

CAUSE OF RIOTS IN HALIFAX TRACED TO STRAINS OF WAR

Say Some Veterans Openly Threatened to Tear City Apart

Halifax, May 12.—(CP)—Some 20,000 navy personnel confined to barracks within the greater Halifax area are still discussing to-day the pros and cons of their participation in one of the worst revolts against authority in the history of Canada.

200 in Jail

The great bulk of the 20,000 were being obliged to suffer for the excesses of a few. The number was divided roughly, 15,000 navy, and 5,000 air force. The ban on 10,000 army personnel was lifted late yesterday.

In addition, some 200 were languishing in jail, the result of charges growing out of the riots and the looting which followed on Monday and Tuesday of this week. They were made up principally of civilians with a generous sprinkling of the navy and a lesser representation of the army and air force. In the meantime, investigations were underway in all these services.

Halifax has been a navy town since its founding 200 years ago. Like most navy towns and like all seaports, it has its seamy and sordid side. On the other hand Halifax under normal conditions takes second place to no town in Canada as a residential city. Its schools and university, its parks and playgrounds, including the fabulously lovely northwest arm, are justly famous throughout the length and breadth of the land. Moreover, Halifax, in peacetime, enjoys a reputation for hospitality that is world wide.

Best Not Enough

But with the outbreak of the present war, Halifax became the chief port of North America. Halifax remained the chief port of North America until the United States entered the conflict, including the full year Britain fought alone. It was during this period, too, that the Royal Canadian Navy doubled, redoubled and quadrupled in size. It may be said the city of approximately 75,000 did its best to cope with the influx of an additional 50,000. But the plain fact is that its best was not good enough. The hotels and restaurants became crowded. Food became scarce, the theatres were overtaxed and while innumerable hostels did their valiant best, the men landing at the dockyard for a few hours' leave after days and weeks of discomfort on the North Atlantic were given plenty to gripe about.

The great bulk of these were lads from good homes in the interior. Some lauded as heroes in their own towns and villages found Halifax seemingly indifferent to their sacrifices. The facts were the navy is an old story in Halifax and while every home had its regular navy visitors there were not enough homes to go round. So an element among the men griped about the Halifax slums they had to pass through on their way to overcrowded hotels, restaurants and theatres. They talked openly of what they were going to do to the "slackers," naval parlance for Halifax, when the war was over. What they were going to do was to tear it apart. They did.

For months before Tuesday, May 8, plans were being laid in Halifax for V-E day by the heads of the various services in consultation with the civic authorities.

The possibility of the situation getting out of hand was considered and finally it was agreed that the protective forces of the navy, army and air force would look after their own personnel. This was routine practice in England and throughout the British Commonwealth and all agreed it would work in Halifax. But it didn't.

Monday night a group of sailors undertook to wreck a tram car in front of the Y.M.C.A. building on Barrington street.

A hurry-up call was sent to the city police and nine husky constables arrived in the police van. When they emerged to find the sailors in charge they looked a trifle sheepish, returned to the sidewalk and watched the sailors demolish their own police van. After that anything went.

The elaborate plans for a fireworks display atop Citadel hill spluttered out. Tuesday morning the plan to have eight bands converge at the base of the hill from various directions went awry to the great disappointment of thousands of mothers and children. Tuesday afternoon the riots broke out in earnest to be followed by wholesale and what looked very much like planned looting. Liquor stores and breweries were raided, plate glass windows were systematically smashed and the stores along four business streets, Hollis, Granville, Barrington and Gittingen, emptied of their contents.

The discomfort of Halifax as a navy town was complete, the army had been called in to take charge.

With Mayor Butler leading the way, a community effort was begun to heal the scars and restore good feeling between the citizens and the services, and start with a clean slate. The mayor appealed to both sides for tolerance and reminded civilians and servicemen of their rights and duties as citizens living side by side.

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