶⁶ The Conference agreed, therefore, to adopt two measures. The first, the Act of Havana, provided for "the emergency establishment of a regime of provisional administration" in any territory which was determined by a committee of the republics to be in danger of a change in status. The second, the Convention of Havana, provided the means by which any action taken under the Act would be ratified.⁶⁷

One result of the Conference of Havana, as well as the difficulties which had developed in the Caribbean and elsewhere, was that the Canadians could not help but be aware of the U.S. position with respect to French possessions in the Western Hemisphere. The Canadian government, therefore, as mentioned earlier, insisted from the outset in the discussions on St.

⁶⁵ FRUS, vol. V, 1940, Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, September 12th, 1940, p. 255.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 255-56.

Pierre with Newfoundland on keeping the Americans informed of their actions and of stating unequivocally that neither dominion had any intention of "interfering with the sovereignty of the Islands."⁶⁸ In keeping with this policy, the Department of External Affairs also instructed its Minister in Washington to inform the State Department that Canada⁶⁹ had "read with interest and satisfaction the proposals for the defense of European colonial possessions in this hemisphere which have been advanced at Havana,"⁷⁰ and that Canada had assumed that "if any danger should arise as regards St. Pierre and Miquelon particularly, this would be a matter of immediate interest to the United States, and we would be glad to consider means by which Canada could co-operate in any necessary defensive provisions."⁷¹

The State Department, not surprisingly, reacted favorably to these proposals and by August 1st,⁷² one day after the close of the Havana Conference, had reached an informal understanding with the Canadians which stipulated that in the event of trouble on St. Pierre, the American government would at once get in touch

⁶⁸ External Affairs document #593, vol. 8, Minister in United States of Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 25th, 1940, p. 751.

⁶⁹ The Canadians were not invited to the Havana Conference.

⁷⁰ External Affairs document #594, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister in the United States, July 25th, 1940, p. 752.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² On the same, day Secretary Hull re-opened the U.S. consulate in St. Pierre.

with the Canadian government upon the question of such co-operation."⁷³

The ease with which these conversations dealt with the question of St. Pierre and Miquelon are in part a reflection of the growing desire on the part of both the Canadian and American governments to work together with respect to matters of defense. This co-operation was formally recognized two weeks later in Ogdensburg, New York, when President Roosevelt and Prime Minister King established the Permanent Joint Board on Defense which was to be "set up at once" to consider "the defense of the north half of the Western Hemisphere."⁷⁴ The Americans, therefore, increasingly confident of Canadian cooperation in matters of defense and confident too, that St. Pierre and Miquelon presented the U.S. with no immediate danger, showed little interest in the colony in the late summer and early fall of 1940, and it was not until the 1st November that the matter once again became the subject of serious discussions between the two governments.

At that time new talks, which involved U.S. Under-Secretary Welles and Canadian Minister Christie, were brought about by the growing concern in both Washington and Ottawa that Marshall Pétain, who had met with Hitler in Montoire on October 24, might now be prepared to collaborate more closely with Hitler. The Canadians, accordingly, began to speculate about what might

⁷³ External Affairs document #602, vol. 8, Minister in United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, August 1st, 1940, p. 758.

⁷⁴ Conn and Fairchild, pp. 370-71.

happen on the Islands "in the event of the French government's adopting an actively hostile policy under enemy duress."⁷⁵ Given this possibility and the "special concern" Canada had for St. Pierre and Miquelon due to its proximity to Canada, the Department of External Affairs instructed Mr. Christie to suggest to the Americans that both governments explore the possibility of joint action on the Islands in the event that hostilities did in fact develop.⁷⁶ But Under-Secretary Welles, who said he "recognized ... in principle, Canada's special concern regarding these Islands" as well as the desirability of arriving at a joint policy over the matter, remained skeptical that any development would arise in the near future which would warrant any sort of action by either government. Rather, he simply stated that his government, which was monitoring French activities closely, would continue to keep in touch with Canada "as regards developments that might affect the position of these Islands."⁷⁷

The U.S. was also reluctant to consider the possibility of action on St. Pierre and Miquelon because it was still involved in delicate negotiations with both the Vichy government and Admiral Robert over the situation in Martinique and the status of the forces still stationed there. In fact, one day before their

⁷⁵ External Affairs document #636, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister in the United States, October 30th, 1940, p. 798.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ External Affairs document #637, vol. 8, Minister in United to Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 1st, 1940, p. 801.

conversations with the Canadians, the American government had dispatched Rear Admiral Greenslade to Martinique to seek reassurances⁷⁸ from Robert that the French warships in Martinique would "not engage in further hostilities" or "move except to the French colonies in the Caribbean and then only after advance notice" had been given to the United States.⁷⁹ There was also a consensus at the State Department that Admiral Robert, thus far, "had played a square game",⁸⁰ and, since he was now French High Commissioner in charge of all French territory in the Western Hemisphere (including St. Pierre and Miquelon), the U.S. thought it propitious to await the results of the latest talks before considering any action on St. Pierre.

As it turned out, the results of the talks from the point of view of the United States, were satisfactory. By the end of November, an understanding had been achieved with France on maintaining the status quo for French territory in the Western Hemisphere. By this agreement, it was understood, that French territory in the Western Hemisphere would remain neutral for the

⁷⁸ On August 5th, 1940, Rear Admiral Greenslade was sent from the U.S. to Martinique to begin negotiations over the disposition of Vichy French naval and air forces in Martinique. At that time he received assurances from Admiral Robert that none of these French Forces would leave without advance warning being given to the United States. (FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Vice-Consul at Martinique to Secretary of State, August 7th, 1940, pp. 513-14.)

⁷⁹ FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Chief of Naval Operations to Greenslade, U.S.N., October 30th, 1940, p. 526.

⁸⁰ External Affairs document #637, vol. 8, Minister in United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 1st, 1940, p. 800.

duration of the war and that the term status quo, in this case, referred not only to the maintenance of territorial integrity but also to the movement of ships and gold, neither of which were to be transferred from Martinique without prior notification of the government of the United States.⁸¹ In return, the United States would allow sufficient funds to be released from French holdings in the U.S. to provide for the maintenance of French territory in the New World.

This understanding between the U.S. and France over the status of French colonies in the Western Hemisphere, was achieved at roughly the same time that Britain, Canada, and Newfoundland had settled their difficulties over the Ville d'Ys, and the French fishing fleet and its catch. Thus, as the winter of 1940-41 approached, there was little reason to suspect that St. Pierre and Miquelon would once again become a serious problem. The Americans, having secured French recognition for the principle of no-transfer, did not expect any difficulty to arise from this tiny archipelago. Canada and Newfoundland, though by no means completely content with having this colony sitting just beyond their shores, were, nevertheless, satisfied with the arrangements they had made thus far, especially now that the Ville d'Ys had left the Islands. And the British, somewhat disillusioned with de Gaulle following Dakar, and shocked by the tenacity of the Vichy resistance they encountered there, were now seeking a modus

⁸¹ FRUS, vol. II, 1940, Memorandum of conversation by Under-Secretary of State Welles, November 25th, 1940, pp. 528-29.

vivendi with the Pétain regime⁸² and under the circumstances would not allow either British or Gaullist forces to undertake any action against Vichy territory, including St. Pierre and Miquelon, unless it was absolutely vital to their own strategic security.⁸³ Certainly, it now appeared as if the Islands might once again drift back into relative obscurity. But such was not to be the case, for by the spring of the New Year, new evidence would come to light which would again draw the Islands into the maelstrom of the war.

⁸² This policy, which followed on the heels of the Dakar failure, was promoted in particular by Foreign Minister Halifax. It was based on the assumption that as long as the Vichy government continued to resist German demands for collaboration, and its empire remained "healthily anti-German", then the British government "had a common interest with Vichy in maintaining, instead of undermining, Vichy's authority in the French empire." (Thomas, pp. 66-7) Throughout November-December 1940, then, various attempts were made by London to reach some sort of understanding with Pétain over his position with respect to the Nazis. Had this understanding been achieved, a partial lifting of the British blockade of France would have followed. (Thomas, R.T., Britain and Vichy, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, pp. 66-8, Woodward, Sir L.W., British Foreign Policy in the Second World War, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971, vol. I, pp. 427-28.)

⁸³ Thomas, p. 67.

CHAPTER II

CRISIS OVER VICHY

At the end of May, 1941, a disturbing report from the Committee on French Resistance (CFR) reached the War Cabinet in London. This report stated that there was "mounting evidence" that the Vichy government "intended using the powerful wireless station on St. Pierre and Miquelon to signal to German U-boats the movement of allied convoys in the North Atlantic."¹ This unfortunate piece of information coincided with two other developments in the spring of that year which made it impossible for the various governments concerned to ignore St. Pierre and Miquelon.

The first was the rapidly deteriorating situation in the North Atlantic, where U-boats were now being sighted as far west as 38° longitude, and where Allied losses between March 1st and May 31st for the whole Atlantic theater totalled 982,836 tons.² To make matters worse, the Germans were now engaged in a concerted effort to draw the Royal Navy out of the Mediterranean and as a result, had dispatched several of their heavy surface ships, such as the Scheer, Schanhorst, and Gneisenau into the

¹ Bybelezer, p. 276.

² Conn and Fairchild, pp. 103-4, Churchill, W.S., Grand Alliance, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977, p. 139, Roskill, S.W., The War at Sea, 1939-1945, vol. I, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954, Appendix R, Table II, p. 618.

Atlantic. On May 18th, it was learned that the battleship Bismarck, along with the Prinz Eugen had now joined this effort and were headed toward the North Atlantic, where within a week of their sailing the Bismarck had sunk the battle-cruiser HMS Hood and damaged the newly-commissioned Prince of Wales.³ In these circumstances, even the mere possibility of communication between St. Pierre and the Germans would be enough to arouse considerable disquiet among the Allies.

The second problem was the worsening situation at Vichy, where it now appeared certain that Marshall Pétain would allow his government to pursue a policy of collaboration with Germany. The first signs of this came as early as February 1941, when the Marshall, having removed the arch-collaborator Laval from office, appointed Admiral Darlan as his successor as Vice Premier and Foreign Minister. Darlan was a well-known anglophobe and, in the opinion of Professor Woodward, was perhaps more dangerous than Laval, not only because he might sacrifice French interests to his own bitter resentment against the British, but also because he was more acceptable to the French public and therefore less likely to be suspected of complete subservience to Hitler.⁴ By February the British had lost all hope of achieving any sort of understanding with Vichy, and as Hitler mounted his attack into Southeastern Europe in April, it became more and more evident

³ Roskill, vol. I, pp. 272-73, 376, 379-80, Appendix M p. 605, and Conn and Fairchild, pp. 114-15.

⁴ Woodward, vol. II, p. 61.

that Darlan would indeed seek to gain the Fuhrer's favor by offering him assistance. This first became manifest in Iraq, where a pro-axis rebellion had broken out under Raschid Ali against the British. Darlan offered to supply Ali's men with arms from Syria. Shortly thereafter, he met with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on May 11th⁵ where he offered a wide range of concessions including the use of Vichy airfields in Syria, the cession of bases in North Africa, supplies for Rommel in Tripolitania, and even a possible open declaration of war by France against Great Britain.⁶ Pétain, it seems, went along with this program for the most part, and on May 15th, in a radio address to the nation, hinted at a new policy of collaboration. Darlan meanwhile, continued to curry favor with the Nazis and by the end of the month had signed the Paris Protocols which formalized an extensive program of collaboration between France and Germany.⁷

While the texts of these agreements were not available to the Allies, enough was known of the proceedings to open a major crisis over Vichy in the west. It was now feared that Hitler might reap tremendous gains in the Near East, as well as North Africa, where it was assumed that a major campaign through Spain,

⁵ Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Ser. D. vol. XII, 1937-1945, Washington D.C., pp. 755-74, 781-82. Quoted from Thomas, p. 106, footnote 89.

⁶ Thomas, p. 106, Langer, W.L., Our Vichy Gamble, New York: Knopf, 1947, pp. 149-50.

⁷ Woodward, p. 70, Langer, p. 156.

France and the Levant could be expected at any moment.⁸ For the British, such a move could have been devastating, resulting in the potential loss of their ability to control the Mediterranean or maintain their tenuous hold in Egypt. For the Americans, the consequences would also have been dire. Dakar, on the West Coast of Africa, was but 7 hours flying time from the Eastern tip of Brazil. Should the Nazis control it, as well as capture the remainder of the French fleet, the danger to America's sea lanes and the Western Hemisphere as a whole, would have been severe indeed.

Britain responded to this crisis by preparing for an invasion of Syria⁹, which took place on June 8th, and by warning Pétain through U.S. diplomatic channels that French collaboration with Hitler would make it impossible for Britain "to maintain in any respect the distinction we have hitherto drawn between unoccupied and occupied France in the execution of our military and economic plans."¹⁰ Roosevelt also issued warnings to Pétain, declaring before the Nation that the United States now faced an "unlimited national emergency". At the same time he asked the Army and Navy to draw up a joint plan for the occupation of the Azores, a key outpost for the defense of the Western Hemisphere should the Nazis successfully take Gibraltar and move into North

⁸ Langer, pp. 142, 144.

⁹ Note, the Free French assisted in the British invasion of Syria.

¹⁰ Woodward, vol. II, p. 68.

Africa.¹¹ Consideration was also given by Marshall to the idea of sending troops to Brazil, to defend her northeastern frontier, as well as to the idea of occupying the island of Martinique, which some members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee feared would soon become a base for German submarines.¹²

Both countries, of course, sought to reduce the chances that France would go ahead with Darlan's plans. But it should be noted that, by this time, British and American policy with respect to Vichy had diverged. The British favored a tough approach; maintaining the blockade they had begun following the armistice and refusing to lift it -- even for humanitarian reasons -- as long as France or French North Africa refused to declare itself unequivocally opposed to the Nazi regime. The Americans, on the other hand, held out the carrot rather than the stick, and developed a policy based on trying to entice France into not collaborating with the Germans by offering to supply France with desperately needed provisions.

In French North Africa, for example, the Americans, under the Murphy-Weygand pact, agreed to supply General Weygand, the Vichy Delegate-General of North Africa, with food and fuel in the hope that by doing so the General might be able to maintain some degree of independence from Nazi dominated Europe and resist

¹¹ Conn and Fairchild, p. 117, Sherwood, R., Roosevelt and Hopkins, New York: Harper, 1948, p. 296.

¹² Conn and Fairchild, pp. 113-14, Marshall, G.C., The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, ed. by L.I. Bland, Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 495-96.

possible German demands for the cession of bases in North Africa. It was even thought, in some British and American circles, that Weygand might eventually be persuaded to join the allied cause, since he had repeatedly demonstrated strong opposition to French collaboration with Germany.¹³ Similar undertakings were attempted in Vichy-held France, where relief supplies were occasionally provided through the auspices of the International Red Cross. In addition, the Americans had also appointed Admiral Leahy as their Ambassador to France, a man of considerable bearing, who it was hoped would be able to convince the French of the merits of maintaining good relations with the U.S. by keeping their fleet out of German hands, upholding the status quo in the Western Hemisphere, and sticking to a policy of strict adherence to the armistice and non-collaboration with the Germans.

The Canadians, meanwhile, were caught somewhere in the middle, between these two diverging views. They, like the Americans, had maintained relations with France following her defeat, but their reasons for doing so were in some ways more complicated than those of the Americans. Canada had to consider

¹³ In September 1941, in fact, the U.S. forces Joint Board concluded in a report entitled The Major Strategy of the United States and its Associates, that the "prevention of Axis penetration into North Africa is very important, not only as a contribution to the defense of the Western Hemisphere" and "security to British sea communications" but also as "a potential base for a future [U.S.] land offensive." Furthermore, the report continued "in French North and West Africa, troops exist which are potential enemies of Germany, provided they are re-equipped and satisfactory political conditions are established by the United States." (Mattloff and Snell, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1953, p. 103.)

its domestic situation and the sympathy many of its Quebec citizens felt for Pétain and his efforts to maintain French sovereignty.¹⁴ Prime Minister King, therefore, tried to avoid activity which might be considered openly hostile to Vichy and dreaded the possibility of war between Britain and France as perhaps no other Western leader. Nevertheless, he remained at this time, leader of Britain's foremost partner in the war, and as such, could not afford to ignore British policy with respect to Vichy. Nor could he ignore the contempt that most English-speaking Canadians held for Pétain or the growing unease felt by many within his own government over St. Pierre and Miquelon now that it appeared likely that Marshall Pétain was prepared to collaborate with Hitler.¹⁵ Indeed, on the 24th of May, his own Chief of Staff, Major-General Crerar, noted in a memorandum addressed to the Minister of National Defense, that the situation between London and Vichy was "not promising" and that due to Syria and other matters "a complete break between the two countries may not be far off."¹⁶ In such circumstances the General recommended that St. Pierre and Miquelon be occupied for the duration of the war by Canadian forces or Free French

¹⁴ Dawson, R.D., Canada in World Affairs, 1939-1941, London: Oxford University Press, 1943, pp. 261-62.

¹⁵ Pickersgill, p. 208.

¹⁶ External Affairs document #652, vol. 8, Minister of National Defense to Prime Minister, May 26th, 1941, p. 813.

Volunteers.¹⁷ Similar views were held by the Department of External Affairs, where one day earlier Second Secretary Escott Reid noted that "should present trends continue" Canada will be forced to consider occupying the Islands, either on its own or in cooperation with the United States. But Prime Minister King rejected these proposals, noting in a meeting of the Cabinet War Committee that such ideas were "quite unsound" and that in the present circumstances "seizure of the Islands by Canada would constitute an act of aggression".¹⁸ Two days later, however, the Department received word from the Dominions Office in London that General de Gaulle was reporting that "according to the latest and most reliable information" the German threat to French possessions, in the Western Hemisphere, including St. Pierre and Miquelon, was "serious and imminent".¹⁹ The British, therefore,

¹⁷ The General's recommendation that the government consider using Free French volunteers from Canada for the occupation of the Islands was in part due to an offer by the President of the Manitoba Free French Committee, M. J.O. Callède, to "head a small expeditionary party of Free French volunteers" to rally the Islands. In his proposal, M. Callède indicated that all his men would be "willing to be dropped by parachutes or any other suitable means over the Islands" and that they remained ready at the government's "command" to "discuss the feasibility of a coup and also details such as training, armament and conveyance of the party." (External Affairs #652, J.O. Callède to District 10 Commander, May 19th, 1941, pp. 812-13.

¹⁸ External Affairs document #653, vol. 8, Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, May 27th, 1941, p. 814.

¹⁹ External Affairs document #654, vol. 8, Dominions Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs, May 29th, 1941, p. 815. It is not clear whether General de Gaulle based this report on the intelligence provided by the C.F.R. mentioned at the outset of this chapter or had his own independent source of information. It should also be noted that Canada asked for, but never received, a further explanation of this report.

having given up on Vichy completely, were now once again suggesting that the Free French be allowed to rally the Islands to Free France²⁰ and were in the process of discussing the matter with Admiral Muselier, commander of the tiny Free French Navy.²¹ At the same time, the Canadian Minister in Washington had been instructed to find out what the U.S. might be prepared to do in the Caribbean and elsewhere now that it appeared that France was ready to collaborate with the Germans. The best that Minister Wrong²² was able to do, however, was merely to report what he had read in the American Press, which indicated that the U.S. position with respect to French territories in the Western Hemisphere continued to be "governed by the Havana Agreement of 1940".²³ Wrong then asked his superiors if any study had been made yet in Ottawa of the position of St. Pierre in relation to the Havana Agreement, noting that its terms seemed "to exclude from its scope an occupation of St. Pierre by Canada, since by it

(External Affairs document #656, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, June 9th, 1941, p 816.)

²⁰ External Affairs document #655, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 4th, 1941, p. 816.

²¹ Bybelezer, p. 276.

²² Hume Wrong replaced Mr. Christie as the Canadian Minister in the United States early in 1941.

²³ External Affairs document #657, vol. 8, Legation in the United States to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 12th, 1941, p. 817.

the Convention would become operative only when a non-American²⁴ state attempted to replace another non-American state in the sovereignty or control of a territory in the Americas." Nevertheless, Wrong reported that he was "nervous lest the reiteration by the State Department that their policy toward all French colonies in the Western Hemisphere is governed by the Act of Havana may make it difficult for us to act rapidly in St. Pierre in concurrence with the United States." Moreover, he further stated that should the need for rapid action arise, Canada would be in the

position of possibly being forced to occupy as a war measures act a French colony in which our interests are infinitely greater than that of any other American country. If we have to do this, we wish our action to be publically approved by the United States; yet the United States declares that its own policy toward all the colonies is governed by an agreement with the other American republics to which we are not a party. It might therefore turn out that we should have to take action without express approval from this government.²⁵

There were some members of the Canadian government who in fact preferred this course. The Minister of National Defense for Naval Services, for example, felt that one of the "principal reasons" that Canada should act "quickly and vigorously" on St. Pierre was that if Canada didn't, the United States would, which

²⁴ Author's italics, Canada for its part saw itself as an American state, though this opinion was not always shared by some members of the U.S. State Department, who viewed Canada as part of Great Britain and therefore not part of the "American" community.

²⁵ External Affairs document #657, vol. 8, Legation in U.S. to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, June 12th, 1941, pp. 817-18.

in his opinion, would "prove most embarrassing" for Canada, to say nothing of the reaction of Newfoundland which would undoubtedly be opposed to such action.²⁶ Lester Pearson, an assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, also favored occupation by Canada alone, although in his view the Islands should eventually be allowed to choose their own form of government. This, he felt, would inevitably lead to a de Gaulle regime, but under this scenario, the regime would at least be established "under Canadian rather than United Kingdom auspices".²⁷

In the meantime, a study by the Department of External Affairs concluded that should Canada have to take action on St. Pierre, it was reasonable to assume that under the terms of the Havana Conference the U.S. and Canada, acting in cooperation, could move on St. Pierre within hours of notifying the other American republics. The study also assumed that if Canada were to act alone, the United States could "reasonably contend that the Act of Havana did not apply to the action taken by Canada since Canada is an American nation."²⁸

²⁶ External Affairs document #660, vol. 8, Minister of National Defense for Naval Services to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs,, June 28th, 1941, p. 826.

²⁷ External Affairs document #669, vol. 8, Memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 26th, 1941, p. 835.

²⁸ External Affairs document #659, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister in the United States, June 25th, 1941, p. 825.

Whatever Canada decided to do, it was becoming more and more clear at the Department of External Affairs that the "status quo in the Islands could not be maintained indefinitely."²⁹ The British were now at war with Vichy in Syria, and the possibility that pro-Vichy elements within the Islands might be using the St. Pierre wireless station for purposes inimical to the Allies was causing real concern within the Department.³⁰ Pressure was also building from abroad. On July 9, the British informed the Canadians that Free French Naval Forces were now being assigned to convoy duty in the North Atlantic. Admiral Muselier, their Commander, wanted one of these ships to "put in to St. Pierre and Miquelon and rally the Islands."³¹ The British, however, thought it wise to consult the U.S. and Canada before "concurring in Admiral Muselier's suggestion" noting that "we might lose heavily on the deal if the Germans were able to use a successful Free French operation in St. Pierre as a lever for obtaining further concessions in North Africa."³² But on July 31, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa reported to Under-Secretary Robertson (who had replaced Dr. Skelton in this position), that his government now suspected that French fishing vessels operating from St.

²⁹ External Affairs document #661, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, July 8th, 1941, p. 827.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ External Affairs document #662, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 9th, 1941, p. 828.

³² Ibid.

Pierre were "reporting the movements and position of convoys from Halifax." He also reported his government's opinion that the authorities on St. Pierre were in a position to tap or cut some Western Union trans-Atlantic cables and that any information thus obtained could then be passed on to Vichy via the wireless. Given such circumstances, it was felt that it would "clearly be advantageous to have St. Pierre under our control." Finally, Robertson was also informed that the British had approached the Americans on Muselier's suggestion and that the State Department had responded by indicating that "St. Pierre and Miquelon are primarily the concern of the Canadian government, and that in formulating their policy, they [the U.S.] were likely to be influenced by the views of the Canadian government." The British, therefore, indicated that they would postpone making any further inquiries at the State Department until the views of the Canadian government were known, and that as such, "an early indication of the Canadian government's attitude" would be "greatly appreciated."³³ The Canadians, for their part, had already promised to provide the British with their opinion of the suggestion that the Free French try to rally the Islands to their side and in the interim, informed the Americans of their increased apprehension over the wireless station on St. Pierre. Under-Secretary Welles, responding to this concern, suggested that Canada "make an ad hoc arrangement for the dismantling of

³³ External Affairs document #670, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 31st, 1941, p. 835.

the radio station rather than take any wider action, which would, he feared, have immediate and unfortunate repercussions in the Antilles."³⁴

In response to these pressures the Canadian government decided as a first step to send an R.C.M.P. officer to St. Pierre to reassess the situation. His report was not encouraging. In it, the officer noted that he had "reason to believe" that some residents of the Islands had indeed been engaging in espionage "in regard to the movements of our convoys and shipping." Of particular suspicion were the staff of the telegraph office and the Administrator and his wife, whom the officer described as "very pro-Nazi." Given these observations, and the fact that coded messages were now being sent abroad over the wireless, the officer recommended that Canada "should not wait until something disastrous happens, to take control of the Islands." Furthermore, he insisted that the government "should not rest on certain suggestions that the Islands ... are not suitable for air bases and that there is only one harbour ..." since the "real danger which cannot be controlled under present conditions, is the aid which can be rendered to the enemy through espionage and sabotage."³⁵

³⁴ External Affairs #664, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, July 15th, 1941, pp. 829-30.

³⁵ External Affairs document #671, vol. 8, Commissioner R.C.M.P. to Under-Secretary for External Affairs, August 4th, 1941, pp. 836-37.

On the 21st of August, the Chiefs of Staff of the Canadian Armed Forces came to a similar conclusion. Their report to the Ministers of National Defense noted the ease with which the fishermen of the Islands could engage in espionage. The Islands, they pointed out, were within 100 miles of the routes of the convoys; observations from fishing trawlers could be reported "by wireless from vessels at sea" or by "periodically returning to port to make reports." Furthermore, the wireless station at St. Pierre was in communication with "Canada, the United States, Martinique, Europe, Africa and Asia. Frequent communication is carried on with France." In addition, it was also noted that "a hostile submarine or other vessels could be provisioned and fuelled at St. Pierre if it were able to slip past our naval patrols." Lastly, there was the attitude of the authorities on the Islands, which was, the report concluded, decidedly pro-Vichy. The Chiefs, therefore, recommended "an early occupation of the Islands" and indicated that a plan for such an occupation had been drawn up, and that it could "be initiated on six hours notice."³⁶

But Prime Minister King, throughout this period, continued to oppose occupation, which, in the words of his Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, "might prove a pretext for renewed German pressure on the North African colonies" as well as provide

³⁶ External Affairs document #673, vol. 8, Memorandum by Chiefs of Staff to Ministers of National Defense, August 21st, 1941, pp. 839-40.

Weygand,³⁷ who was still "wavering, with another excuse for falling in with Vichy's plans for 'collaboration'."³⁸ Nevertheless, the problem of what to do with St. Pierre and Miquelon remained, to quote one departmental memo, "most complex".³⁹ By the middle of August, Under-Secretary Robertson felt that Canada had four options: 1) Send a consular agent to St. Pierre, 2) allow a Free French takeover, 3) occupy the Islands with Canadian Armed Forces, or 4) "Let things drift".⁴⁰ Robertson, for the reasons stated above, preferred the first option, and in a memo to the Prime Minister suggested that a consular agent be sent to St. Pierre as soon as possible. This was accomplished by the end of the month. Meanwhile, on August 28th, Robertson, who was then in London, informed the British in a meeting with Sir William Strang, of the Canadian view that a Free French occupation of St. Pierre was not worth the risk that such a move might pose to other parts of the French empire.⁴¹

³⁷ Under-Secretary Robertson, like many American officials, also hoped that Weygand might eventually be persuaded to join the Allied cause.

³⁸ External Affairs document #672, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs (Robertson) to Prime Minister, August 15th, 1941, pp. 838-39.

³⁹ External Affairs document #667, vol. 8, Memorandum by Escott Reid to Cabinet War Committee, July 25th, 1941, p. 833.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mack minute, August 28th, 1941, conversation between Strang and Robertson, Z7400/93/17, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 277, footnote #3.

Muselier, however, continued to press the British Admiralty⁴² and by the end of September, the Admiralty, in turn, had convinced the British Chiefs of Staff of the "need to neutralize St. Pierre and Miquelon by force."⁴³

On October 21, then, the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, informed Under-Secretary Robertson that the British Chiefs of Staff now felt that the "strategical importance of the Islands" meant that the "removal of Vichy influence from St. Pierre and Miquelon is now very desirable; preferably by an operation by Free French Naval Forces, but if necessary by the Canadian government." The Commissioner cited the threat posed by the wireless station and fishing vessels as the primary reasons the C.O.S. felt that action must now be taken, but in addition, also noted that "action by the Free French Naval Forces would be desirable on account of the need to increase the prestige of the Free French movement by carrying out a successful action of this nature." Moreover, even if de Gaulle's men were not involved in the actual operation, the British government considered it "essential that the Islands should be administered by the Free French, in order to counter Vichy propaganda that we are aimed at seizing the French empire." The British government, therefore, were now seeking the concurrence of the Canadian government "in

⁴² Sommerville-Smith to Mack, September 4th, 1941, memorandum from Free French Naval Staff to Admiral Dickens, 27662/93/17; CFR (41), September 1st, 1941, CAB 85/24, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 278, footnote #2.

⁴³ Bybelezer, p. 278.

the proposed rallying of the Islands if possible by the Free French Naval Forces." If the Canadians were agreeable "the matter will then be taken up with the United States government in order to ascertain their attitude, both generally and in regard to the possible implications in connection with the Panama Declaration."⁴⁴

In response to this communication from the British High Commissioner, the Canadian government immediately called an inter-departmental meeting which was held, according to the minutes, "in view of the numerous questions concerning St. Pierre and Miquelon which require decision."⁴⁵ Clearly, it was now felt that the Canadian government had to adopt a firm policy on the Islands and at the meeting a number of points were agreed to unanimously. Of foremost importance were the decisions concerning the transmission of radio messages both by fishing vessels to St. Pierre and by short wave to Europe. This activity, it was decided, could not be allowed to continue, and the committee, therefore, recommended that the government take a number of steps. First, that "Canadian Radio personnel ... be stationed at the short wave transmission station at St. Pierre to control all outgoing messages." Second, that the "use of Code and Cypher ... be stopped." Third, "that the wireless equipment of all fishing

⁴⁴ External Affairs document #675, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary for External Affairs, October 21st, 1941, p. 845.

⁴⁵ External Affairs document #676, vol. 8, Minutes of Inter-Departmental meeting, October 22nd, 1941, p. 845.

boats should be inspected by Canadian Radio personnel and limited to short ranges (of the order of 500 miles)," and fourth, that the smaller radio stations on the Islands should also be monitored and that "our personnel be furnished with copies of all messages sent." In addition, the Committee also agreed that it was "practically certain" that the Canada-U.S. Joint Defense Board would approve of this action, but it was considered inexpedient to refer these steps to the Board since it would delay any action by at least a month.

Nevertheless, it was "considered important that the full agreement of the United States government should be secured in advance." It was also decided that "no action is called for at the present time to protect de Gaullists on the Islands" and that the economic arrangements hitherto agreed to be maintained. Finally, the Committee agreed "to furnish full information with regard to our policy in connection with St. Pierre to the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, to the Commission of Government in Newfoundland and to our acting Consul in St. Pierre."⁴⁶

On November 3rd the U.S. was fully informed of the Canadian proposal. Ray Atherton, the State Department official who met with the Canadian Legation in Washington, did not, according to Minister Wrong, show any indication "that the proposal would be resisted by the government of the United States," and in the course of their "brief discussion" asked questions only about the

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 845-47.

number and type of personnel to be employed in the mission. But in Ottawa, on the same day, Pierrepont Moffat, the U.S. Minister in Canada, told Under-Secretary Robertson that the Canadian plan "would come close to creating the type of situation" which would "embarrass us [the U.S.] in relation to ... our Western Hemisphere policy." Robertson responded by stating that the "British government and the Free French government were pressing Canada hard," but "under questioning," indicated that "rather than unilateral action by Canada" the British in fact preferred a Free French takeover, which according to them "would not allow any charge of British imperialism vis-à-vis the French Empire ... nor raise questions under the Monroe Doctrine."⁴⁷

Moffat immediately cabled the contents of this conversation to the State Department which, it should be noted, had not as yet been informed of the British position in this matter.

The State Department responded to the Canadian proposal on November 8th by indicating that it had considered the plan and had "no comments to offer."⁴⁸ This, according to John Hickerson, the Assistant Chief of the European Division of the State Department, was "intended and so understood by the Canadians [in subsequent conversations] as constituting a green light for them

⁴⁷ FRUS, 1940, vol. II, Moffat to Secretary of State, November 3rd, 1941, p. 540.

⁴⁸ External Affairs document #680, vol. 8, Minister in United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, November 10th, 1941, p. 850.

to go ahead."⁴⁹ Two days later, the Permanent Joint Board on Defense came to an unanimous agreement that "the existence on the Islands of an uncontrolled and high-powered wireless transmitting station constitutes a potential danger to the interests of Canada and the United States."⁵⁰ And, in future conversations between Hugh Keenlyside, Counsellor for the Department of External Affairs, Mr. Hickerson and Minister Moffat, it was informally understood that should the Administrator of the Islands refuse to consent to Canadian observers, economic pressures would then be applied from both Canada and the United States in order to see to it that the Administrator would "agree to the proposed supervision of his wireless station."⁵¹ On November 22, Prime Minister King gave his approval for these plans and in doing so, concurred with Under-Secretary Robertson's assertion that the "alternative procedures", which the British had suggested, "of (a) allowing the Free French forces to take over the Islands; or (b) installing, by overt Canadian action, a pro-de Gaulle administration should not, ... be considered until it is proven that the proposal outlined above [of taking over the radio station and of applying economic pressure] will not be effective."

⁴⁹ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, footnote #3 to Memorandum by Canadian Legation to Department of State, November 3rd, 1941, p. 541.

⁵⁰ External Affairs document #682, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, November 14th, 1941, p. 852.

⁵¹ Ibid.

But when the Cabinet War Committee met to discuss the details of the operation a week later, the proposals for applying economic pressure, in the event that the Administrator absolutely refused to cooperate, were curiously absent from the discussion. Instead, it was decided that if the Administrator proved recalcitrant, that a landing party should be put ashore "which will effectively dismantle all radio transmitters on the Islands."⁵² By the first week of December, then, it looked as if the Canadian government might finally be ready to go ahead with its plans. But before Primer Minister King would give the final order, cables⁵³ were sent from his office to both London and Washington. In these communications, King reiterated the proposed action by Canada, including the decision, in the event that the Administrator would not cooperate, to land "a detachment of ratings in the Islands ... to see that there is no interference with the [radio] supervisors in the performance of their duties". He also requested that the opinions of both the British and American governments about the plan be forwarded to Ottawa "at the earliest convenience."⁵⁴

⁵² External Affairs document #684, vol. 8, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Cabinet War Committee, November 29th, 1941, p. 856.

⁵³ These messages were sent in the form of a telegram from Primer Minister King to Prime Minister Churchill, a copy of which was also sent to the State Department in Washington, both countries received this telegram on December 5th, 1941.

⁵⁴ External Affairs document #686, vol. 8, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, December 3rd, 1941, pp. 859-60.

1 The State Department responded within 24 hours of receiving the message, and their reaction was not favorable. In what Canadian Minister Wrong described as, "two rather difficult conversation," Assistant Chief Hickerson demanded an explanation of why it was that the Canadian government had seemingly abandoned the proposal to apply "economic pressure on the Islands through the shutting off of funds if the Administrator was not willing to agree to place the wireless station under Canadian supervision."⁵⁵

Clearly, the State Department objected strongly to any action which might be perceived as a Canadian occupation of the Islands, which is what the landing of even a small detachment of troops amounted to, insofar as the United States was concerned. Two days later, in a further conversation with Minister Wrong in Washington, Ray Atherton reiterated this position, and informed the Canadian Minister that the State Department still believed that the best approach was to apply economic pressure rather than the "more drastic procedure set forth in the Canadian memorandum of December 5th." Minister Wrong, to his own dismay, was unable to provide the reasons "which had led the Canadian government to omit the possible use of economic pressure from their proposal to deal with the situation." The best he could do was to speculate that perhaps the "Canadian naval authorities were concerned, lest after the initial approach to the Administrator, ... the

⁵⁵ External Affairs document #689, vol. 8, Legation in the United States to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 6th, 1941, pp. 861-62.

transmission of shipping information might be either commenced or extended if there was an interval of some length between the first approach and the placing of Canadian personnel on the Island."

Mr. Atherton and his colleagues⁵⁶ then suggested that the best approach might be to proceed with the Administrator in three stages, involving as a first step a friendly discussion on the "rumours that the wireless station was being employed in a manner inimical to our interests," which would be followed by a simple request that, as a result of these rumours, which were no doubt "unfounded", Canadian radio inspectors be allowed supervise all transmissions from the Islands.

If the Administrator objected to this idea, then, as a second step, the Canadian officials could point out that the "Canadian government were prepared to prevent the further release of funds [to the Islands] until wireless transmissions were effectively supervised, and that they had good reason to believe that the government of the United States would take parallel action." This, noted the U.S. officials, would allow M. de Bournat the opportunity to reverse his decision, which he could then justify to his own government by stating that in the circumstances he had been left no alternative but to choose between "Canadian supervision of the wireless installations and starvation for the islanders." Finally, if de Bournat remained

⁵⁶ Present at the meeting were also Mr. Hickerson and Mr. Reber.

intransigent, then he should be informed "not only that the release of further funds would be refused, but also that the Canadian authorities would record every message transmitted from the wireless station, and if any of these messages were in code or cypher or contained matter of assistance to the enemy, he would be responsible for any consequences which might follow."⁵⁷ Obviously, what the State Department hoped to do by proceeding in this manner was to be able to pin the blame for any action taken on the Vichy authorities. This, in fact, is what Pierrepont Moffat intimated to Under-Secretary Robertson in a meeting in Ottawa called by Minister Moffat for the purpose of delivering an "interim answer" to Primer Minister King's request for the opinion of the United States on the Canadian proposal.

At this meeting, Moffat took essentially the same line as Atherton and the others in Washington. He also suggested that perhaps it might be best if M. de Bournat were to come to Ottawa for a "three cornered discussion" of the matter with Canadian and United States authorities, but indicated, however, that in view of what had happened the day before at Pearl Harbor, that his government would now be inclined "to advise against taking any immediate action with respect to St. Pierre and Miquelon." Robertson agreed with this notion, and indicated his opinion that it was "highly probable" that the British government, which had not as yet responded to the Canadian proposal, would also "agree

⁵⁷ Note that later in the day, Secretary Hull personally approved this approach. FRUS, vol. II, 1940, memorandum of conversation by Robertson, December 8th, 1941, pp. 543-45.

with the United States view that the matter might be kept in abeyance for a week or two."⁵⁸

Pearl Harbor, then, provided both the Canadian and American governments with a further excuse for once again delaying action on St. Pierre and Miquelon. This hardly seems surprising, since both the State Department and Prime Minister King, had, throughout 1941, continually advocated policies of extreme caution whenever discussion over the fate of the Islands took place in Washington or Ottawa. But there was one more event which would further complicate the issue for the Canadians as well as the Americans and the British, and that was the arrival in St. John's on December 9th of Admiral Muselier and his petite arm of Les Forces Navales Françaises Libres.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ External Affairs document #1296, vol. 9, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, December 8th, 1941, p. 1629.

⁵⁹ Free French Naval Forces.

CHAPTER III
THE "PETIT COUP DE MAIN"

Admiral Muselier set sail for Newfoundland from Greenock, on the west coast of Scotland, on the afternoon of November 24th, 1941.¹ His stated objective was to make an inspection of the Free French submarine, Surcouf,² which was then stationed in Halifax, as well as to inspect other Free French vessels, now assigned to convoy duty under British command in the North Atlantic.³ But Muselier, of course, also had a secret agenda, which was to make for St. Pierre at the first opportune moment and to rally the islands to the cause of Free France.⁴

Both Muselier and de Gaulle insist that they had thought of rallying the Islands to Free France "since the beginning".⁵ In fact, following the British attack on Oran, when war between Britain and Vichy appeared likely, Muselier notes that the two of them gave serious consideration to departing for the islands, in order, he says, to defend the honour of the flag by carrying on

¹ de Ville Fosse, L. Les îles de la liberté, Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1972, p. 116.

² The Surcouf was at this time one of the largest submarines in the world, 2,880 tons with 2 eight-inch guns.

³ de Gaulle, C., Mémoires de Guerre, L'Appel 1940-1942, Paris: Plon, 1954, pp. 184-85.

⁴ de Gaulle, Mémoires, p. 185, Muselier, p. 252.

⁵ de Gaulle, Mémoires, p. 184.

from there, to the bitter end, a desperate but only symbolic resistance.⁶ But war between Vichy and Great Britain did not happen, and Muselier, who had since become the head of the Free French Naval Forces, which was under overall British command, continued, nonetheless, to press the merits of the idea of taking the Islands on his superior at the Admiralty. The Admiralty, as has been mentioned, supported Muselier, but could not act without the approval of the War Cabinet, which was slow in coming, and the question of the Free French taking action on their own, rested entirely on their ability to bring sufficient forces to the area, which did not really present itself until the fall of 1941, when Muselier decided to embark on his tour of the North Atlantic.

It appears, then, that the Free French decision to go ahead with the occupation of the Islands, came in mid-November 1941, when de Ville Fosse notes "La décision de principe avait été prise par de Gaulle, d'accord avec Muselier ... de procéder au ralliement de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon ... au cours de sa [Admiral Muselier's] mission outre-Atlantique⁷ De Gaulle, for his part, gave some indication that something of this sort might be in the works when, a month earlier, he had informed the British Foreign Secretary, Antony Eden, of his belief, that the time had come to proceed with the rallying of the Islands to Free

⁶ Muselier, p. 247.

⁷ de Ville Fosse, p. 114.

France.⁸ Eden, however, in response to de Gaulle's request for his opinion on this matter, informed the General of the Foreign Office view that

La position géographique de ces îles nous empêche de donner notre assentiment à toute operation comportant un changement du status quo sans avoir obtenu l'agrément exprès des gouvernements du Canada et des État-Unis.⁹

The Foreign Office, then, felt obliged to consult the Canadians about the idea, and as indicated by their communication with Ottawa, shown in the previous chapter, would not consult the U.S. about it until the views of the Canadian government were known.¹⁰ Still, in spite of this rather cautious response from Eden, there is no doubt that there was considerable support for the idea of a Free French takeover within both the Foreign Office and the British government as a whole, where the Admiralty and the Chiefs of Staff, as has been indicated, were now both on record as being in favor of such action.¹¹

At the time of Muselier's sailing, however, it is not clear as to whether anyone within the British government knew of or had

⁸ de Gaulle, Documents, p. 486.

⁹ de Gaulle, Documents, p. 486

¹⁰ de Gaulle, Documents, p. 486.

¹¹ External Affairs documents #670, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, July 31st, 1941, pp. 835-36, #675, vol. 8, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, October 21st, 1941, pp. 844-45; Bybelezer, p. 278; footnote #5, Cos(41) 358, October 17th, 1941, Cab. 75/15; footnote #2, Sommerville Smith to Mack, September 4th, 1941, Z7662/93/17.

given sanction to, the Free French decision to go ahead with the plan to take over the Islands.

Muselier, in any case, very nearly did not make it. Indeed, on the same day he left port, the weather turned so bad that one of the 3 corvettes sailing with him developed engine trouble, forcing the party to put in at Oban for repairs. This was an omen of things to come, for the crossing was one of the worst that Muselier or de Ville Fosse had ever encountered. Sleep, notes Muselier, was impossible, because the roll of the sea tossed the men out of their bunks even when they were lying flat on their stomachs with their arms and legs spread wide apart. Eating, was no better, for the corvettes, he continues, were built so rapidly that water filtered in everywhere, and the mess room soon resembled a swimming pool. Besides, it was impossible to hold on to one's food or drink, which frequently ended up flying into a comrade's lap, as on one occasion, when Admiral Muselier and Commander de Ville Fosse unceremoniously exchanged a glass of wine, for a bowl of tapioca! Nevertheless, they managed to persevere, and after a stop in Iceland and various other difficulties, including the loss of their most precious cargo, the "barriques de vin",¹² the party finally managed to reach St. John's on the 9th of December.

But the war had changed. Pearl Harbor brought the United States in, and Muselier, who had received the news while still at

¹² This delicate cargo, which was unfortunately stowed on deck, was shattered by the violence of the waves, which de Ville Fosse says, were strong enough to rip open the barrels.

sea, felt that he now had no choice but to consult with the Canadians and the Americans before going ahead with the plan to occupy St. Pierre and Miquelon. He therefore immediately telegraphed de Gaulle upon his arrival, informing the General of this decision, and requesting in addition that de Gaulle get in touch with the British in order to obtain their approval as well. Muselier, in his memoirs, says that he made this decision because the Japanese attack fundamentally altered the positions of both the British and American navies in the Pacific. Each would now be faced with the burden of having to reinforce their positions in the Far East. This, of course, could only add to the difficulties they already faced in the Atlantic, among which, Muselier points out, was the heavy burden placed on the Allies by the "doubtful neutrality" of the Vichy fleet. He felt it his duty therefore, to do all he could to alleviate the Allies from the encumbrance of this burden, and was concerned, that an attack on St. Pierre and Miquelon at this moment might provoke a reaction from Vichy which would have serious consequences on the general conduct of the war at sea.¹³

De Gaulle immediately cabled the Admiral telling him that as far as he was concerned, nothing had changed with respect to the operation.¹⁴ He nevertheless complied with the Admiral's request

¹³ Muselier, p. 256.

¹⁴ de Gaulle, Documents, p. 490

and promptly wrote to Churchill, asking him if His Majesty's government had any objections to this "petit coup de main"¹⁵

In the meantime, in St. John's, Admiral Muselier spoke freely with the local authorities about the proposed operation. Their reaction, he insists, was universally favorable, and moreover, when the subject of discussing the matter with the Canadians came up, they left him with the distinct impression that "ils craignaient une occupation canadienne de Saint-Pierre et qu'ils aimaient mieux y voir les France Libre que les Canadiens."¹⁶

In London, Churchill, upon receiving de Gaulle's telegram, was also inclined to allow the operation to go ahead.¹⁷ So was the Foreign Office, which said they had "no objection", and the Chiefs of Staff, when consulted, indicated that they "were strongly in favor of Admiral Muselier being authorized to rally St. Pierre and Miquelon to Free France without his saying anything about it until it had been done."¹⁸ But Churchill, in

¹⁵ de Gaulle, Documents, p. 490. De Gaulle, in his mémoires, says that, in any case, he had to go along with Muselier's request and warn the British in order to avoid the appearance of concealment now that the "secret was thus out". (de Gaulle, Mémoires, pp. 185)

¹⁶ Muselier, p. 256

¹⁷ Bybelezer, p. 279

¹⁸ Foreign Office 371/31837 St. Pierre and Miquelon, Diary of Events, quoted from Kersaudy, F., Churchill and De Gaulle, London: Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981, p. 170, and Bybelezer, p. 279, Footnote #4, Cos(41) 419, 8, December 12th, 1941. The Foreign Office also indicated that they saw no reason to inform the Americans, whom they believed would not "raise any objections at such a late date 'about such a small matter'." (Bybelezer,

spite of his apparent willingness to "unmuzzle Muselier"¹⁹ decided to defer instead to the request of the Dominions Office, which was the only department within the government advising further contact with the Allies.²⁰ On December 15th, therefore, Churchill approved the proposed action but asked de Gaulle to postpone the operation for thirty-six hours so as to allow him enough time to inform the Americans.²¹

Telegrams were thus sent immediately to both Ottawa and Washington, and on the evening of the 15th, W.G. Hayter, First Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, called on Ray Atherton at the State Department to inform him of the proposed operation. At that meeting, Hayter explained that the "idea"

Footnote #4, Morton to Churchill, Dec. 19, 1941; Sir. O. Sargent Minute, Dec. 14, 1941, 210810/93/17).

¹⁹ Bybelezer, p. 280, footnote #1, quoted from Premier 3, 377, December 13th, 1941.

²⁰ Bybelezer, p. 280. Bybelezer notes that the CFR and the Spears Mission were also unequivocally supportive of the proposed operation by the Free French (Bybelezer, p. 279).

²¹ F.O. to Washington, tel. 6957, December 15th, 1941, 210591/93/17, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 280, Footnote #3,; Kersaudy, p. 170. According to Bybelezer, Churchill may also have wavered in his support of the operation not only because of his concern over the U.S. and Vichy reaction generally, but also because of his hope to be able to obtain Roosevelt's support, at the upcoming Arcadia Conference, for the issuance of a joint communique, which he minuted to the COS would be: "blessing or cursing to Pétain in the names of Great Britain and the United States ... I do not think this prospect would be marred by a Free French descent upon Miquelon and St. Pierre. It would be more convenient (however) if it happened after an Anglo-American ultimatum had been delivered and rejected (by Vichy), but if you feel that it is better to unmuzzle Muselier now, I am prepared to consent" (Churchill to Ismay, Minute D 313/1; December 13th, 1941, Premier 3, 377, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 280).

1 behind the Free French occupation, was "to control the radio station without forcing the Canadian government to take action in what might be an embarrassing political situation." Prime Minister Churchill, Atherton was told, had approved the operation, but the instructions from London "went on to state that no action would be taken unless the consent of the Canadian and American governments were obtained." Atherton responded by going over the background of the issue from the American point of view, including their discussions with Ottawa, but did not indicate what the official U.S. response would be.²²

In Ottawa, meanwhile, the Department of External Affairs received a telegram from the Dominions Office in London, which contained a response to Prime Minister King's earlier communication with Churchill, and also informed the Canadians of Churchill's decision to approve of the proposed Free French action. In this communication London suggested that the solution proposed by Canada on December 5th, "would hardly go far enough to meet all the difficulties" and that in light of this, it was His Majesty's government's view "that nothing will afford complete security short of taking over the Islands entirely."²³ Furthermore, "in existing conditions", the British felt that it was unlikely that such action would prove "embarrassing to the

²² FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum of conversation between Atherton and Hayter, December 16th, 1941, p. 548.

²³ External Affairs #1300, vol. 9, Dominions Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 15th, 1941, p. 1634.

United States government", and as such, the go ahead had been given to the Free French in London.²⁴ Curiously, the Canadians were not, however, informed in this communication of Churchill's request that de Gaulle delay issuing orders for thirty-six hours, and it was not until the following morning that Ottawa learned through its Minister in Washington, that such a delay had in fact been requested.²⁵

In the meantime, Muselier, having completed his inspection of the Surcouf in Halifax, had arrived in Ottawa, where (after a twenty-seven hour train ride) he immediately met with various Canadian officials, including Admiral Nelles and Mr. Robertson, the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. In his memoirs, Muselier notes that the Canadian Naval authorities all seemed inclined to agree with his plan to occupy St. Pierre, but that Robertson seemed to prefer action by Canada.²⁶ In any case, Robertson insisted "sur le fait que la politique canadienne étant liée à celle des États-Unis"²⁷ and it was therefore indispensable that Muselier speak with the American Minister. And so, on the same afternoon, in what must have been a very long day for the Admiral, a meeting was arranged.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ External Affairs document #1301, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in United States, December 16th, 1941, pp. 1634-36.

²⁶ Muselier, p. 259.

²⁷ Ibid.

At this encounter, Muselier spoke at length about the situation on St. Pierre, as well as a number of other outstanding issues which concerned the Free French and the Americans. On the subject of St. Pierre, Muselier indicated that he had been authorized by General de Gaulle to take over the Islands but that he was unwilling "to carry out this mission until he had satisfied himself that the project was agreeable to the governments of Newfoundland, Canada, and the United States."²⁸ He also noted that the population of the colony was "entirely favorable to de Gaulle" and that as such, the "operation would take place without bloodshed." Finally, he reminded Minister Moffat that should the operation take place, "the threat of the wireless station on the flank of the convoy routes would thus be permanently removed."²⁹

The Admiral then went on to discuss other issues, including Free French apprehension over possible American action in the Antilles, the recent seizure by the United States of fourteen French commercial vessels berthed in American ports, and also his willingness to go to Washington for further discussions over these and other matters.³⁰

Moffat, according to Muselier, appeared very well informed and personally favorable to the Free French views, but deferred

²⁸ Moffat, p. 359.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. Note, de Gaulle had not authorized Muselier to go to Washington (Muselier, p. 263).

making any definite pronouncements until he had received orders from his government.³¹ He therefore telephoned the State Department immediately following the meeting and informed Assistant Chief Hickerson of the conversations he had had with Muselier, as well as his own view that within the Department of External Affairs, there seemed to be a "division of thought regarding action in St. Pierre; one branch favoring direct action by Canada along the lines discussed with us [the U.S.] and the other favoring action by the Free French."³² Moffat then asked whether it was correct to assume that the U.S. favored action by Canada, to which Mr. Hickerson replied that it most certainly was, insofar as he was concerned, but that he would give Mr. Moffat a more definite response after conferring with other officials at the department.

The answer came the following morning when Mr. Atherton informed both Minister Moffat and First Secretary Hayter, that Roosevelt "did not favor a policy whereby the Free French were permitted to move in on the St. Pierre-Miquelon situation." Furthermore, the President, he noted, "entirely approved" of the approach discussed a week earlier with the Canadian Minister

³¹ Muselier, p. 260.

³² FRUS, 1941, vol. II, Moffat to Hickerson, December 15th, 1941, p. 564. Generally speaking, the Canadian military was more in favor of allowing Muselier to go ahead, Admiral Nelles and Air Secretary Power in particular. But it should also be noted, that both Under-Secretary Robertson and Minister Wrong tended to support the idea of Free French action as well, though never enough to sway the opinion of Prime Minister King, who remained steadfastly against the idea.

whereby "the Canadians in the first instance should use persuasion, but that failing that force might be used in order that there might be Canadian control of the radio station."³³ Atherton also reminded Mr. Hayter "that the British government and ourselves were interested in the maintenance of relations with the Vichy government and [that] certainly any action by the Free French in moving into French possessions in this continent would be bound to be detrimental ... particularly at this moment when Marshal Pétain had given certain memoranda assurances, copies of which had been transmitted to the British Embassy."³⁴ Moffat was also informed that the State Department was not interested in having Admiral Muselier visit Washington at this time.³⁵

The Canadian Minister in Washington, Hume Wrong, who had been kept fully informed of the discussions between the British and the Americans on the previous evening, also received a telephone call on the morning of the 16th, from Assistant Chief Hickerson, who informed Minister Wrong of the President's views, including his preference for Canadian control of the wireless

³³ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, p. 548, memorandum by Ray Atherton, December 16th, 1941.

³⁴ Ibid. See page 72. It is not clear whether the "memorandum assurances" mentioned here, refer to the earlier understandings reached between Vichy and the United States in the fall of 1940 or whether this in fact is a reference to the agreement just reached between Roosevelt and Pétain which further guaranteed the status quo in the Western Hemisphere.

³⁵ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, p. 547, memorandum of telephone conversation between Atherton and Moffat, December 14th, 1941.

1 station. Hickerson also alluded to a recent understanding between Roosevelt and Pétain, in which Roosevelt confirmed the maintenance of the status quo with respect to French possessions in the Western Hemisphere.³⁶ Later, at a face to face meeting with the Minister that same afternoon, Hickerson intimated that the idea of a Free French move on the Islands had been "thoroughly thrashed out" at the State Department, and that all the officials involved, including Under-Secretary Welles, had been against it. When pressed by Minister Wrong for the "particulars" about the Department's unsympathetic view of the Free French proposal, Hickerson responded with a further explanation of the understanding between Roosevelt and Pétain that he had made mention of earlier. The "gist" of this agreement, which Wrong notes had apparently been reached on December 13, 1941, was a promise by Roosevelt "not to interfere with the status of French possessions in this hemisphere so long as the Germans do not secure the French fleet or have access to French territory for military operations against the Allies."³⁷ Hickerson then said that this understanding had been reached mainly with the French West Indies in mind "but that it was broad enough to cover St. Pierre." Furthermore, he continued, the U.S. would "regard the taking over by the Free French of the Islands as a change in status, but would not so regard Canadian control

³⁶ External Affairs document #1301, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in United States, December 16th, 1941, p. 1635.

³⁷ External Affairs document #1305, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 16th, 1941, p. 1639.

of the wireless station without interference with the civil administration."³⁸ Finally, he went on to explain that the United States government was about to send Admiral Horne, U.S.N., to Martinique to discuss these arrangements with Admiral Robert, whom, he noted, had already verbally assured the U.S. that "all understandings given before the U.S. involvement in [the] war are still in effect." The United States, therefore, was "definitely opposed" to any Free French operation in the Antilles and positively did not want to see them attempt to take over the radio station on St. Pierre.³⁹

In Ottawa, meanwhile, Pierrepont Moffat informed Under-Secretary Robertson, of Roosevelt's position. He also indicated that the State Department would immediately communicate these views to the British Ambassador, "where" Robertson noted, "they will correct the assumption on which London was proceeding that Free French occupation of the Islands 'would not be embarrassing to the United States government'." Lastly, Moffat mentioned that he himself would advise Muselier of the U.S. decision.⁴⁰ Ottawa had also learned, through Minister Wrong, of the arrangements between Roosevelt and Pétain, and at a War Cabinet meeting, called the same day (December 16), various opinions were expressed as to what Canada should do next.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ External Affairs document #1303, vol. 9, Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, December 16th, 1941, p. 1637.

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The Minister of National Defense for Naval Services, for example, felt that since Canadian control over the wireless station, "without free consent", would in itself be an interference with French sovereignty, and that since the "installation of Canadian radio personnel was unlikely to prove a lasting solution", that the most appropriate decision would be to allow the Free French to go ahead. Under-Secretary Robertson, more or less concurred with this view, and noted that "had it not been for U.S. opposition" Free French action "might have proved the simpler and more effective solution both from the short and long term viewpoint." Prime Minister King, however, remained firm in his conviction that it was of paramount importance to avoid "any action which might be made occasion for increased German demands upon Vichy" and thus, with the Cabinet undecided, no decision was taken for the moment.⁴¹

On the following morning, Minister Moffat called on Admiral Muselier to inform him that "after careful study" of the proposal for the Free French to occupy St. Pierre, the President had decided "that it would be a mistake for such an occupation to take place."⁴² Moffat then went on to explain that concern over the wireless station, which was shared by the Free French, had in fact been the subject of discussions between the United States and Canada for quite some time, and that the President felt "that

⁴¹ External Affairs document #1304, vol. 9, Minutes of Cabinet of War Committee, December 16th, 1941, p. 1638.

⁴² Moffat, p. 360.

there would be fewer adverse repercussions if the Canadians took control of the communications from the Island, by suasion, if possible, but otherwise by stronger means,"⁴³ Muselier responded by indicating that he would not proceed with the occupation. But he made it clear, nevertheless, that he felt the Americans were making a mistake, noting in particular that the precedent created by the Canadian seizure of the communications facilities on the Islands might provide Admiral Darlan (whom he characterized as "eaten by ambition and driven by hatred for the British") with the very excuse he needed to turn over the control of communications in North Africa to the Germans.⁴⁴ Moffat, for his part, acknowledged this possibility but indicated that "on balance" the United States still felt that action by the Canadians was the "wiser course". He then concluded by informing the Admiral of the "inadvisability of the Free French moving in on other French territorial possessions in this hemisphere" and by indicating as well that the State Department did not think it would be a good idea for him to visit the U.S. at this time.⁴⁵ Muselier, whom Moffat noted, received this news with "obvious disappointment",⁴⁶ closed the talks by remarking that he doubted that the Canadian plan would work, and that perhaps he would

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Moffat, p. 361.

⁴⁵ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, p. 547, memorandum of telephone conversation between Moffat and Hickerson, December 17th, 1941.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

remain in Canada for a time, in the event that the United States might be persuaded to change its mind. He also noted that the U.S. position on St. Pierre upset him, not so much because of the importance of the Islands per se, but rather because "it indicated that the thinking in Washington was still revolving around the idea of playing ball with the Vichy government ... which, he said, "would merely result in one body blow after another", at the very time when a strong stand by the United States would "electrify" French resistance to Hitler.⁴⁷

Following this conversation, Muselier issued a written statement,⁴⁸ to be sent to the State Department in Washington, clarifying his position on St. Pierre, and in addition, immediately telegraphed General de Gaulle to inform him of the American rejection of the plan. In his communication with de Gaulle, Muselier indicated that the Americans, out of fear of Vichy and North African reaction, "préfère qu'un contrôle sur communication soit établi Saint-Pierre par personnel gouvernemental canadien", but that in his opinion the American attitude "est déterminée par crainte flotte Darlan."⁴⁹ In any case, Muselier noted that any attempt to establish Canadian supervision of the wireless was "une atteinte à souveraineté nationale" which would no doubt serve Nazi propagandists well. Finally, Muselier pointed out that he considered "l'opération

⁴⁷ Moffat, p. 362.

⁴⁸ See appendix II.

⁴⁹ Muselier, p. 262.

comme seulement différée" and that as such he would maintain à ma disposition les quatre bâtiments prévus."⁵⁰

In London, however, the Foreign Office had already received the word that Roosevelt was against the Free French operation, and on the morning of December 17th, Sir William Strang informed M. Dejean, of the Comité Nationale, that the U.S. had rejected the plan.⁵¹ Dejean immediately contacted de Gaulle, who later informed the Foreign Office that "no orders would be issued for this operation."⁵² London, therefore, considered the Free French operation as off, and immediately cabled both Washington and Ottawa to inform them that "de Gaulle ... agrees that the proposed action should not, repeat not, now be taken."⁵³

Meanwhile, in Washington, Under-Secretary Welles was urging Canadian Minister Wrong to press his government "to put the agreed plan for Canadian control of communications in St. Pierre into force quickly." Moreover, Welles insisted that the United States "attached great great importance under present circumstances to maintaining its precarious bridgehead at Vichy,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kersaudy, p. 171.

⁵² F.O. 371/31873, Saint Pierre et Miquelon, Diary of Events, quoted from Kersaudy, op. cit., p. 171; Bybelezer, p. 231, Strang minute December 17th, 1941, Z10592/93/17.

⁵³ External Affairs document #1309, vol. 9, Dominions Office to Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 18th, 1941, p. 1642.

and would not countenance any initiative on the part of the Free French ... which might prejudice that bridgehead.⁵⁴

On the following morning, Wrong met again with Atherton, who provided the Minister with further details of the arrangements now being completed between Admiral Horne and Admiral Robert in Martinique.⁵⁵ The Canadian Minister, noting these arrangements as well as those which had just been completed between Roosevelt and Pétain, then asked Mr. Atherton whether he thought such arrangements might not make it difficult for Canada to act in St. Pierre. After all, noted the Minister, Canada could not assume that either the local authorities or the Vichy government would acquiesce in Canadian control over the wireless. And, should Canadian personnel have to be established by force, Canada might find itself "charged with action directly contrary to arrangements just entered into between Washington on the one hand and Vichy and Martinique on the other," which might be used by Vichy "as a pretext for further steps detrimental to the general

⁵⁴ External Affairs document #1308, vol. 9, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, December 18th, 1941, p. 1641.

⁵⁵ This understanding, essentially reaffirmed those entered into by Admiral Greenslade a year earlier, including a written guarantee on the part of the French to 1) give the United States 48 hours notice before French ships left Martinique and to cancel their movement if the U.S. objected, 2) allow an American Naval observer onto Martinique, as well as to allow the U.S. Consul there to check an aircraft based there, and 3) grant formal permission for a U.S. patrol plane to fly daily over the Islands. The United States would of course in return maintain the economic arrangements granted earlier. (External Affairs document #1310, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 19th, 1941, p. 1643.

interest of the allies."⁵⁶ Atherton, however, dismissed these concerns as "most unlikely". The Vichy government, he insisted, was primarily concerned with maintaining the French empire and Atherton had no doubt that they would "much prefer to have Canadian control of the wireless station than a de Gaulle coup in the Islands."⁵⁷

By the 19th of December, then, when the next Canadian War Cabinet meeting was held which discussed St. Pierre, the Canadians found themselves once again caught in the middle of two divergent views. For while the Americans were urging action, the British were demanding the opposite. London, in fact, still felt that the proposal to have Canada take over the wireless station (even with Roosevelt's endorsement), was wholly inadequate "from a military point of view". His Majesty's government, preferred outright occupation by British or Allied Forces, but since the United States had ruled this out for the moment, they recommended instead that Canada "not ... take any action for the time being."⁵⁸ Prime Minister King, therefore, urged his cabinet to refrain from executing the plan until the U.S. and British governments had agreed on a common course of action. The cabinet

⁵⁶ External Affairs document #1310, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in United States, December 19th, 1941, pp. 1642-43.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ External Affairs document #1309, vol. 9, Dominions Office to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 18th, 1941, p. 1642.

concluded, and by the 22nd of December both the British and American governments had been informed of this decision.⁵⁹

In the meantime, things had become a bit difficult for Admiral Muselier. By some strange circumstance an article had appeared in the London Sunday Dispatch of December 14th, which "announced" Admiral Muselier's intention of going to Washington for negotiations with the Americans. These talks, the article maintained, were expected to place the Free French at the forefront of the U.S. war in the Pacific and also expected to bring about United States recognition of de Gaulle.⁶⁰ Muselier maintains that in spite of the interest he expressed to Moffat in going to Washington, it was never his intention to discuss with the Americans any aspect of the Pacific war, or the recognition of de Gaulle, and that even if such a visit had been arranged, he would have immediately informed de Gaulle. Moreover, the sudden appearance of this article completely baffled him, as he insists that he never had the slightest contact, either direct or indirect, with Mme. Tabouis, the author of the article.⁶¹ De Gaulle, however, who had not ordered Muselier to go to Washington, was furious when news of the article reached his desk and he immediately sent a dispatch to Muselier ordering him to

⁵⁹ External Affairs document #1314, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 22nd, 1941, p. 1645. De Gaulle, however, was not informed that the Canadians had in fact decided to postpone the operations (Muselier, p. 304).

⁶⁰ Muselier, p. 260.

⁶¹ Muselier, p. 263.

return to London as soon as his tour of inspection was finished. Muselier, decided at once to comply with these orders and to return to London by air, but before he could make the necessary arrangements, he received another telegram from de Gaulle which seemed to reverse the previous order. "Nos negociations ici," said de Gaulle, "nous ont montré que nous ne pourrons rien entreprendre à Saint-Pierre et Miquelon si nous attendons la permission de tous ceux qui se disent intéressés. Cela etait à prévoir. La seule solution est une action à notre propre initiative."⁶² Later, the same day, Muselier also received a telegram from the Comité Nationale which informed the Admiral that they were now aware of President Roosevelt's rejection of the Free French intention to occupy the Islands. De Gaulle, Muselier concluded, must have been perfectly aware of the American position, as well as his own view, and yet, notes the Admiral, "Il me poussait à agir."⁶³

That this is what de Gaulle intended did not, however, become unequivocally clear until Muselier received de Gaulle's final telegram of that day which ordered the Admiral, despite all the assurances given to the Allies to the contrary, to go ahead and take St. Pierre, and to do so without saying anything to the foreigners.⁶⁴ Muselier, who received this communication a few

⁶² de Gaulle, Documents, p. 494.

⁶³ Muselier, p. 264.

⁶⁴ Telegram du général de Gaulle à Muselier, 18 décembre 1941. Nous avons, comme vous le demandiez, consulté les gouvernements britannique et américain. Nous savons, de source

hours before leaving Ottawa, immediately showed it to Colonel Pierrené, the Free French representative in Canada, who is said to have remarked incredulously of de Gaulle, "Il est fou."⁶⁵ Whatever the case might have been, Muselier now found himself in even more of a quandary. Should he go back on his word to the Americans and Canadians, disobey his operational command, the British Admiralty, and go ahead with de Gaulle's instructions? Or should he do the opposite, and disobey General de Gaulle, his commander-in-chief and follow the Admiralty's instruction not to go ahead with the plan? After considerable anguish,⁶⁶ Muselier decided on the former, but not without first concluding that once the operation was finished he would resign his post on the Comité Nationale as Commissioner for the Navy and Merchant Marine⁶⁷ in protest of de Gaulle's handling of this affair.⁶⁸ On December 21st then, after returning to Halifax, Muselier telegraphed de Gaulle, to inform him that he had received the order to go ahead

certaine, que les canadiens ont l'intention de faire eux-mêmes la destruction du poste radio de Saint-Pierre. Dans ces conditions, je vous prescrib de procéder au ralliement de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon par vos propres moyens et sans rien dire aux étrangers. Je prends l'entière responsabilité de cette opération, devenue indispensable pour conserver à la France ces possessions françaises (de Gaulle, Documents, p. 494).

⁶⁵ Muselier, p. 265.

⁶⁶ de Ville Fosse, p. 131.

⁶⁷ It should be noted, however, that Muselier had no intention of giving up his post as Commander of the Free French Naval Forces.

⁶⁸ Muselier, p. 265.

with the operation and that he would execute it as soon as possible.⁶⁹

There has been a great deal of speculation as to why de Gaulle suddenly reversed his position and went back on his word to the Allies not to undertake the operation. De Gaulle himself asserts, that on December 17th, the same day he gave the Foreign Office his assurance that no Free French occupation of St. Pierre would take place, he also learned of the proposed Canadian operation. This "foreign intervention", he insists, meant that there could no longer be any hesitation on his part, he had to act, to protect the interests of France Libre and the sovereignty of France.

His reference to the Canadian operation in his final telegram to Muselier on December 18th tends to reinforce this interpretation, as does his December 18th communication with Foreign Minister Eden, in which the General vehemently protests the fact that the Allies had planned such an operation on French territory without consulting him.⁷⁰ But it is not entirely clear

⁶⁹ Muselier à de Gaulle, décembre 21, 1941. J'ai reçu votre telegram du 17 décembre me prescrivant, l'operation. Vos instructions seront exécutées dès que possible. Mais je suis retardé par une violente tempête de neige. Cannons et tubes lance-torpilles sont momentanément hors d'état par suite du gel. J'espère pouvoir appareiller le 22 décembre avec les quatre bâtiments. Discrétion absolue a été observé par nous (de Gaulle, Documents, p. 495, Muselier, p. 265). De Ville Fosse also notes that once Muselier had decided to act, "il était résolu aussi a réussir (de Ville Fosse, p. 131).

⁷⁰ Bybelezer, p. 281; External Affairs document #1316, vol. 9, Foreign Secretary Eden to British Ambassador in Washington, December 24th, 1941, p. 1647.

that the proposed Canadian operation was in fact the principal reason behind the General's dramatic decision. It may have been that he simply wished to disrupt the all too comfortable relations between the United States and Vichy. There is some evidence for this in his memoirs, where he admits that perhaps he provoked the St. Pierre incident in order "to stir up the bottom of things, as one throws a stone into a pond."⁷¹ But the most tangible proof for this interpretation comes from a document sent by Pierre Dupuy, the Canadian Chargé d'Affaires for France, Belgium and the Netherlands, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs in Ottawa. In this telegram, which originated from London, Dupuy insists that there were three principal reasons for de Gaulle's occupation of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The first was to "prevent an agreement between Washington and Vichy concerning St. Pierre, as in the case of La Martinique ...," the second was to "protest for not having been more closely associated with the conversations in Washington", and the third, and to this writer the most important, was to "provoke complications between Washington and Vichy which might lead to [a] severance of diplomatic relations and thus facilitate recognition of his Movement as the true French government."⁷² Thus, while it may be true that de Gaulle, as he claims, was motivated to take St. Pierre out of his desire to protect French

⁷¹ de Gaulle, Mémoires, p. 184.

⁷² External Affairs document #1339, vol. 9, Chargé d'Affaires Dupuy to Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 29th, 1941, p. 1671.

sovereignty from the so-called Canadian "intervention", it seems equally true that he did so in a desperate attempt to gain both attention and recognition from Washington.

There has also been considerable speculation as to how de Gaulle learned of the Canadian plan in the first place. Professor Kersaudy, for example, notes that de Gaulle most likely learned of the operation through Sir William Strang, who is reported to have mentioned it to Dejean "en passant", in their discussion on the morning of the 17th. De Gaulle may also have received a tip from someone in the Foreign Office, as he suggests in his memoirs, but the need for such a tip hardly seems necessary when one considers de Ville Fosse's assertion that part of the reason the Free French made the decision in mid-November to go ahead with the St. Pierre operation, was due to their concern over possible Canadian intervention. Nor should it be overlooked that Muselier, who debated the merits of the Canadian plan freely with both the American and Canadian governments, had himself advised de Gaulle in his telegram of December 17th, that the Canadians were in fact planning to take control of the wireless station operating from St. Pierre.

In any case, if de Gaulle needed an excuse to act, the Canadians had provided one. The dye was cast. Muselier had telegraphed his intentions to go ahead, and it was simply a matter now of waiting for the weather to clear so that the Admiral, his three corvettes, and the massive Surcouf, could slip quietly out of Halifax harbour, make for St. Pierre, and carry out their "petit coup de main".

CHAPTER IV

"THE BUSINESS MUST BE SETTLED"

The village of St. Pierre slept soundly on the morning of December 24, 1941. It was a particularly cold morning, cold of the sort that only those who have lived on the sea in winter can truly understand. But for the few souls who had ventured out in the frigid pre-dawn air, a surprise would come with the dawn that day which none of them would be likely to forget. For at four o'clock that morning, Admiral Muselier and his little fleet, hove to in the lee of St. Pierre Island. Battle stations were called, a landing party organized, and with the Surcouf remaining at watch at the narrow entrance to the harbour, the Mimosa, Alysse, and Acovit made their way quietly into St. Pierre. The captain of one of the corvettes, surveying the scene, noted that it looked as if all the inhabitants of the town "sleep and dream of us for Christmas".¹ But as the Mimosa approached the dock, this tranquility was quickly shattered. A dark figure, in boots and a sealskin cap, raced towards them. He had spotted the cross of Lorraine, and was shouting with all his might "vive de Gaulle", "vive de Gaulle", while in between these exclamations he kept up a "relentless stream of profanity directed against Marshall Henri Phillipe Pétain."² He was soon joined by a number of other

¹ Wolfert, New York Times, December 25th, p. 7.

² Ibid.

figures, equally enthusiastic, who assisted in tying up the boats to the dock.³

The news of the Free French arrival then "spread like wildfire"⁴ and as the marines disembarked from their ships and fanned out across the town to take control of strategic points, the people of St. Pierre rushed out of their homes "in various stages of dress", cheering wildly, brandishing home-made Free French flags, and offering "wine to every hand".⁵ Within half an hour St. Pierre was reported secure. The citizens then joined the men and sailors of Free France in an emotional chorus of *le Marseillaise*. Not a shot had been fired. The Administrator, M. de Bournat, surrendered peacefully,⁶ and with the exception of the Ministers of Health, Justice, and Communications, all the public servants of the Islands, including the eleven gendarmes, chose to remain at their posts and to serve under the Admiral.⁷ Muselier then announced that as a "Christmas present, Free France will give you what it has to bestow -- liberty."⁸ A plebiscite was to be held the next day, December 25th, in which the Islanders would

³ de Ville Fosse, p. 136.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Wolfert, New York Times, December 25th, 1941, p. 7.

⁶ But not without turning to the crowd of de Gaulle supporters assembled on the quay before the Mimosa, and shouting "vive Pétain" as he made his way up the gangplank of the ship. (de Ville Fosse, p. 137.)

⁷ Muselier, p. 268.

⁸ Wolfert, New York Times, December 25th, 1941, p. 1.

I be able to choose between "the course of the Free French and the course of collaboration with the axis powers, who starve, humiliate, and martyrise our country."⁹ Following this announcement, Muselier sent the Alysse off to take Miquelon and shortly after that, got in touch with both the Canadian and American Consuls, who were told that they would be allowed to continue to communicate freely with their governments.¹⁰ All that the Admiral requested in return, was that they ask their respective governments for any information as to the movements of "naval units of the Vichy government, especially those stationed at Martinique."¹¹

In the meantime, Ira Wolfert, a special correspondent for the New York Times who had somehow managed to get word of the Free French operation¹² and had shown up in Halifax threatening to expose the whole affair if he were not invited along, was busy

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wolfert, New York Times, December 25th, 1941, p. 7.

¹¹ External Affairs document #1318, vol. 9, Consul in St. Pierre to Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 24th, 1941, p. 1648.

¹² Wolfert was the lucky recipient of a tip about the operation from two St. Pierrais who were in New York, and who suspected that Muselier's presence in Canada was the prelude to his moving on St. Pierre. Thus informed, Wolfert set out at once to find Muselier, whom he eventually met up with in Halifax, whereupon Wolfert proceeded to bluff the Admiral into thinking he knew everything about the operation. Muselier "arrested" the reporter -- illegally but good naturedly -- and placed him in the hold of one of his ships in order to keep him quiet, at least until Christmas Eve when the Admiral notes "Il (Wolfert) eut la satisfaction bien gagnée de transmettre à son journal la première nouvelle de la libération. Son renom de reporter est désormais nettement assuré." (Muselier, p. 286, Sherwood, p. 949.)

cabling the news to the Times in New York. That same afternoon, word was also sent by Muselier himself to General de Gaulle and the British Admiralty in London,¹³ and to the Canadians and Americans, who were told by the Admiral that "conformement aux ordres du général de Gaulle, et appelé par le population, je m'etais rendu à Saint-Pierre et avais libéré les îles."¹⁴

In Ottawa, reaction to the news was swift and negative. Prime Minister King, who along with other top officials at the Department of External Affairs did not learn of the operation until shortly after 7:00 p.m. on the 24th,¹⁵ was "shocked" and "distressed" by the news.¹⁶ His first order¹⁷ was to send Under-Secretary Robertson to see the French Ambassador, who had unfortunately been informed only the day before that his suspicions¹⁸ about a Free French or Canadian move on St. Pierre were unfounded and that should Canada decide to act she would do

¹³ Muselier, pp. 281-82.

¹⁴ Muselier, p. 282.

¹⁵ External Affairs document #1324, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in United States, December 26th, 1941, pp. 1652-54.

¹⁶ Pickersgill, pp. 318-19.

¹⁷ King also sent an "immediate" and "confidential" telegram to the British High Commissioner, informing him that "In view of the circumstances of Free French occupation of St. Pierre today, do not send Christmas message to General de Gaulle."! (External Affairs document #1319, vol. 9, Secretary of State for External Affairs to British High Commissioner, December 24th, 1941, p. 1649.

¹⁸ A few days prior to Muselier's coup the French Minister in Ottawa reported to the Department of External Affairs that he had heard rumours about a possible Free French takeover of St. Pierre.

so overtly and would "confer with him first."¹⁹ Robertson, of course, informed the Ambassador that Muselier's actions had come as a complete surprise to his government, which had particularly embarrassed Prime Minister King. The French minister, who apparently did not give any indication as to how severe Vichy's reaction might be, immediately sent a cable to France informing his superiors of all that had happened.²⁰

In Washington, meanwhile, Canadian Minister Wrong, who had also learned of the affair shortly after 7:00 p.m. on the 24th, managed to reach Under-Secretary Robertson by phone shortly before his interview with the French Ambassador. In this conversation, Robertson instructed Wrong to immediately notify the State Department of the Free French action, and to assure the Department that Canada had no foreknowledge of the Free French move and had acted throughout "in good faith".²¹ Wrong, in accordance with these requests, telephoned Mr. Atherton, who had not as yet heard the news, and remarked upon being told of the Free French action that "he was afraid that it would have many repercussions."²²

¹⁹ Pickersgill, p. 319.

²⁰ Ristelhuber, the Vichy Minister in Canada, had sent another cable, a few hours earlier, which informed the Pétain government that Canada had said it would not allow the Free French to take possession of St. Pierre (External Affairs document #1326, vol. 9. p. 457, Moffat, p. 364).

²¹ External Affairs document #1324, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 26th, 1941, pp. 1652-53.

²² Ibid.

Indeed, the State Department took the matter very seriously, and on the following morning, Christmas Day, Secretary Hull himself chaired a meeting of senior department officials to discuss what to do about the Free French seizure of the Islands.²³ At this meeting, there was a general consensus that Muselier's actions ran the risk of upsetting the "delicate balance" of U.S. relations with Vichy, involving not only the agreements reached between Roosevelt and Pétain over the maintenance of the status quo on both sides of the Atlantic, but also the additional guarantees recently obtained from Admiral Robert in Martinique. Beyond this, there was also the question of how the Free French action might affect U.S. ability to maintain the principles achieved at the Havana Conference, as well as the question of its effect on the United States position at the upcoming Rio Conference in which the State Department hoped to strengthen and reaffirm those principles by inducing all of the American Republics to sign a joint declaration severing relations with the Axis powers.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Secretary Hull called this conference, which was held between January 15 and 28, 1942, in response to Pearl Harbor. As is mentioned above, he hoped to unify the foreign policy of the republics by calling upon them to break relations with the Axis powers as one. Chile and Argentina, however, refused to sign the joint declaration, with the result that the former, in Hull's words, became "a hotbed for Axis activities." The question of St. Pierre and Miquelon, however, was never raised at the Conference. (Hull, vol. 2, pp. 1143-44, 1150.)

Hull, whose patience reportedly "snapped"²⁵ upon hearing of the Muselier coup, clearly wanted action. It was decided therefore that the Department should at once get in touch with the American Minister in Ottawa "to persuade the Canadians that very afternoon to take steps to restore the status quo."²⁶ This, Secretary Hull undertook personally, and at 4:30 that afternoon a call was put through to Moffat.

Hull began this conversation by asking for the "facts about Admiral Muselier and the understandings reached with him."²⁷ He then went over how serious an issue this was, and insisted that Moffat must put the question of restoring the status quo ante before the Canadians immediately. Moffat responded by noting that "although the Canadians were extremely embarrassed by what had taken place" he feared that "they would be reluctant to restore the situation, particularly in the event that the plebiscite²⁸ which was being held at this moment ... went favorably to de Gaulle." Moffat then noted that Prime Minister King (who was scheduled to leave for Washington to attend the Arcadia

²⁵ Canadian Minister Wrong makes numerous references to the anger expressed at the State Department over the Free French action, but singles out Secretary Hull in particular, whom he notes issued his statement to the press on December 25th (see p. 95) in a "White Heat". (External Affairs document #1344, vol. 9, January 3rd 1942, p. 1676.)

²⁶ Moffat, p. 365.

²⁷ Moffat, p. 364.

²⁸ Both the Canadian and American governments had been informed of Muselier's intention to hold a plebiscite by their Consuls in St. Pierre. News of the plebiscite and its results were also reported by Wolfert in the press.

Conference by train that evening) had planned to discuss the issue upon his arrival tomorrow in Washington. But Hull insisted that "that was not quick enough, that the situation was so urgent that the Canadians should start steps this very afternoon." He then mentioned something about Canadian pledges, to which Moffat replied that as he understood it, there had been no pledge, "but merely an understanding as to policy." This brought a bitter reply from Hull, who insisted that

... in the first place Mr. Wrong's conversation with Mr. Atherton [of December 8th] virtually involved a pledge, in the second place whether it was a pledge or an understanding was merely a quibble, that in the third place, on the basis of our meeting of minds, the United States had reached an understanding with Admiral Robert which had now been breached. Unless the status quo were immediately restored, Admiral Robert could make the accusation, and with considerable justice, that the agreement had been violated from our side, and Vichy, the Nazis, etcetera, could play that up to a damaging degree. Canada had perhaps greater responsibilities than anybody else, partly because of geography, partly because of her understanding with Admiral Muselier. In any event, we must ask Canada to repair the damage and to do so at once.²⁹

Hull then closed the conversation by bringing up the question of publicity, noting that he was thinking of issuing a statement "to the effect that Admiral Muselier's action was an arbitrary one contrary to agreements, and that the United States was asking Canada what steps she was prepared to take to restore the status quo."³⁰ Moffat, however, asked Secretary Hull if he might not

²⁹ Moffat, p. 365.

³⁰ Ibid.

withhold any statement until after he had a chance to discuss it with the Canadians, to which Hull apparently agreed.³¹

Following this conversation, Moffat immediately sought out Under-Secretary Robertson, whom he found at the home of T.A. Stone "just getting ready to go to Christmas dinner."³² Moffat delivered Secretary Hull's message, which Robertson noted, asked Canada "in great urgency to take a very serious step."³³ Nevertheless, the Secretary agreed to take up the matter at once with the Prime Minister, who, when reached by telephone a short while later, reacted to Hull's suggestion by noting that action by Canada to restore the status quo was out of the question until the British and Americans had both agreed to it. Furthermore, as he was about to leave for Washington to attend the Arcadia Conference, it seemed best to Prime Minister King, to defer any action until he had had the opportunity to discuss it with the President and Mr. Churchill.³⁴ All three men then decided that as far as publicity was concerned, it was "essential to keep the matter as quiet as possible for the time being and not to aggravate the situation by premature press statements."³⁵

³¹ Moffat, pp. 365-66.

³² Moffat, p. 364.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Churchill had arrived in Washington on December 22nd to attend this conference, which he had called on his own initiative following Pearl Harbor.

³⁵ External Affairs document # 1325, vol. 9, Memorandum by L.B. Pearson, December 26th, 1941, p. 1655.

In fact, the seizure of the Islands had already created a sensation in the press, where news of the event made the Christmas headlines of the New York Times (thanks to Wolfert) and was also being reported widely over the radio.³⁶ But any hope of the issue fading from public view, as Prime Minister King had suggested, was soon shattered by Secretary Hull, who without warning and at roughly the same moment that Ambassador Moffat was discussing the problem with the Canadians, issued the following statement to the press:

Our preliminary reports show that the action taken by three so-called Free French ships at St. Pierre-Miquelon was an arbitrary action contrary to the agreement of all parties concerned and certainly without the prior knowledge or consent in any sense of the United States Government.

This government has inquired of the Canadian government as to the steps that government is prepared to take to restore the status quo of these Islands.³⁷

The statement was a colossal blunder, for two reasons. In the first place, because his words "so-called Free French" created a storm of protest in the U.S., where the public viewed Mr. Hull's remarks as a gratuitous insult to the Free French movement, which, in seizing St. Pierre, had provided the world with the first "good news" about the war since the stunning blow

³⁶ There were in fact many top officials in both External Affairs and the State Department who first heard of the affair over the radio or read it in the press.

³⁷ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, Secretary of State to Admiral Leahy, December 25, 1941, p. 551, and New York Times, December 26th, 1941, p. 1. Copies of this statement were sent to both Admiral Leahy in France and Admiral Robert in Martinique.

at Pearl Harbor.³⁸ Sherwood notes, for example, that telegrams addressed to the "so-called Secretary of State" and the "so-called State Department", soon began arriving in Secretary Hull's office as a result.³⁹ And, in an article in the New York Times, on December 27, it was reported that the Union for Democratic Action, headed by a group of prominent Americans including Reinhold Niebuhr, had sent a telegram to the Secretary criticising him for his insult to General de Gaulle and the "'gallant Frenchmen' who 'are so heroically holding aloft the torch of freedom.'"⁴⁰ It was also a blunder because the Canadians had been given no opportunity to comment on the statement, which they regarded as "most embarrassing in its suggestion that the Canadian Government should at once restore the status quo" and "entirely misleading in its reference to an agreement between Muselier and the Canadian Government."⁴¹ Robertson, upon hearing the remarks, immediately telephoned Moffat "in great perturbation", to protest Hull's actions, and to inform him that insofar as the Prime Minister was concerned in this matter, "his whole attitude had changed from one of helpful cooperation to one

³⁸ Sherwood, p. 482.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ New York Times, December 27th, 1941, p. 8. All of this publicity was, of course, a boost to General de Gaulle, who, according to a poll cited by Professor Langer, was not very well known in the U.S. at the time the incidence occurred. In fact, only 34% of those surveyed in December 1941 could correctly identify the General. (Langer, p. 218.)

⁴¹ External Affairs document #1325, vol. 9, Memorandum by L.B. Pearson, December 26th, 1941, p. 1655.

of most reluctant cooperation."⁴² Furthermore, now that "the fat was in the fire", both he and Prime Minister King were being hounded by the Press for comment.⁴³ Moffat, speaking to the Department of State a few minutes after his conversation with Robertson, tried to explain the Canadian position to his superiors, noting that Canada was quite upset over Secretary Hull's press release and was reluctant to act without a specific request that she do so from the British as well as the Americans. Moreover Ottawa was also upset because they did not "see why they should be the whipping boy" in this matter, "acting apparently on their own".⁴⁴

None of these objections, however, carried much weight at the State Department, where the Canadian attitude was beginning to be viewed as "obstructive and of doubtful validity", especially in regard to their insistence on bringing the British into what the Americans regarded as "essentially a North American problem."⁴⁵ But Prime Minister King would not back down on his insistence on British involvement, and at 10:00 p.m. that evening, he issued a retort to Secretary Hull's earlier statement, which left no doubt as to his position on this matter.

Canada is in no way responsible for the Free French occupation of St. Pierre. We have kept in close touch with both the United Kingdom and the United States on

⁴² Moffat, p. 367.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

this question and have always been ready to cooperate in carrying out an agreed policy.⁴⁶ We decline to commit ourselves to any action or to take any action pending such agreement. In the circumstances and until we have had an opportunity of considering action with the President and Mr. Churchill, the Canadian Government cannot take the steps requested to expel the Free French and restore the status quo in the Islands.⁴⁷

In London, meanwhile, news of Admiral Muselier's actions also came as a complete shock. The Foreign Office reacted by immediately summoning de Gaulle's Commissioner for Foreign Affairs in order to demand an explanation. The Commissioner, M. Dejean, responded to this inquiry by informing the British that de Gaulle had in fact ordered the coup and that his reasons for doing so stemmed from his knowledge of the Canadian operation, which, had it been carried out, would have undermined the cause of Free France. Having obtained this information, the Foreign Office quickly dispatched a telegram to Washington which placed the blame for the affair "squarely on de Gaulle".⁴⁸ This did not mean, however, that London approved in any way of Secretary Hull's demand that the Free French withdraw from the Islands. On

⁴⁶ Author's italics.

⁴⁷ It should be noted that King decided not to issue this statement to the press, but to deliver it only to the State Department. (Moffat, p. 370.) However, King did tell a group of reporters that evening that there had been no prior agreement between Muselier and Canada and that Canada had no prior knowledge of the operation. When asked about what Canada was prepared to do to restore the status quo, King offered no comment. (New York Times, December 26th, 1941, p. 10.)

⁴⁸ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942 and Casablanca, 1943, British Ambassador Halifax to Prime Minister Churchill, December 25th, 1941, p. 380.

the contrary, when word of his suggestion that Canada restore the status quo reached the War Cabinet in London, it was immediately decided to call on the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to send an urgent telegram to Ottawa asking Canada "to take no action in regard to any proposal to restore the status quo in the Islands."⁴⁹ To do so, London concluded, would not only greatly agitate the British public, who were now as caught up in the news of the affair as the Americans, but might also cause serious harm to de Gaulle and his movement.

Secretary Hull, however, was not to be deterred. On December 26, in separate meetings with Prime Minister King (who had just arrived in Washington) and British Ambassador Halifax,⁵⁰ he suggested that the controversy be settled by arranging for an agreement with Admiral Robert in Martinique, approved by Vichy, which would allow for Allied supervision of the radio station on St. Pierre in return for a British request that the Free French withdraw from the Islands. As a face-saving measure, Britain and Canada could then publicly "praise very highly the part the Free French occupation had taken in securing the agreement for supervision [of the radio]."⁵¹

At the White House, later that day, in a meeting with Hull and King, both President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill

⁴⁹ CAB (Great Britain Cabinet Office, Cabinet Minutes and Memoranda, 1916-45, Millwood, New York: Kraws-Thomson Organization, 1977), 65/25 136(41) 5, December 26th, 1941.

⁵⁰ Lord Halifax replaced Ambassador Lothian as British Ambassador to the United States early in 1941 and served in that capacity until 1946.

⁵¹ Hull, vol. II, p. 1131, Pickersgill, p. 320.

were inclined to agree on "the need to get this incident closed up so as to avoid its developing into a serious question."⁵² Churchill, however, noted that Roosevelt, who was not even aware of where Muselier obtained the ships to attack St. Pierre,⁵³ seemed "to shrug his shoulders over the whole affair."⁵⁴ He nevertheless suggested that "Canada might appoint a commission of some kind to look after the supervision of wireless transmission ... that the Governor might be restored, and the Free French forces withdraw."⁵⁵ Churchill concurred on the need for some sort of "compromise settlement" and said he was "prepared to take de Gaulle by the back of the neck and tell him he had gone too far and bring him to his senses." Prime Minister King then interjected that "it would not do to have the Governor brought back, as he was pro-Axis and his wife a German." He then brought up Secretary Hull's earlier suggestion about a face-saving formula for de Gaulle, which brought no response from either Churchill or Roosevelt. The meeting concluded with the President suggesting that it might be best for Mr. Hull and Prime Minister King to work out "a suggested arrangement" which could be considered the following day.⁵⁶

⁵² Pickersgill, p. 321.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Churchill, The Grand Alliance, p. 667.

⁵⁵ Pickersgill, p. 321.

⁵⁶ Pickersgill, p. 322.

On the morning of the 27th, then, Secretary Hull and Prime Minister King had "a long conversation" about St. Pierre and Miquelon.⁵⁷ The Secretary was disturbed that he had not put his case strongly enough before the President and Mr. Churchill the day before, and was worried that perhaps he had not been understood.⁵⁸ Prime Minister King, however, assured Mr. Hull that he was "mistaken in thinking they had not seen his point of view."⁵⁹ Hull then asked the Prime Minister what he thought should be done about St. Pierre - Miquelon, to which Mr. King replied that something along the lines of what had been discussed at the White House the previous afternoon would be fine. They then discussed various ideas as to how the supervision of the wireless station might be effected, as well as what to do with the governor, whom Prime Minister King insisted had to be removed. Secretary Hull also indicated that he thought he had better call on the French Ambassador, Gaston Henry-Haye, to "propose to him an arrangement to have the wireless supervised by Canada and perhaps someone associated with their [the U.S.] Consul."⁶⁰ This evidently had already been arranged, as Prime Minister King ran into the French Ambassador in the ante-room on his way out of the meeting with Mr. Hull. The French Ambassador

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ King writes in his diary that Hull was so upset by this that "he had evidently been distressed through the night, thinking of this." (Pickersgill, p. 322)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

introduced himself, and immediately noted that "we must get this difficulty settled about St. Pierre", but Prime Minister King avoided conversation, (as well as a group of photographers from the press), and left Mr. Hull with the understanding that he would wait to hear from him.⁶¹

If everyone else in the world seemed to be pitted against Cordell Hull at this moment, the Vichy French at least appeared pleased at the actions he had taken thus far. It should be recalled that on December 25th, when Secretary Hull released his statement to the press, he also had it cabled to Ambassador Leahy in France, instructing him to deliver it at once to the proper authorities.⁶² On the 26th, word arrived at the State Department that the Vichy Foreign Minister, Charles Rochat, in a meeting with Ambassador Leahy, had expressed his "appreciation for the prompt action ... [the U.S.] government was taking", as well as his hope that "the status quo [of the Islands] would be reestablished as rapidly as possible." He also pointed out that Muselier's action was in violation of the agreement governing the status quo of French possessions in the Western Hemisphere" and indicated that if the Islands were left in Gaullist hands, that the Germans could "use this as a pretext for insisting on

⁶¹ Pickersgill, p. 323.

⁶² FRUS, vol. II, 1941, Hull to Leahy, December 25th, 1941, p. 551.

stationing German forces 'in other French colonial possessions to protect them'."⁶³

At their meeting on the 27th, then, Gaston Henry-Haye, who had also personally thanked Secretary Hull for his press release, was reminded of the importance of the radio station located on St. Pierre. It was "very important", Hull insisted, "that the French officials clear up this matter against any possibility of injury by signals to enemy vessels on the high seas." Indeed, he continued, "the French Government on the Islands should be only too glad to do so" Hull then recommended that the station either be closed for the duration of the war, (with some Canadians there as observers to make sure it remained so) or, "if it is desired to operate the station, to agree to two or three Canadians and an American to be attached to our consulate ... to assure Great Britain, Canada, and the United States against any possible injury".⁶⁴ Hull also noted that the Administrator of the Islands, M. de Bournat, had "made himself personally offensive to Canada and to some of the people on the Islands" and that it would be better if he were transferred to some other location and another administrator be appointed to take his place. The French Ambassador responded by saying that he would strongly recommend to his government and to Admiral Robert in Martinique, that the proposals Hull had put forward with respect to the radio

⁶³ FRUS, vol. II, 41, Leahy to Hull, December 26th, 1941, p. 553.

⁶⁴ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum, of conversation between Hull and French Ambassador, December 27th, 1941, p. 560.

transmitter be adopted. He also noted that he would see that de Bournat would indeed be transferred, but preferred that that request "not be made a part and parcel of the transaction relating to the wireless." Hull then concluded the meeting by asking Henry-Haye not to say anything "about this matter in any way" when he left the Secretary's office, and by indicating that he could "not undertake to say whether the British and the Canadians would agree to this proposal," but that in any case, he would wait for a response from the French authorities before approaching the other governments.⁶⁵

The substance of this talk was then transmitted to the U.S. embassy in France, so that Leahy could communicate it to M. Rochat at Vichy. In the interim, Gaston Henry-Haye spoke to the press,⁶⁶ (ignoring Secretary Hull's request not to) and Cordell Hull sought out the British Ambassador.

At that meeting, which took place on December 27th, Secretary Hull pressed Ambassador Halifax to accept a solution to the St. Pierre problem which involved essentially four points. First, that the Free French forces should be withdrawn; second, that the wireless should be put under Canadian control; third,

⁶⁵ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum of conversation between Hull and French Ambassador, p. 561.

⁶⁶ Upon leaving Secretary Hull's office, Henry-Haye told the New York Times that he had met Secretary Hull for over an hour, and that he had "no reason to doubt the restoration of the status quo" in the Islands, which, he continued, would be accomplished after suitable guarantees had been "established for the supervision of the wireless station." (New York Times, December 28th, 1941, p. 8.)

that a new governor agreeable to Vichy be appointed; and fourth, that "the solution be quick".⁶⁷ Halifax, accordingly, immediately forwarded these proposals to London, which two days later "brought a blast from the Foreign Office in reply."⁶⁸ It was pointed out, for example, that there was no hope of the Free French withdrawing voluntarily, and that if they were to be compelled to withdraw, there might be bloodshed, which the Foreign Office insisted "would have a deplorable effect". Moreover, London wanted to know "on what grounds the Free French would be asked to withdraw", especially in light of the plebiscite that had been held, (which was over 90% in favor of de Gaulle). Finally, they noted that British public opinion was firmly behind de Gaulle, and reiterated the view expressed earlier by the Chiefs of Staff that "control of the wireless by Canada with the Vichy Governor in occupation would not be enough."⁶⁹

Secretary Hull, however, remained undaunted by these arguments, and in a meeting with Ambassador Halifax to discuss the Foreign Office reply, he continued to insist that de Gaulle, by his actions, had violated international law, that

⁶⁷ External Affairs documents #1334, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 29th, 1941, pp. 1667-68, #1335, vol. 9, Memorandum by L.B. Pearson, December 29th, 1941, pp. 1668-69.

⁶⁸ External Affairs document #1335, vol. 9, Memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 29th, 1941, p. 1668.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

unchallenged, he would probably attempt to capture other French colonies in the New World, and that furthermore, should this incident lead to a break with Vichy, all that had been accomplished by Leahy in unoccupied France, and Murphy in French North Africa, including the "valuable information that these Americans have obtained by keeping in touch with the Vichy Government", would be lost.⁷⁰ It was "unthinkable", the Secretary continued,

... that all of these benefits to the British and American governments should be junked and thrown overboard in order to gratify the desire of the de Gaulle leaders, who, in open violation of their pledge to the contrary, suddenly seized and occupied St. Pierre and Miquelon by force, thereby inflicting on Great Britain and the United States unimaginable injury to their military defensive situation in this hemisphere and in French Africa.⁷¹

The Secretary then went on to say that the use of force to evict Muselier had never been contemplated by the State Department⁷²

⁷⁰ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum of conversation Hull and Halifax, December 29th, 1941, p. 562.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² On the same day, the State Department received a communication from the U.S. Consul in St. Pierre which indicated Muselier's determination, in view of the results of the plebiscite, to defend the Islands "against any attacks by the Vichy, British or American fleets." At the same time, however, the Admiral indicated his tremendous disappointment with de Gaulle, whose actions, he was convinced, were taken not only in direct contradiction to the wishes of the Allies, but also were taken without the expressed approval of the Free French National Committee in London. As such, the Admiral thought it important for the Department to understand that he himself was "not a gangster" but had carried out the order because of his conviction that his failure to do so would necessitate his resignation as Commander of the Free French Naval Forces. This, he concluded, would no doubt result in their disintegration since the force was largely held together "because of his personal following". (FRUS,

and that should the Vichy French offer a "suitable agreement" it would be "entirely consistent" for de Gaulle to be thanked for his contribution to the safeguarding of the wireless station, withdraw from the Islands, and "move on to some other act of service to the allied Governments!"⁷³ Halifax, in reply, noted that whatever the solution might be, "it must not be such as to humiliate the Free French or make them too sour."⁷⁴ He then agreed to put the matter once more before his government while he and Secretary Hull waited for the response from the authorities at Vichy.⁷⁵

A day earlier, Hull had taken a similar stand with Churchill at the White House, where the Secretary, in a "blunt conversation", accused de Gaulle of being "marplot" and of launching a propaganda campaign against him. He then asked Churchill if he might not do something about that campaign, which, since it emanated from London, had created the strong impression that it had British backing. Churchill responded by agreeing to consider the points Secretary Hull had raised, but not without warning the Secretary of the possible damage that

vol. II, 1941, Consul in St. Pierre to Secretary of State, December 29th, 1941, pp. 556-57.)

⁷³ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum by the Secretary of State, December 29th, 1941, p. 563.

⁷⁴ External Affairs document #1334, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, December 29th, 1941, p. 1668.

⁷⁵ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, memorandum by Secretary of State, December 29th, 1941, p. 563.

might be done to British - Free French relations should the Prime Minister take too strong a stand with de Gaulle.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, in France, Ambassador Leahy called on M. Rochat in order to convey to him the substance of the proposals put forward by Hull in Washington on December 27th. Incredibly, Rochat responded by indicating that, while his government appreciated the steps Washington was taking to restore the legitimate government in St. Pierre, it was nonetheless obliged "to take the position that the status quo ante must be restored" before the "conditions in the [State] Department's telegram ... would be examined." Furthermore, the French government "could not comply" with the U.S. request to withdraw the Governor from the Islands.⁷⁷

On the 30th, Ambassador Henry-Haye met with Secretary Hull to discuss his government's response. In that conversation, the Ambassador indicated that Vichy had decided to leave any further discussion on the matter in the hands of Admiral Robert in Martinique. He then infuriated Hull by launching into "a loud monologue about French sovereignty and about France being a great country and having to be treated accordingly."⁷⁸ Unable to take

⁷⁶ In the first few days of this incident Churchill seems to have blown hot and cold over de Gaulle, but his attitude against the General hardened, along with Roosevelt's, as the crisis continued.

⁷⁷ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, Leahy to Hull, December 29th, 1941, p. 565.

⁷⁸ He also mentioned in the same conversation that de Bournat had just been given the "Cross of Honour" for his service to France. (Hull, pp. 1131-32.)

any more, Hull cut the Ambassador off by retorting that the last thing he expected at this moment, when he was "being subjected to every sort of abuse, even in this country", for trying to settle this affair in an amicable manner, was a "stump speech about the greatness of the French nation!"⁷⁹ St. Pierre and Miquelon, he continued, may be "a small matter on the surface", but in the present situation "it is a highly explosive question" which demands immediate settlement. The French government, therefore, must find a way to cooperate before "reckless people and publicity seekers ... inflame the public everywhere and make the matter of greater difficulty and injury to all governments concerned."⁸⁰ They then closed the discussion with Henry-Haye agreeing to take the matter up further with his government.⁸¹

There can be no doubt that Secretary Hull was beginning to resent being vilified in the press for his stand on St. Pierre and Miquelon. Sherwood notes, for example, that after years of dignified public service, the Secretary found it "bewildering as well as infuriating" to become "the target of the kind of insults and jibes to which many of his colleagues in the administration had long since become accustomed."⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ FRUS, vol. II, 1941, conversation between French Ambassador and Secretary of State, December 30th, 1941, p. 565.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Sherwood, p. 483.

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But the anxiety Mr. Hull suffered about his poor showing in the press, rose tremendously when he learned of Prime Minister Churchill's address to the Canadian Parliament on December 30, 1941. In that speech, Churchill, who had left for Ottawa the day before, heaped scorn upon the "men of Vichy" whom he said, "lie prostrate at the foot of the conqueror", while he praised de Gaulle, whom he noted had refused to bow to Hitler and was "being held in increasing respect by nine Frenchmen out of every ten throughout the once happy, smiling land of France."⁸³

After this address, Sherwood writes that Secretary Hull's rage reached "hurricane proportions"⁸⁴ and that matters for him were made much worse by numerous editorials across the country which praised Churchill's speech.⁸⁵ The following, from the New York Herald Tribune, Sherwood calls a typical example:

If there was any longer any question about it, the Prime Minister has certainly blown all question of St. Pierre-Miquelon and Washington's "so-called Free French" through the dusty windows of the State Department. To Mr. Churchill there is nothing "so-called" about the Free French, "who would not bow to their knees" and "whose names are being held in increasing respect by nine Frenchmen out of every ten"; there is no trucking to the Vichy politicians who "misled" France and who "fawned upon" the conqueror; there is no glossing over the "cat-and-mouse-game"

⁸³ Churchill, The Complete Speeches of Winston Spencer Churchill, 1897-1963, ed. by Robert Rhodes James, London: Chelsea House, 1974, vol. VI, 1935-1942, pp. 6544-45.

⁸⁴ Sherwood, p. 483.

⁸⁵ Hopkins writes that by this point Hull was all the more upset because he was convinced that the British had turned their press agents loose on him. (FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942 and Casablanca, 1943, Memorandum by Hopkins, January 9th, 1942, p. 396.)

which Hitler is now playing with the "tormented men" who live only by his "blows and favors." Here, as elsewhere, Mr. Churchill understands that in the grim psychology of war there are moments when the forthright and aggressive spirit, the boldness to demand as well as dicker, the capacity to grasp the emotional values of a situation, are more important than all the gains of deviousness and subtlety.

That is what the State Department has failed to realize in respect to the problem of France. Uninformed as to what the department is trying to do, most Americans will still hesitate to criticize its recent actions; few after this can do otherwise than criticize the befuddlement and want of courage in the manner of its utterances.

On the day following the speech, Hull fired off a memorandum to the President, reiterating the importance of the St. Pierre incident, and drawing the President's attention to a new development, which was a report from Leahy which stated that Darlan had told him that Germany had already "used the seizure of those Islands by de Gaulle as an argument for the entry of Axis troops into Africa in order that it may be protected against a similar invasion."⁸⁶ Hull termed this, "just the beginning of ominous and serious developments" which will no doubt occur as a result of the affair. He then pointed out the fallacy of Churchill's contention that nine out of every ten Frenchmen supported de Gaulle,⁸⁷ and warned the President of the

⁸⁶ Sherwood, pp. 484-5, FRUS, Conference at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Secretary of State to President, December 31st, 1941, pp. 381-82.

⁸⁷ Hull insisted that, although (according to the State Department) 95% of the French populace was anti-Hitler, more than 95% of this number "are not Gaullists and would not follow him." (FRUS, Conference at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Secretary of State to President, December 31st, 1941, p. 382.)

consequences for North Africa "if the fact goes out to the world that the British government was really behind this movement [to take St. Pierre] and we abandon our own policies without serious protest."⁸⁸ The Secretary then closed his remarks by expressing the hope that, should Vichy prove cooperative, that Churchill would in turn "be disposed to talk with you, [F.D.R.] or rather let you talk with him, about the necessity to work out the matter....!"⁸⁹

On January 2nd, following another blunt conversation with Churchill⁹⁰ who had returned to Washington immediately after his address in Ottawa, Secretary Hull decided that it might be best to draw up a draft statement, that could perhaps be issued to the press by the President and Mr. Churchill, "in order to quiet steadily spreading rumours and reports very damaging to the British-American situation" and also as "a prelude to a settlement" with Vichy.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Sherwood writes that Secretary Hull remained suspicious of British involvement in the takeover of St. Pierre and Miquelon throughout the crisis, p. 486.

⁸⁹ FRUS, Conference at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, memorandum by Secretary Hull, December 31st, 1941, pp. 381-82.

⁹⁰ At this meeting Hull criticised Churchill's remarks in Ottawa as "highly incendiary" and pleaded with the Prime Minister to counter the damage done to the State Department by saying "just a few little words" in defense of U.S.-Vichy policy to the press. But Churchill, writes Hull, "was not cordial to the suggestion." (Hull, vol. II, p. 1134.)

⁹¹ Hull, vol. II, pp. 1134-35.

Hull completed this document on the same day. In general, it asserted that the President and Mr. Churchill were in fact in "entire agreement" on the Islands controversy, and that "an arrangement satisfactory to all concerned should not be difficult" as there is "complete cooperation and understanding between the United States, Great Britain, and Canada in this as in other matters."⁹²

But Roosevelt, according to Hull, refused to press Churchill to accept this document,⁹³ no doubt in part because of the President's view that it was "inadvisable to resuscitate this question" in the press.⁹⁴ Churchill, however, who had nevertheless read the Secretary's draft proposal, responded to Hull's suggestions by drawing up a draft statement of his own, which he forwarded to Secretary Hull with the comment that he was "not particularly in love with it" [his statement], but that he thought that "it would bring this matter to an end, which is what we all wish."⁹⁵ The Prime Minister's draft, which began by stating that Allied governments "view this incident as on a very small scale compared to what is going on all over the world", was then revised at the State Department and returned to the White

⁹² Hull, vol. II, p. 1135.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ FRUS, Conference at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, memorandum by Secretary of State to the President, January 2nd, 1942, pp. 387-88.

⁹⁵ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Secretary of State, January 3rd, 1942, p. 388.

House for comment. Here, it was approved by both the President and Prime Minister Churchill, after which it was forwarded to King in Ottawa and Eden in London for their observations. Eden was also asked to seek out de Gaulle's opinion.

The statement maintained Churchill's observation about the incident being a small matter and in addition also indicated that the three governments concerned⁹⁶ regarded the Islands as demilitarized and out of the war, that all armed forces as a result should be withdrawn, and that steps will be taken to secure the radio. It also said that the "local inhabitants will be left in full exercise of their rights of domestic self government" and concluded by asserting that "there should be no occasion for confusion or misunderstanding since there is no divergence of policy and there is complete cooperation and understanding between the United States, Great Britain and Canada in this as in other matters."⁹⁷

Prime Minister King, who was now back in Ottawa, responded to the above proposal by informing Pierrepont Moffat on January 6th that he was now prepared to "agree to any statement respecting St. Pierre which was fully agreed between the United Kingdom and the United States."⁹⁸ Foreign Minister Eden, however, was not so cooperative.

⁹⁶ Great Britain, U.S. and Canada.

⁹⁷ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, draft communiqué, January 3rd, 1941, pp. 389-90.

⁹⁸ External Affairs document #1347, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, January 6th, 1942, p. 1679.

In a telegram addressed to Churchill on January 4th, Eden indicated the difficulties the Allies might encounter should the inhabitants, under their "rights of domestic self government, decide to ask de Gaulle to appoint a governor and elect to be under the authority of [the] National Committee."⁹⁹ Certainly, in these circumstances, they could expect the "greatest difficulty in getting General de Gaulle to agree to withdraw his forces from the Islands ..." which was bound to be difficult no matter what the outcome of this affair might be. Eden then asked if it was still correct to assume that, should de Gaulle refuse to withdraw, that Secretary Hull would not insist on using force¹⁰⁰ to evict him. He closed by suggesting a number of amendments and additions, including the insertion of the statement that the Islands "are French and will remain French" which he hoped would quell any criticism from both "Vichy and General de Gaulle that we intend to keep the Islands. He also advised the Prime Minister that nothing be said to the press until all three governments and General de Gaulle had agreed to the proposal.¹⁰¹

But the statement was never released to the press, for on the following afternoon, Secretary Hull summoned British Counsellor Millar to the State Department where he learned that the Foreign Office had not agreed to the draft statement as it

⁹⁹ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Eden to Churchill, January 4th, 1942, p. 390.

¹⁰⁰ Eden apparently received word of Hull's assurances not to use force from Halifax on January 2nd, 1942.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

stood, and had not consulted the Free French.¹⁰² Hull, who was very impatient to release this document, then considered issuing a statement on his own, but refrained from doing so after having second thoughts.¹⁰³ Instead, he decided to proceed with work on a draft agreement, acceptable to the Allies and de Gaulle, which would then be sent to Leahy in France for Vichy's approval.

Hull had in fact already started this process two days earlier, when, following a meeting with the French Ambassador, he had telegraphed another set of proposals to Vichy which were essentially the same as those put forward before, except in their suggestion that the new governor be drawn from the local population.

By January 8th, the Secretary had completed a more comprehensive proposal¹⁰⁴ which he sent to Roosevelt at Hyde Park, along with a letter in which he reminded the President of the terms of the Havana agreement as well as the specific assurances Roosevelt had given Marshall Pétain in early December, including a quotation from the President's remarks which said that "as long as French sovereign control remains in reality purely French, subject solely to the limitations of the Armistice agreement, the Government of the United States has no desire to

¹⁰² External Affairs document #1347, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, January 6th, 1942, p. 1679.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ This proposal differed considerably from the terms sent to Leahy on January 5th, and included suggestions that the Islands be neutralized and that the Administrator should be withdrawn for the period of the war. (see p. 117)

see existing French sovereignty over French North Africa or over any of [the] French colonies pass to the control of any other nation."¹⁰⁵

Roosevelt responded to Hull's suggestions by advising another meeting with Churchill, who would return from a rest in Florida in a few days time. But Secretary Hull was not particularly enamoured with this idea, preferring as Harry Hopkins notes, "to take the whole thing up through the normal diplomatic channels."¹⁰⁶ Roosevelt, however, insisted on discussing it with Churchill, and on the evening of January 11th the two men met, without Secretary Hull, to go over the matter.

Hull's proposals contained six points, which were drawn in part from various suggestions previously made by the British and Canadians. First, it stated that the Islands "are French and will remain French"; second, that the radio station will be subject to allied supervision; third, that the islands "shall be neutralized and de-militarized and shall be considered out of the war"; fourth, that the "administrator shall be withdrawn for the period of the war" and that no new administrator shall be appointed for the same period, leaving the administration of the Islands "in the hands of the Consultative Council"; fifth, that all armed forces be withdrawn; and sixth, that the Canadian and American

¹⁰⁵ FRUS, Conferences in Washington 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Secretary of State to the President, January 8th, 1943, p. 394.

¹⁰⁶ FRUS, Conferences in Washington 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, memorandum by Hopkins, January 9th, 1942, p. 396.

governments agree to continue economic assistance to the inhabitants of the Islands.¹⁰⁷

Churchill made no changes in this document but accepted it on the condition that de Gaulle agreed.¹⁰⁸ He then forwarded it to Eden at the Foreign Office, noting in this communication that the President had raised this issue "as an urgent matter" arguing that it must be considered "in connection with Super-Gymnast"¹⁰⁹ and that he did "not wish to break sharply with Vichy." The Prime Minister then noted that the State Department were "boring along on their old lines quite oblivious of the fact that the further they go against de Gaulle the worse they will fare in American opinion." Nevertheless, Churchill was "of the opinion that the ... proposal should be embodied in a communiqué representing the policy of the United States, Canadian and British governments." It was, he said,

¹⁰⁷ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, January 12th, 1942, p. 399.

¹⁰⁸ Hull, vol. II, p. 1136.

¹⁰⁹ Super-Gymnast was the code name for the Allied plan to invade North Africa, later called Torch, which was discussed at length at the Arcadia Conference. Sherwood writes that Roosevelt was "particularly favorable" to this operation, as it appealed to "Naval-minded men". (Sherwood, p. 460.) It should also be noted that in its original form, the plan assumed that the Vichy French in North Africa would offer no resistance or might even be induced to "invite" the Allies in. It was with this in mind that the President and Mr. Churchill decided, early in the discussions at Arcadia, to approach General Weygand in the hope of enticing him into supporting just such an allied operation. Weygand, when approached however, refused to cooperate and insisted on informing Marshall Pétain of the American advances. (Matloff and Snell, Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, pp. 102-3, and Langer, pp. 209-11.)

... a reasonable compromise, and ... in the circumstances it is only prudent to accept and enforce it. This means that you [Eden] should tell de Gaulle that this is our settled policy, and that he must bow to it. He has put himself entirely in the wrong by his breach of faith. If he is to retain any measure of our recognition he must send orders to Muselier which the latter will obey. You should dwell on the many advantages gained by Free France and that many of the points agreed will be a bitter pill to Vichy, but however you dish it up he has got to take it.¹¹⁰

Churchill then mentioned that "they are in a mood here to use force -- i.e., the battleship Arkansas¹¹¹ which the President mentioned or starvation without stint," and, adding that it was "intolerable that the great movement of events should be obstructed", and that he would "certainly not intervene to save de Gaulle", he expressed the hope that all would be "fixed" by the following day. "By all means," he concluded, "consult the Cabinet if you will, but we will soon be flitting and I must settle this before I go."¹¹²

Eden did in fact consult the Cabinet, which responded at once to Churchill's telegram by informing the Prime Minister that the formula suggested above "would come as a bitter blow not only

¹¹⁰ FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-42, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, January 12th, 1942, pp. 399-400.

¹¹¹ The Canadians were shocked when they learned of this proposal and Prime Minister King sent a message at once to President Roosevelt imploring him not to take any such action. (External Affairs document #1356, vol. 9, Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, January 14th, 1942, p. 1688 and document #1358, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, January 15th, 1942, p. 1690.)

¹¹² FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-42, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, January 12th, 1942, pp. 399-400.

to General de Gaulle, but also to public opinion in this country, which would fail to understand how our previous support of the Free French movement was compatible with the enforcement of the present terms upon it,"¹¹³ and would "not appreciate going easy with Vichy."¹¹⁴ Indeed, they felt that the State Department had overestimated Vichy's reaction. As such, the Cabinet noted that it would not acquiesce to compelling de Gaulle to accept these terms, but would agree to Eden "trying persuasion".¹¹⁵ They also had difficulty with the idea of the Islands being governed by a Consultative Council, noting that it was "not clear whether such a Council was in existence (in which case it might be of a Vichy complexion) or would have to be elected."¹¹⁶ The Cabinet insisted on the latter, and deferred speaking with de Gaulle until this matter was cleared up.¹¹⁷ Churchill, therefore, spoke with Roosevelt at once, who agreed to amending point 4 of Hull's formula by altering the reference to the "Consultative Council" to "a Council freshly elected within ninety days". Eden was then asked by the Prime Minister "to seek at once to persuade de

¹¹³ CAB 65/25, 4(42) 4, January 12th, 1942.

¹¹⁴ FRUS, vol. II, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Atlee to Prime Minister Churchill, January 12th, 1942, p. 400.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ CAB, 65/25, 4(42) 4, January 12th, 1942.

¹¹⁷ External Affairs document #1353, vol. 9, Under-Secretary of State to Prime Minister, January 13th, 1942, p. 1656.

Gaulle to agree to the plan,¹¹⁸ with the additional warning that should de Gaulle not settle on these terms, the United States will immediately "issue a statement which has been prepared [with Churchill's authorization], and will enforce the arrangements outlined therein with whatever force is necessary ..."¹¹⁹ Clearly, Churchill admonished, "the business must be settled."¹²⁰

On January 14th, then, Foreign Minister Eden saw General de Gaulle, who was as recalcitrant as ever. Refusing to consider "the delicacy of Washington's relations with Vichy",¹²¹ de Gaulle would not leave the Islands and insisted on the retention of his own newly appointed Free French governor (M. Savary), and on the retention of a number of Free French marines, even after Muselier had left. Moreover, he argued that the U.S. attempt to alleviate the crisis amounted to "nothing less than an American effort to establish a 'protectorate' over a government collaborating with Hitler," and he appeared to Eden to be completely unperturbed at the possibility of American intervention.¹²² Exasperated, Eden

¹¹⁸ External Affairs document #1355, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, January 14th, 1942, p. 1687.

¹¹⁹ External Affairs document #1357, vol. 9, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, January 15th, 1942, p. 1689.

¹²⁰ CAB 65/25, 5(42) 1, January 14th, 1942, Prime Minister Churchill to Foreign Secretary Eden. In the same communication, Churchill also mentioned the possibility that in the "prepared statement", Roosevelt might announce the appointment of a U.S. trustee for the Islands.

¹²¹ Bybelezer, p. 291.

¹²² Ibid.

then asked the General directly what he would do if in fact the United States sent in a task force to evict his men.

"The Allied ships," de Gaulle replied, "will stop at the limit of territorial waters, and the American Admiral will come to lunch with Muselier, who will be delighted."

"But if the cruiser crosses the limit?"

"Our people will summon her to stop in the usual way."

"If she holds her course?"

"That would be most unfortunate, for then," the General insisted, "our people would have to open fire."

According to de Gaulle, Eden then threw up his arms in indignation, which moved the General to say that he could understand the Foreign Secretary's alarm, but that he had "confidence in the democracies."¹²³

Following this conversation, however, it appears that de Gaulle had second thoughts and in a second meeting with Eden that day he accepted the terms of the Hull-Roosevelt-Churchill proposal, subject to three secret conditions which would be appended to the text. First, that a small number of Free French marines should be retained in the Islands; second, "that the Consultative Council would take orders from the Free French National Committee"; and third, that the Free French

¹²³ de Gaulle, pp. 186-87.

administration should remain but should be merged in the Consultative Council."¹²⁴

Eden at once telephoned these terms to the embassy in Washington, and, after giving Churchill time to consider them, he rang back to get his reaction. It was not favorable. The Prime Minister, in fact, lashed out at Eden for having "failed lamentably" with de Gaulle, fearing, as he put it, that there would be an explosion in Washington as a result. Eden countered by insisting that the de Gaulle clauses were "very fair", and warned Churchill that de Gaulle had intimated that should the Americans go ahead and publish their own statement, he would retaliate by broadcasting the "state of Allied dissension over radio Brazzaville."¹²⁵

In the end, Churchill agreed to put de Gaulle's proposals before Roosevelt, but before he did so, Eden telephoned him again, at 1:00 a.m., at which point the Prime Minister seemed to soften his position a bit on de Gaulle. But when Churchill finally met with Roosevelt, later that evening, his heart had hardened again, and he suggested to the President that the whole matter be deferred until he himself had had the chance to talk to de Gaulle out of his reservations. Roosevelt agreed. Churchill then returned to London, but not before handing Roosevelt another communiqué on the Islands that he had drafted himself.

¹²⁴ External Affairs document #1360, vol. 9, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 24th, 1942, pp. 1691-92.

¹²⁵ Bybelezer, p. 292.

Back in Britain, on January 19th, Churchill personally informed the Cabinet of his decision to see de Gaulle.¹²⁶ Eden, sensing the wrath building inside the Prime Minister, warned Churchill the following day that

Quite apart from the issue of St. Pierre and Miquelon, General de Gaulle's attitude in many respects has been most unsatisfactory in recent months. The trouble with him is that he sees himself in the role of Joan of Arc, liberating his country from Vichy. His war is a private war against Vichy and his cooperation with the Allies is secondary in his mind. It would therefore be all to the good if you could speak to him strongly in this sense and make him understand that the continuation of our support depends on his full collaboration¹²⁷

Churchill, however, did not need to be told, and on January 22 he met with de Gaulle and in a frank discussion with him insisted that the General "had no right to take action in these unimportant territories without consideration for the Great Alliance without which France could not be restored."¹²⁸ Furthermore, since "the President was unable to accept de Gaulle's secret clauses, which he felt he could never communicate to Vichy, the General had no choice but to endorse the present Anglo-American communiqué, which ... granted the Free French all save formal control in St. Pierre".¹²⁹

¹²⁶ CAB 65/25, 9(42) 5, January 19th, 1942.

¹²⁷ Eden to Churchill, minute PM/42/3, January 20th, 1942, Z643/3/17. Quoted from Bybelezer, p. 293.

¹²⁸ F.O. 371/3/873, January 22nd, 1942, quoted from Kersaudy, p. 178.

¹²⁹ Bybelezer, p. 294.

De Gaulle, however, insisted that the tone of the communiqué ran directly counter to the Churchill-de Gaulle Agreement of August 1940, which recognized de Gaulle's leadership of all Free Frenchmen who rallied to him in support of the Allies.¹³⁰ He was suspicious of the composition of the St. Pierre Council, and even went so far as to seek assurances on French sovereignty, questioning whether under the proposed agreement the Islands would indeed be able to remain part of France.

At this, Churchill exploded, questioning de Gaulle's "claim to monopolize France,"¹³¹ and asking the General if his demand that St. Pierre and Miquelon remain a part of France, referred to the "France", crushed under the heel of Nazi occupation, to the "powerful and considerable France of Vichy",¹³² or to the "comparatively small" Free French Movement.¹³³ Then, as if to emphasize the diminutive stature that de Gaulle in fact had among his countrymen at that moment, Churchill pointed out that the agreement of August 1940 had been "based on a hope, which had since proved false, that de Gaulle would be able to rally an impressive number of Frenchmen. As the agreement stood, it was

¹³⁰ Bybelezer, p. 291.

¹³¹ Bybelezer, p. 295.

¹³² Bybelezer, p. 295, footnote 1, "note of conversation between Prime Minister and General de Gaulle, January 22nd, 1942, Z766/3/17.

¹³³ F.O. 371/3173, note of conversation between General de Gaulle and the Prime Minister, January 22nd, 1942, quoted from Kersaudy, p. 178.

entirely in de Gaulle's favor without corresponding benefit to His Majesty's government."¹³⁴

Having weathered this storm, and having been assured by Eden, who was present, that the acceptance of the communiqué would result in concessions that merely changed the appearance, but not the substance, of Free French control over the Islands, de Gaulle gave in and agreed to drop his demand for the three secret clauses.¹³⁵

Churchill, delighted, sent word at once to President Roosevelt in Washington, telling him that, after a "severe conversation", de Gaulle had agreed to "the communiqué which I left with you." He then noted that de Gaulle had asked for time to consult Admiral Muselier, but that he expected to receive the final assent from the Free French the following day. Canada would be asked to agree as well.¹³⁶ Finally, the Prime Minister said that he hoped "the solution for which I have worked here will be satisfactory to Mr. Hull and the State Department, noting that it finally looked as if the two tiny islands could "relapse into the obscurity from which they have more than once emerged since the Treaty of Utrecht."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Barker, E., Churchill and Eden at War, London: MacMillan London Limited, 1978, p. 53, Kersaudy, pp. 178-79.

¹³⁶ Churchill had been informed by this point of Prime Minister King's decision to give his assent to any proposal that the United States and the British had agreed to.

¹³⁷ FRUS, vol. II, 1942, Churchill to Roosevelt, January 23rd, 1942, p. 668.

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But there was one final problem. The communiqué which de Gaulle had agreed to was not the six point proposal put forward by Hull. Rather, it was the communiqué issued by Churchill on the day of his departure, January 14th. In many respects this document was quite similar to Hull's except that it differed in two important ways.¹³⁸ It did not call for the withdrawal of all armed forces, nor did it insist that the Islands be "neutralized and demilitarized" and "considered out of the war". This meant, of course, that the door was left open for de Gaulle to leave a detachment of marines on the Islands. It also left open the question of Free French involvement in the government, which de Gaulle assumed he could continue to control. Secretary Hull, would of course never have agreed to such a proposal, but it appears that he had been effectively locked out of the White House discussions over St. Pierre and Miquelon from the moment

¹³⁸ 1) The Islands are French and will remain French. 2) The present Administrator shall be withdrawn; the Administration of the Islands shall be exercised by the Consultative Council. 3) The above-mentioned Council will agree to the appointment of Canadian and United States officials to assist them in the operation of the wireless stations on the Islands in the common interests of the Allies. 4) The Free French National Committee have informed His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom that they never intended that ships of the Free French naval forces should remain in the Islands, and that these ships will shortly resume their normal duties of attacking the enemy wherever they may find him. 5) The Canadian and American Government agree and undertake to continue economic assistance to the inhabitants of the Islands, and the respective Consuls of those countries will confer with the local authorities as to the nature of the assistance to be given. Arrangements are being made both to continue the supplies from the United States and Canada on which the Islands are dependent, and to provide the seasonal supply of fish to the French inhabitants of Martinique. (FRUS, Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943, pp. 403-4.)

when the British War Cabinet refused to accept his 6 point draft communiqué in toto on January 12th. The first sign of this came on January 14th when Minister Moffat received a telephone call from the State Department. In that conversation, he was informed of the terms of Secretary Hull's proposal (which unbeknownst to the Department had already been altered by Churchill and Roosevelt at the White House at the request of the British War Cabinet), and in addition was also asked to deliver a personal message from Secretary Hull to Prime Minister King which intimated some of Hull's frustration over the way the affair had been handled since the two of them had last discussed it with the President and Mr. Churchill on December 26th.

At that meeting, the Secretary recalled, it was understood that Mr. Hull and Prime Minister King were to work out a solution to the problem, but "in practice" he continued, "Mr. Churchill kept taking the ball in his hands, insisting that he would clear the formula with Ottawa, and then apparently did nothing about it."¹³⁹ Secretary Hull, therefore, was afraid that Prime Minister King "would feel that he was being sidetracked" and he wondered

¹³⁹ In his memoirs, Hull indicates that he was in fact so frustrated over Churchill's conduct in this affair, and over Roosevelt's refusal to pressure Churchill into clarifying "the relations between Great Britain and the United States with regard to de Gaulle and Vichy", that he seriously considered resigning from office and even penciled out a note of resignation to the President. (Hull, vol. II, p. 1137.)

"if Mr. King would prefer any other method of proceeding than the one now being followed."¹⁴⁰

The Prime Minister responded by indicating to Minister Moffat that there were "no hurt feelings" in Ottawa as to the manner in which the negotiations had proceeded.¹⁴¹ Indeed, over the course of the next few days, it became more and more apparent that Ottawa was in fact more fully informed of the discussions going on between the White House and the Foreign Office than was the State Department. It was through the Department of External Affairs, for example, that the State Department first learned of the British reservations over the composition of the Consultative Council in Hulls' proposal.¹⁴² It was also through External Affairs that Secretary Hull learned that Churchill, in his January 12th telegram to Eden, had mentioned the possibility that the Americans might send the Arkansas to evict the Free French from the Islands, which came as a complete shock to Hull, who immediately instructed Minister Moffat to inform the Canadians that in all the discussions he had had with Roosevelt over this matter, "the one thing the President had consistently opposed is any idea of sending armed ships to the islands."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ FRUS, vol. II, 1942, memorandum of phone conversation between Moffat and Dunn, January 14th, 1942, pp. 663-64.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid, and External Affairs document #1356, vol. 9, Minutes of War Cabinet Committee, January 14th, 1942, p. 1688.

¹⁴³ FRUS, vol. II, 1942, memorandum of phone conversation Moffat, January 15th, 1942, pp. 667-68. A few hours later Secretary Hull had second thoughts about delivering this message

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Roosevelt, in fact, gave Secretary Hull little or no indication of the discussions that went on after January 14th. Secretary Hull, therefore, was unaware of Churchill's new communiqué, knew little or nothing of the discussion that had gone on with de Gaulle, and was not even informed when word arrived at the White House that de Gaulle had finally agreed to drop his objections and sign on to the proposed solution put forward by Churchill. Thus, when the Canadian government sent its final approval for the publication of the Churchill communiqué to the State Department on January 28th, Minister Wrong learned that Secretary Hull had not as yet seen the communiqué in question--five days after Churchill had sent it to the White House!¹⁴⁴

When he did finally see the document, Hull had no doubt that it would not be acceptable to the Vichy government which as early as January 5th had given the Secretary an indication of the terms it might be willing to accept. These included, the approval of Canadian and American observers over the radio station, as well as the appointment of a new administrator, but only on the conditions that de Bournat be allowed to return to his post until a new administrator had been appointed, that all Free French forces withdraw, and that Canada issue a declaration noting its

to the Canadian government and therefore telephoned Minister Moffat to tell him to not deliver the message.

¹⁴⁴ External Affairs document #1364, vol. 9, Memorandum by Minister in the United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 28th, 1942, p. 1697.

respect for the "territorial sovereignty of the Islands".¹⁴⁵ Clearly, these terms would not be acceptable to either Churchill or de Gaulle and on February 2nd an exhausted Secretary Hull concluded in a memo to the President that, "in view of the failure to achieve a general satisfactory settlement, ... and in view of the paramount importance of furthering unity and harmony in the ... cooperative war effort with Great Britain, Canada, and the other United Nations, I recommend that further negotiations or discussions of the matter be postponed for the period of the war."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ FRUS, vol. II, 1942, Leahy to Hull, January 6th, 1942, p. 660.

¹⁴⁶ FRUS, vol. II, 1942, Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 2nd, 1942, p. 669.

CHAPTER V

RETURN TO OBSCURITY

With Secretary Hull's decision to drop all discussion of the Islands for the period of the war, St. Pierre and Miquelon soon drifted back into obscurity. The Free French were quietly allowed to remain. The State Department, as a face-saving measure, announced on February 13th that they did not consider the Havana Convention as being applicable to the Islands, thus tacitly acknowledging the Free French fait accompli. Two weeks later, Admiral Muselier departed on the Mimosa for St. John's (from where he would fly back to London), leaving behind M. Savary as the new administrator, and a small detachment of Free French marines, who, with the help of local volunteers, were determined to defend the colony "to the last man". St. Pierre and Miquelon to quote Muselier, were now "libéré" and "en bonne mains".¹ The "petit coup de main" was finished. But it was not without sadness that the Admiral brought this affair to a close. On February 8th, the Alysse, which had returned to convoy duty with the Aconit almost immediately after the liberation of the Islands, was torpedoed by a German submarine. The Surcouf too had been lost, when she was accidentally rammed by an American steamship after leaving the Islands to resume her duties in the Pacific. Muselier, prior to his departure from the Islands, had wired de

¹ Muselier, p. 316.

Gaulle that he hoped to be able to avenge the Alysse aboard the Mimosa on his return to St. John's. He also indicated his desire, following his report to the Comité Nationale, to return quickly to the United States and Canada, "pour y faire entendre raison à nos alliés d'Amerique² so that he could then lead the Free French Naval Forces in an action against the Antilles and French Guyane. But unfortunately, as he writes in his memoirs, "'nul n'est prophète en son pays'; et les dieux et les forces mauvaises en ont disposé autrement."³

Indeed, it is with Admiral Muselier's return to London that the consequences of the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair first begin to manifest themselves. For the Admiral, as has been indicated, was determined to resign from his position on the National Committee as Free French Commissioner for the Navy and Merchant Marine in order to protest de Gaulle's "dictatorial tendencies", which in the case of St. Pierre and Miquelon, Muselier insists, had seriously compromised Free French relations with the Canadians and Americans. On March 3rd, then, Muselier, to the astonishment of his colleagues, announced his resignation from the Comité Nationale, saying that for the reasons given above, he could no longer offer the General "any support of a political nature."⁴ De Gaulle accepted Muselier's resignation,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bybelezer, p. 307, Muselier, p. 327. On the following day, Muselier also notified the Admiralty of this decision, which he insisted, had stemmed in part from his aversion to working within

but would not accept his intention to carry on as Commander of the Free French Naval Forces, which in the words of Professor Kersaudy, would have been tantamount to allowing the Admiral "to secede" from the Free French movement, "and take his fleet with him."⁵ Muselier, however, persisted in his request to stay on, and at the strong behest of the First Sea Lord and the Admiralty,⁶ which stood squarely behind Muselier, the War Cabinet drew up a resolution demanding that de Gaulle allow the Admiral to remain at his post.⁷ But De Gaulle, who had relieved Muselier of his command effective March 4th, refused to consider the Cabinet's request, and when Muselier continued to carry on as commander, de Gaulle responded by ordering him to take thirty days rest. Muselier, however, refused to comply, with the result that de Gaulle formally requested that His Majesty's government place him under house arrest for the same period! At this point, a split developed within the British government over this issue. The Admiralty, on the one hand, continued to argue strongly in Muselier's favor, suggesting in response to de Gaulle's demands,

a political formation which "was merely representative of one man's desire for political power." (Muselier to Alexander, March 4th, 1942, Z2009/97/17. quoted from Bybelezer, p. 308.)

⁵ Kersaudy, p. 179.

⁶ Churchill College Archive Center, SPRS 1/137/2, Somerville-Smith to Spears, 21/1/42, quoted from Kersaudy, p. 181.

⁷ CAB 65/25, 32(42) 7, March 9th, 1942. In this discussion, the First Sea Lord argued that the Free French Navy, "was now the most powerful branch of the Free French Movement" and that the Admiralty was of the opinion that there was little hope of finding a suitable successor to Muselier should de Gaulle succeed in getting rid of him.

that the British government consider Muselier's incarceration only on the condition that de Gaulle renegotiate all existing agreements between the Free French Movement and the British government, even at the risk of a formal breach with de Gaulle. The Foreign Office, however, urged caution, arguing that the Admiralty's stand on behalf of Muselier was not worth the risks involved, which in their view included not only the resignation of de Gaulle (who in the opinion of the Foreign Office had now become the symbol of resistance within France) but also the loss of the entire Free French Movement.⁸ In the end, the Foreign Office view prevailed, and the Cabinet on March 16th dropped its demand that de Gaulle retain Muselier as Commander of the Free French Navy and even agreed to hold Muselier for thirty days, after which it expressed the hope that the Admiral would be given "suitable employment" following his release.⁹ De Gaulle had prevailed again, and Muselier, shortly thereafter, announced that he would have nothing more to do with either the Free French or their intractable leader.

Apart from Muselier's dismissal as leader of the Free French Navy, which is perhaps the most tangible result of the affair, the crisis over St. Pierre and Miquelon also holds significance for what it says about the differences between United States and

⁸ Strang minute, March 12th, 1942, memorandum of phone conversation between Strang and Alexander, Z2205/97/17, and Foreign Office minutes, Z2206/77/17, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 320.

⁹ CAB 65/25, 34(42) 4, March 16th, 1942, quoted from Kersaudy, p. 181.

British policy toward Vichy and de Gaulle, the importance of Churchill and Roosevelt in the conduct of the war, U.S. concern over Latin America, Canada's role in the war, and the difficulties involved in developing and maintaining a military alliance between the U.S., Britain and Canada.

With respect to Vichy, it seems clear that the British by December 1941, had lost all hope of ever reaching any sort of rapprochement with the Pétain regime. Any thought, therefore, of appeasing Pétain in order to secure promises of non-collaboration, had long since vanished. British policy, was therefore bent on making the Marshall understand that should he move closer toward collaboration with Germany, he would do so at his own peril, and that Britain in such circumstances would not hesitate to retaliate with whatever military force she could muster.

With Pétain completely discredited in Britain, then, London could find little reason not to grant de Gaulle permission to take over St. Pierre and Miquelon. Churchill's hesitation to give final sanction to the scheme, therefore, was not due to his concern over the possible reaction at Vichy, but rather due to his concern over the reaction of the United States, which might object to the move on the grounds that it was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine or on the grounds that it was a threat to their delicate relations with the Pétain regime.

Accordingly, any cooperation Churchill afforded the Americans over Vichy, stemmed not from his faith in the merits of

their policy, but rather from his desire to strengthen the inchoate Anglo-American alliance, especially at this critical stage when the Americans had just entered the war. Moreover, Churchill was particularly sensitive to the feelings of Roosevelt, and being in the White House when the crisis erupted, it is not surprising that the Prime Minister, for the most part, took his cues from the President in this matter.

This would account for the hardening of Churchill's stance with respect to de Gaulle as events unfolded. Thus, in the first few days of the crisis when Roosevelt tended to treat the whole affair as a "tempest in a teapot",¹⁰ Churchill remained somewhat ambivalent in his attitude towards the General, defending him at times, while at others offering to take him by the scruff of the neck in order to force some sense into him. But as the crisis continued, Roosevelt began to take the affair more seriously. It may have been that Hull's persistent warnings about the consequences of the Free French action were finally getting to the President. Certainly, the report from Darlan which said that the Germans were pressing him to grant concessions in North Africa as a result of the affair was not something the President could take lightly, especially in view of his strong support for Super-Gymnast. Sherwood notes that Roosevelt was also upset by

¹⁰ In fact, Sherwood writes that initially Roosevelt was amused by all the fuss the incident created and even seemed to derive "a certain amount of mischievous pleasure from the spectacle of his esteemed old friend, the Secretary of State learning at last how it felt to be the target of widespread criticism." (Sherwood, p. 488.)

Secretary Hull's threat to resign over the incident, writing in his biography of Hopkins that, a "major rupture" of this sort within the Administration, was something that Roosevelt was "anxious to avoid at any cost."¹¹ It may also have been that the President was simply losing his patience over an incident involving "2 tiny islands" which he noted "cannot be made an issue in the great effort to save the world."¹² It was probably a combination of all these factors, but in any case, the more Roosevelt pressed Churchill to bring de Gaulle around to some sort of compromise, the more Churchill pressed the Foreign Office to do the same, even in the face of strong opposition from many members within his own cabinet.

This brings us to another significant aspect of the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair -- its illustration of the considerable power each of the two leaders held within their respective governments, and the control that power gave them over the conduct of the war. For it should be recalled that both men, by the middle of January, were in effect ignoring the advice of their chief advisors on foreign policy in this matter, favoring instead to work out their own personal solution to the problem. Eden's demand, for example, that Churchill put de Gaulle's three secret conditions before Roosevelt for approval, was quickly discarded by the Prime Minister. Rather, both leaders agreed that

¹¹ Sherwood, p. 488.

¹² Churchill minute to Roosevelt, 14, I, 1942, quoted from Barker, p. 53, note, Roosevelt penciled these comments in the margins of this minute.

Churchill himself would endeavor to talk de Gaulle out of his reservations (upon his return to London) and that the basis for the Prime Minister's talks with the Free French leader would rest on a communiqué written not by Hull, but by Churchill. Moreover, none of this was made known to Secretary Hull, who would soon find himself in the embarrassing position of having to learn about these developments through the agencies of the British and Canadian governments. The State Department, in fact, was so cut-off from the White House, that they soon began to query both the Canadian and British embassies for information as to what was going on, leaving the Canadians with the strong impression that there was "a serious lack of liaison between the White House and the State Department."¹³

Indeed, this may have contributed to the rapid dénouement of the whole affair, since Secretary Hull, when confronted with the finished Churchill communiqué, quickly decided that it would be better to quietly accept the Free French fait accompli than to put such unacceptable terms before the Vichy government, which would no doubt find them insulting, thus further damaging U.S.-Vichy relations.¹⁴ But ironically, Secretary Hull's decision to drop his demand for a Free French withdrawal from the Islands, was not greeted all that warmly at the Foreign Office, where

¹³ External Affairs document #1363, vol. 9, Minister in the United States to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, January 27th, 1942, p. 1695.

¹⁴ Hull also wanted to avoid a revival of the issue in the press.

after all the wrangling with de Gaulle, the news of the Secretary's decision came as somewhat of a shock. Of course the Foreign Office had assumed all along that the Secretary was more or less aware of the negotiations that were going on with de Gaulle, and when they learned otherwise, their reaction turned from shock to anger,¹⁵ which is but one more indication of the difficulties presented by the very personal method Roosevelt and Churchill sometimes adopted in formulating policy. In any case, the frustration at the Foreign Office over the way this affair had been handled, soon led the Ministry to suggest that Secretary Hull adopt a much tougher line with Vichy, and that he counter any threat of concessions in North Africa, as a result of the taking of St. Pierre with a threat of his own -- occupying Martinique, and seizing all French assets within the grasp of the United States.¹⁶

But Hull would not hear of such a suggestion, which ran counter not only to his policy with France, but also ran counter to his policy toward the Latin American republics. Indeed, the arrangements made between the U.S. and Vichy with respect to Martinique, were based squarely on the principles of the no-transfer policy. Hence, any suggestion of a U.S. occupation of Martinique, especially without proper grounds, was greeted with considerable disquiet at the State Department, which took the

¹⁵ Bybelezer, p. 299.

¹⁶ Strang memorandum on St. Pierre and Miquelon, Z1259/3/17, February 5th, 1942, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 299, and CAB 65/25, 17(42) 3, February 6th, 1942.

policy of no-transfer quite seriously. In fact, in their view, and in the view of a number of senior military officials, the Axis threat to South and Central America, both overt and covert, was considerable and demanded action. But in the early stages of the war, the United States did not have enough troops to offer more than a token defense of the region. The establishment of the policy of no-transfer, then, provided a means by which the United States and her Latin American neighbours could collectively maintain the status quo in the Western Hemisphere in the absence of a strong U.S. military deterrent. Moreover, any attempt to occupy, or even to threaten to occupy Martinique, might in the long run prove self-defeating should it result in the Germans being given access to Vichy bases on the West Coast of Africa, such as Dakar, which would only serve to make the German threat to South America all the more ominous.

Given these considerations, the State Department's objections to the Free French seizure of St. Pierre and Miquelon, on the grounds that it was a violation of the principle of no transfer and of the terms of the Havana Conference, were no doubt genuine. The Department was concerned, lest Muselier's actions (which they regarded as a change in status), might lead to a weakening of the Havana agreement, which Argentina, for example, had been reluctant to sign. Nor was the Department's anxiety lessened by the timing of the Muselier coup, which came just three weeks prior to the scheduled Rio Conference, where the agreements reached in Havana would come under renewed scrutiny

I and where it was hoped that the Latin American republics would strengthen their stand against the Axis.

Canada, of course, was not party to the agreements reached between the U.S. and American republics, but this did not mean that the United States was any less concerned over her defense, or over the possibility that she too might attempt to effect a change in the status of a territory in the New World. Indeed, the warnings Canada received from the State Department over Greenland and St. Pierre and Miquelon, illustrate that latter concern quite well. Still, Canada's position was unique. As a member of the British Commonwealth, she was frequently thought of by many officials within the State Department as being part of the "Old World". As such, Canadian control over St. Pierre and Miquelon, for example, was seen by many within the Department as unacceptable on the grounds that it was tantamount to turning the colony over to the British, which would be a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. When she did cooperate with the United States, however, Canada often found herself in the position of being a somewhat junior partner who was expected to follow the American lead, even to the detriment of British policy, as Secretary Hull's initial reaction to the Muselier coup clearly shows. For all intents and purposes, then, Canada was caught between the British and the Americans, and frequently found herself being pulled in two directions at once. All of this was made more complicated by the Canadian propensity (of which King was particularly afflicted) to try and please everyone, an impossible

task in war time, which had the net effect of paralyzing Canadian policy, and more often than not led to her upsetting both partners. The St. Pierre and Miquelon affair is perhaps the classic example of this phenomenon. For two years, the Canadian military pushed the government to do something about the Islands, and for two years the Cabinet vacillated, unsure of itself, never knowing whether it should follow the British or the American lead. And so it did nothing, nothing that is, until the Cabinet arrived at a tentative plan (initially suggested by the Americans), for the take-over of the radio station on St. Pierre. But the plan, in the end, was too heavy handed for the Americans and too weak for the British, so the Cabinet drew back again to consider the merits of its proposal, never stopping to consider whether Canada, should act on its own initiative, and take action against two minute and undefended islands, held just miles from her shore by a potentially hostile power in the middle of a world war!

The final and perhaps most significant aspect of the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair is the overall effect the incident had on U.S.-Vichy policy and the relationship between the Allies and Charles de Gaulle.

For the British, there can be no doubt that the affair placed them in a difficult and embarrassing position vis-à-vis the United States at the very moment when they were undertaking to establish the beginnings of an active wartime alliance with that country. De Gaulle's timing, then, could not have been

1 worse, particularly for Churchill, who would not soon forget it. Indeed, according to Professor Kersaudy, Churchill complained frequently in the spring of 1942 of the General's "breach of faith" in his seizure of St. Pierre,¹⁷ and Bybelezer claims that the affair contributed significantly to the deterioration of their relationship.¹⁸ But this did not mean, however, that Churchill or his government could simply write off de Gaulle. For there can be no question that irascible or not, the Foreign Office remained convinced that de Gaulle was Free France, and that without him the Free French movement would die. This, the British government judged to be politically inexpedient, especially, as Bybelezer notes, in the early months of 1942, when, "at the height of Allied military disasters, the principle of French resistance, was more important than its actual existence."¹⁹ Nevertheless, de Gaulle's actions did have a price. Churchill, for example, was for the moment much more reluctant to push the Free French on the Americans and would raise little or no objection to the exclusion of Free France from the signing of

¹⁷ Kersaudy, p. 184.

¹⁸ Bybelezer, p. 294.

¹⁹ Bybelezer, p. 325.

the Declaration of the United Nations,²⁰ or to their exclusion from the allied invasion of North Africa later that year.²¹

As far as the Americans themselves were concerned, Langer claims that the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair was of "crucial significance" in determining the U.S. attitude "toward both de Gaulle and the Free French."²² Its most immediate consequences appear to be the two events just mentioned, the absolute exclusion of the Free French from even the knowledge of the Torch operation and Secretary Hull's insistence that they not be allowed to sign the Declaration of the United Nations on January 1st, 1942. But there were other less tangible results as well. Indeed, the seizure of the Islands seemed to confirm the worst fears about de Gaulle both in the State Department and the White House, where he was suspected of being an arbitrary and dictatorial character who could not be trusted to act in the best interest of either France or the Allies. As a result, U.S. relations with Free France, which had been warming, however

²⁰ This document, which was signed by twenty-three nations on January 1st, 1942, set forth the Allied principles for fighting the Axis.

²¹ Churchill, it should be noted, had in any case been reluctant to inform the Free French of the planned North African invasion because of their tendency to leak information, but as Kersaudy notes, even if he had decided to involve them at some point, he would have been overruled by Roosevelt who "had disliked de Gaulle from the start, ... distrusted him since Dakar, and hated him since St. Pierre and Miquelon." (Kersaudy, p. 214.)

²² Langer, p. 212.

slowly, in the last half of 1941,²³ now turned quite cold, while the relationship with de Gaulle himself, took on the acrimonious and even hostile characteristics which would plague it for the remainder of the war. In fact, Henry Stimson, who was Roosevelt's Secretary of War, notes in his memoirs that the "very mention of de Gaulle was enough to produce an outburst of skillful Tennessee denunciation" from Secretary Hull, and that to the President, "de Gaulle was a narrow-minded French zealot with too much ambition for his own good and some rather dubious views on democracy."²⁴ De Gaulle, as such, was more or less shunned by the U.S. diplomatic community, who now even went so far as to look for someone to replace him (General Giraud)²⁵ and did not hesitate to run the risk of insulting the General in even the smallest of matters, such as the exclusion of any Free French representatives

²³ Bybelezer notes that under Pleven's tenure relations between the Free French and the Americans had begun to improve in the latter half of 1941. In September, for example, the State Department approved of Free France establishing a standing Free French delegation in Washington. In October, the State Department recognized the de-facto legitimacy of Free French authority in the colonies they controlled, and in late November, Roosevelt himself declared that "Free French territory was vital to the defense of the U.S. and, hence, liable for lend-lease aid." (Bybelezer, p. 303, and Washington telegram 5297, November 20th, 1941, Z9870/4445/17, quoted from Bybelezer, p. 303.)

²⁴ Stimson, H.L., On Active Service in Peace and War, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941, p. 546.

²⁵ General Giraud was handpicked by Roosevelt to assist the Allies in the Torch operation where it was hoped he would be able to secure Vichy French North African cooperation.

from the Memorial Day ceremonies in Washington on May 30, 1942.²⁶ De Gaulle's difficulties with the Americans, then, could only increase with their expanding role in the war, and there can be no doubt that any subsequent recognition or help he received from the U.S. Administration, came not out of any attempt on the part of Roosevelt to improve his personal relations with de Gaulle, but rather out of sheer military and political necessity. Thus, it would seem reasonable to conclude that if de Gaulle's aim in seizing St. Pierre and Miquelon was indeed to "provoke complications between Washington and Vichy which might lead to severance of diplomatic relations and thus facilitate recognition of his movement as the true French Government",²⁷ then he failed miserably to achieve his goal. The U.S.-Vichy relationship was not seriously affected by de Gaulle's actions and in fact continued unabated until it fell apart, not out of any desire on the part of the U.S. to move closer to de Gaulle, but of its own accord following the German reaction to the allied invasion of North Africa.

Of course, this does not mean that the St. Pierre and Miquelon affair had no effect on the allied effort to win the war. For as we have seen, it was serious enough to damage de

²⁶ De Gaulle reacted angrily to this and in a talk with Churchill a week later, quipped that "for the Americans, the Frenchmen of Bir Hakeim are not belligerents." (Kersaudy, p. 189.)

²⁷ External Affairs document #1339, vol. 9, Memorandum by Chargé d'Affaires for France, Belgium and the Netherlands (Dupuy), December 29th, 1941, p. 1671.

Gaulle's relations with the U.S. and Great Britain, created a great deal of animosity between some of the key policy makers of the war, and, had Secretary Hull had his way, may have led to a serious breach between the Foreign Office and State Department over U.S.-Vichy policy, versus British support for de Gaulle. Nevertheless, the affair did place a great deal of strain on U.S.-British and U.S.-Canadian relations. Indeed, Secretary Hull's public demand that Canada restore the status quo ante was clearly resented at both the Department of External Affairs and the Foreign Office, and it is no doubt fortunate for all of the parties involved that the incident and the differences it created, which were widely reported in the press, faded so quickly from public view.

And so, from February 1942 on, the Islands themselves were all but forgotten, and the people of St. Pierre and Miquelon soon resumed their quiet and isolated existence. The majority of them, however, continued to be unquestionably loyal to de Gaulle and unwavering in their support for his efforts to avenge the humiliation France had suffered at the hands of the Nazis in the spring of 1940. In this sense, then, de Gaulle's victory over St. Pierre and Miquelon may not have been entirely pyrrhic, for by war's end, no one questioned the right of the citizens of St. Pierre and Miquelon to maintain their ties to their beloved France, and to remain, as they have to this day, the last proud outpost of her once vast empire in the New World.

Appendix I

Le secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures à l'administrateur
de Saint-Pierre-et Miquelon

TÉLÉGRAMME

Ottawa, le 14 juillet 1940

1. Le problème que les événements récents en Europe ont créé pour vous et le peuple de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon a fait l'objet d'un examen bienveillant de la part du Gouvernement du Canada. Le Gouvernement et le peuple de Terre-Neuve sont aussi naturellement intéressés à tous faits nouveaux qui pourraient affecter leurs plus proches voisins maritimes.

2. Vous apprécierez volontiers l'utilité et même la nécessité qu'il y a d'aborder prochainement l'étude des problèmes auxquels vous, Terre-Neuve et nous-mêmes sommes mutuellement intéressés. Afin de faciliter une telle étude, le Gouvernement de Terre-Neuve est disposé à se joindre à nous pour envoyer une délégation d'un représentant de chaque pays pour vous rencontrer à Saint-Pierre.

3. Vous attacherez sans doute autant de prix que nous à ce que cette réunion ait lieu aussi prochainement que possible. Je serais porté à proposer mercredi le 17 juillet comme date convenable. Des dispositions peuvent être prises pour qu'un vaisseau de la Canada Steamship Lines arrête à Saint-Pierre pour

y débarquer nos représentants. Je serais heureux de recevoir, dans le plus bref délai possible, une expression d'opinion concernant ce projet.

Le administrateur de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon au secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures

TÉLÉGRAMME

St-Pierre, le 15 juillet 1940

Votre désir étudier situation actuelle en cordiale collaboration est conforme à celui qui a déjà [été] manifesté aussi recevrai-je avec plaisir mercredi 17 juillet la visite des représentants des Gouvernements amis du Canada et de Terre-Neuve.

Appendix II

Monsieur le Ministre,

» Dans notre entretien de ce matin, vous m'avez fait connaître le point de vue du gouvernement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique sur la réponse qu'il convenait de donner au désir de la population de Saint Pierre-et-Miquelon de se rallier à la France libre et sur le grave danger que présente pour la sécurité des convois de l'Atlantique l'existence de communications par câble et par T.S.F. entre Vichy et Saint-Pierre.

» Vous m'avez fait savoir que le gouvernement des Etats-Unis ne jugeait pas opportun de déférer au vœu de cette population pour éviter les répercussions que ce ralliement pourrait avoir sur la politique du gouvernement de Vichy. La solution adoptée par le gouvernement des Etats-Unis est d'établir localement un contrôle canadien des communications.

» Le désir de la France libre a toujours été de ne rien faire qui puisse gêner la politique du gouvernement des Etats-Unis. Ce désir ne peut être que renforcé dans la période actuelle de lutte commune contre le Japon, l'Allemagne et l'Italie. C'est pourquoi j'avais tenu, avant de passer à l'action, à prendre l'accord de votre gouvernement. Toutefois, je crois de mon devoir d'attirer votre attention sur les conséquences de la

communication que vous avez bien voulu me transmettre. Une population de 5.000 habitants est opprimée de façon croissante, alors que son vœu le plus ardent est de rejoindre le camp des démocraties. Une source de recrutement très appréciable est fermée à l'effort naval allié (armement d'environ quinze corvettes).

» En outre, un contrôle va être établi sur une terre française, contrôle qui sera considéré par l'opinion publique française en France et dans l'empire comme une atteinte à la souveraineté nationale et qui servira certainement d'élément à la propagande de tendance nazie qui s'efforce de faire croire que le but des Alliés est de s'emparer des colonies françaises. Ce contrôle pourra ainsi servir de prétexte à une demande analogue de l'Allemagne sur certaines colonies françaises.

» Au contraire, le ralliement à la France libre eût donné espoir et courage à tous les Français, qui sont très sensibles à notre politique de défense de l'intégrité de l'empire français et de sa participation à l'effort de guerre contre les puissances totalitaires.

» Je vous prie de bien vouloir agréer l'assurance de ma haute considération. «

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