

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association
Revue de la Société historique du Canada

Journal of the
Canadian Historical Association
Revue de la
Société historique du Canada

Allies in Complicity: The United States, Canada, and the Clayton Knight Committee's Clandestine Recruiting of Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1940-1942

Rachel Lea Heide

Volume 15, Number 1, 2004

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/012074ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/012074ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Heide, R. L. (2004). Allies in Complicity: The United States, Canada, and the Clayton Knight Committee's Clandestine Recruiting of Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1940-1942. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 15(1), 207-230.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/012074ar>

Tous droits réservés © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 2004

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Allies in Complicity: The United States, Canada, and the Clayton Knight Committee's Clandestine Recruiting of Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1940-1942

RACHEL LEA HEIDE

The training of pilots and air crew in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) was one of the most important contributions Canada made to the Allied air war. In an effort to get the schools running and graduating recruits as quickly as possible, Canada gladly accepted foreign instructors and trainees interested in helping fight the Axis powers before their home states officially became belligerents in the war. Between June 1940 and January 1942, over 49,000 thousand American pilots and would-be air recruits answered the Royal Canadian Air Force's surreptitious call for American nationals to help with Canada's Second World War air effort. The tale of the Clayton Knight Committee involved a Canadian oil company heir and a prominent American aviation artist with extensive personal connections. The escapade also involved the air force deliberately remaining at arm's length so as to be able to reap the benefits of the Clayton Knight Committee's activities without actually violating American neutrality laws. The venture had blessings from the Chief of the United States Army Air Corps and America's Head of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics as well, and the committee even had expert legal advice from the American State Department as to how the law could be stretched safely.

Despite the intrigue, dash, and daring-do of the nineteen-month campaign to bring American men into the BCATP, historians have treated the Clayton Knight Committee as little more than a mere episode, not worthy of mention (as in American Second World War air power literature), or they have relegated it to a few pages or an appendix (as in Canadian works on the BCATP).¹ In

1 Notable monographs covering the evolution of American air power are not concerned with foreign relations with neighbours and allies; focussing instead on the development of strategic bombing and independent air force doctrine, the inter-service rivalry between an army in favour of a separate air force and a navy not wanting to lose its marine corps or aviation assets, and the eventual establishment of the third service, the United States Air Force. See Herman S. Wolk, *Planning and Organizing the Postwar Air Force 1943-1947* (Washington, D.C.: USAF Office of Air Force History, 1984); *Toward Independence: The Emergence of the US*

fact, this behind-the-scenes, clandestine recruiting scheme says volumes about the Canadian government's courage to push the envelope and about the American administration's desire to circumvent the strict interpretation of that country's neutrality laws.

When Canada's Prime Minister W.L.M. King signed the BCATP Agreement² on 17 December 1939, he thought he had found the perfect solution to the fears of conscription becoming an immediate consequence of Canada's entry into the Second World War. Canadians running the pilot and aircrew training schools would remain on Canadian soil. Trainees actually being sent overseas after graduation would either be young men from Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain, or Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) members who volunteered; hence, conscription need not be an issue. By spring 1940, pilot, observer, gunner, wireless operator, bomber, navigator, and flight engineer trainees began attending the schools which were built in every Canadian province. Eventually, 131,533 air force personnel – from Canada, the British

Air Force 1945-1947 (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1996); *The Struggle for Air Force Independence 1943-1947* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1997); and Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation 1945-1950* (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1994). Even Colonel Stanley W. Dziuban's *Military Relations Between the United States and Canada 1939-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1959) does not mention the Clayton Knight Committee nor any American concerns over Canada's recruiting below the 49th parallel. Dziuban does mention Canada's request of May 1940 to send Canadian air trainees to American facilities, but this request was rejected because "such facilities were being fully utilized to meet US needs, and, furthermore, that any such step would violate the Hague Convention" (10). Dziuban acknowledges that Americans came to Canada to join all three Canadian services, and he also notes that a substantial number of Americans in the Royal Canadian Air Force were instructing in BCATP schools (241-2). Nonetheless, he makes no mention of how these men heard about the Plan, how they were directed to Canadian recruiting offices, or how the two countries negotiated these men's participation in a foreign military service. Academic works on the BCATP are few (most monographs are written by amateur historians, journalists, or veterans themselves, and these focus on biographical accounts, specific training adventures or mishaps, and the eventual reaching of the battlefield). Two Canadian historians, both affiliated with the Department of National Defence's Directorate of History and Heritage, have given a small amount of attention to the Clayton Knight Committee in their wider works. Both of these historians have described the committee's goals and accomplishments, and both have discussed – to some extent – the committee's run-ins with American authorities. Neither author puts the Clayton Knight Committee episode into the greater context of foreign relations between Canada and the United States. See W.A.B. Douglas, *et. al.*, *The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force: Volume II: The Creation of National Air Force* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); and F.J. Hatch, *Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Canadian Government Printing Centre, 1983); "Recruiting Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force 1939-1942" in *Aerospace Historian* 18.1 (Spring-March 1971).

- 2 17 December 1939 BCATP Agreement, National Archives of Canada (NAC) RG 25 Volume 1858A File 72-T-38.

Commonwealth, and German occupied nations in Europe – graduated from the BCATP. Although the United States of America did not signed the BCATP Agreement and become an official participant, Canada's southern neighbour made a significant contribution to the successful operation of the training plan: American pilots came to Canada to work as instructors and staff pilots. During the manpower shortage of 1941 and the consequent decline in Canadian air recruits passing through the plan, American men interested in become air crew for the RCAF or the Royal Air Force (RAF) were permitted by the F.D. Roosevelt Administration to come to Canada, train, and join foreign militaries. Canada was able to secure American pilots and air crew trainees through the work of the Clayton Knight Committee (CKC), despite the United States' neutrality and laws against recruiting American citizens for foreign armed services. This not only provides insight into Canadian-American relations during the Second World War crisis, but it also is very revealing of the two governments' attitudes. Despite having to conduct a recruiting campaign through clandestine means and having to constantly be in tune with American diplomatic concerns, the Canadian government and air force were determined to keep a steady flow of American airmen coming into the BCATP. The American administration, while apparently tolerating the CKC's blatant circumvention of American laws, was more than happy to allow the CKC to function virtually uninhibited as a means of circumventing Congressional and public opinion and hence supporting the Allied war effort while their hands were officially tied.

The CKC was the brain-child of William Avery Bishop (the Canadian flying ace of First World War fame). Even before war was declared, Bishop was considering possible sources of experienced pilots for Canada's war effort. During the First World War, American airmen had been eager to participate in combat before the United States entered the war. Bishop assumed the same interest would be shown again, and he believed that an organization should be established in the U.S. to inform these airmen as to the openings available with the RCAF, the minimum qualifications demanded of the volunteers, and the paperwork applicants should bring with them. By counseling these men before they left home and crossed the border into Canada, Bishop aimed to avoid having Americans undertake expensive trips only to find themselves unqualified, rejected, and financially destitute in a foreign country. Bishop visited the White House in March 1939 and was given the impression that the barriers to recruiting Americans for the RCAF could be overcome.³

3 Douglas, 632-3; Hatch, 87; "Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau," Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) File 181.003 (D3639); "Contribution to Victory, 1939-1942" by Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 2; 27 September 1944 letter, Beatrice Thomas (Secretary CKC) to Robert Hinckley, DHH File 80/68 Part 45; Undated Press Release, DHH File 80/68 Part 46; 30 June 1942 letter, Clayton Knight to Bogart Rogers, DHH File 80/68 Part 47.

With this encouragement, the former ace⁴ began soliciting possible partners for this organization to screen American airmen interested in flying for Canada. He contacted Homer Smith – a Canadian who had been living in the U.S. for many years, a former member of the Royal Naval Air Service during the First World War – to see if he would be willing to donate his time and money: Smith “was the happy executor of a personal family fortune that stemmed from the Imperial Oil Company of Canada.” Smith was glad to cooperate, and he immediately began contacting airline presidents, flying school owners, and Civil Aeronautics Authority officials.⁵

Once war was declared by Great Britain on 3 September 1939, Bishop approached Clayton Knight as another possible key player in this organization. Knight was an aviation artist, but he was also an American airmen who had flown with the British during the First World War; additionally, he had extensive ties to aviation circles in the United States. Bishop asked him on 4 September, “what do you think of the possibilities of Americans wanting to come up to Canada and help out with the Commonwealth Air Training Plan?” Knight believed that the interest amongst American airmen would be high, and he offered to canvas his network of contacts to provide a more definitive answer.⁶

Government and RCAF interest in securing American expertise did not begin until the end of the Phoney War, which was brought about in the spring of 1940 by Germany’s incredible territorial gains on the European continent. As the Allies scrambled to regroup from this unexpected turn of events, the very existence of the BCATP – only in its infancy – was threatened: it was nearly shut-down so that all available pilots could immediately be sent to help combat the Germans in the Battle of Britain. After much deliberation, Canada chose to not sacrifice future air war contributions for the present needs; instead of suspending the BCATP, its schedule was accelerated, and Canada began producing more graduates on a monthly basis than was originally projected. This acceleration and expansion of training meant that more instructors were needed, but the source of already trained pilots with suffi-

4 After the First World War, Bishop was no longer officially affiliated with the RCAF. Commercial aviation and foreign business interests pre-occupied his inter-war career. During the Second World War, his RCAF Air Vice Marshal rank was honorary. With this, he was able to lend his fame to recruiting and morale-building campaigns. His First World War fame, Victoria Cross, and wife’s financial connections made him well known to both Canadian and American aviation communities. Personal correspondence with S.E. Dieter (former Historian with *The Billy Bishop Heritage Museum* in Owen Sound, Ontario).

5 *Ibid.*; quote from “Contribution to Victory, 1939-1942” by Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 2.

6 *Ibid.*; quote from 17 June 1965 interview with Clayton Knight by Major Robert Hays (USAF), DHH File 80/68 Part 3.

cient experience to teach a new generation or to serve as staff pilots in the schools for observers, bombers, gunners, and navigators had already been exhausted.⁷

A special meeting of the RCAF's Air Council was called in May 1940. Representatives of the major airlines attended this meeting which aimed to determine how many more experienced pilots could be brought into an expanded BCATP. Homer Smith and Clayton Knight were present as well and listened as the air force was told by the airlines that less than twenty-five airmen could be spared for work in the BCATP. Knight seized the opportunity to gain the RCAF's support for the idea of securing the services of American pilots. After the war, Knight reminisced, "in the heavy silence that followed this grim evaluation, heads were turned curiously in my direction when I stated, 'Homer Smith and I have an initial list of slightly over three hundred pilots who are willing to come up to help.'"⁸

Despite initial skepticism, the RCAF agreed to use Bishop, Knight, and Smith's pre-existing organization to tap into this desperately needed source of pilots. On 31 May 1940, Wing Commander W.A. Curtis sent a proposal to the RCAF's Air Staff requesting permission to have Wing Commander Homer Smith⁹ procure one hundred pilots in the United States; Smith would oversee the organization to "interview pilots and issue them, where necessary, with railway fare and traveling expenses to headquarters in Ottawa." Curtis also proposed advancing Smith \$5,000.00 to help with expenses.¹⁰ The following day, Air Commodore J.S. Breadner (Chief of the Air Staff) forwarded this proposal to the Deputy Minister for Air:

To implement the government's decision concerning the acceleration of the Joint Air Training Plan, additional instructional staff will be required forthwith ... Wing Commander Smith, since the commencement of the war, discreetly and carefully explored the American field, and has an organization in that country that will under his supervision interview the candidates. Those selected would be issued railway fare and traveling expenses to RCAF headquarters Ottawa for final interview and disposition.¹¹

7 Douglas, 633; "Recruiting in the United States of America" Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7.

8 Douglas, 633; quote from "Contribution to Victory, 1939-1942" by Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 2.

9 He had been commissioned into the RCAF and put on the reserve list by Defence Minister Ian Mackenzie on 9 September 1939.

10 Douglas, 633; 31 May 1940 memorandum, W/C WA Curtis to Air Member for Personnel, NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-2.

11 1 June 1940 memorandum, A/C J.S. Breadner (Chief of the Air Staff) to J.S. Duncan (Acting Deputy Minister of Defence for Air), NAC RG 24 Volume 5358 File 45-10-2.

The CKC was authorized by the Canadian government to provide information to American pilots wanting to help Canada and Britain's war effort. The committee would ensure that these men had all the requisite documents before they crossed the border into Canada. Officially, the committee was trying to fill civilian instructor and staff pilot vacancies in the BCATP's Air Observer Schools and Elementary Flying Training Schools. Because these positions did not require the pilots to be members of the RCAF, the U.S. government could not accuse the Canadians of recruiting Americans into a foreign armed service. Nonetheless, the committee did have information available about the air force, and committee members, as well as the Canadian and American governments, knew that pilots, once in Canada, often opted for the glamour of donning the RCAF uniform instead of serving as civilians.¹²

Candidates needed to be between eighteen and forty-five years old; they required the equivalent of a high school education, 300 hours flying time, and a Civil Aeronautics Authority license. These qualifications were less strict than those for the American military air services. In the United States, volunteers had to have a minimum of two years' university training, and eyesight had to be 20/20 without glasses. Canada accepted airmen whose 20/40 vision was correctable to 20/20 with glasses. The RCAF would also accept married men; the United States' air forces would not. Because of the difference in qualifications, the CKC was not competing with America's army and naval air services; a pool of men interested in aviation – but unable to meet American standards – existed, and they were eager to try their luck in Canada.¹³

Once an airmen passed the medical examination, flying test, and personal interview, he would be sent to Canada for more tests; while in Canada awaiting acceptance or rejection, his hotel expenses would be covered (usually at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa), and he would be given a \$5 *per diem* living allowance. There was a wide variety of employment options for the American pilot. He could retain his civilian status by working at an Elementary Flying Training School as a flying instructor or at an Air Observer School as a staff pilot. Many Americans preferred joining the RCAF; in this case, they would instruct at a Service Flying Training School or become a staff pilot flying non-pilot air crew trainees at a Bombing and Gunnery School. American pilots could also help the RAF by ferrying planes across the Atlantic from North

12 Douglas, 635; 17 June 1965 interview with Clayton Knight by Major Robert Hays (USAF), DHH File 80/68 Part 3; April 1941 Clayton Knight Committee General Regulations, DHH File 80/68 Part 28; 27 May 1941 Press Release, DHH File 80/68 Part 46.

13 Douglas, 635; "Seek Pilots Here to Fly Warplanes Across Atlantic," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 6 January 1941, DHH File 80/68 Part 50; "Contribution to Victory, 1939-1942" by Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 2; 17 June 1965 interview with Clayton Knight by Major Robert Hays (USAF), DHH File 80/68 Part 3.

American manufacturers or by ferrying planes from British factories to squadrons in the theatres of war.¹⁴

CKC offices were set-up in luxury hotels across the U.S. and Canada. The headquarters was at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City. Other branches were located in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Hollywood, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, Oakland, Portland, St Louis, San Antonio, San Francisco, Spokane, and Washington DC. Five offices were established in Canada – Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, and Vancouver – to help American candidates find accommodations while in Canada and to assist those returning home after rejection.¹⁵

In initiating the campaign and organization to procure American pilots, Canadian officials were very conscientious in making sure American authorities were aware of the committee's actions and intentions; the Canadian government even put specific measures in place to ensure that American concerns over recruitment laws and oaths of allegiance were accommodated. Members of the CKC discussed their plans with Major-General H.H. Arnold (Chief of the United States Army Air Corps) and Rear-Admiral J.H. Towers (Head of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics) as early as March 1940. Both men were supportive of the committee's efforts; they felt that there was no need for the American services to feel threatened because there was indeed a large pool of talent who had failed to meet the very strict standards of the United States' air forces. Major-General Arnold told Knight that many good airmen had been released from his air service because of technicalities – they had gotten drunk or had conducted some low stunt flying, or it was discovered that they were married. In addition to informing Knight of these available men, Arnold also offered to provide the committee with a list of failed candidates. Knight's courteous inquiries were met with generous and reassuring support.¹⁶

The Department of External Affairs also approached the southern neighbour's State Department to gauge its reaction to Canada's bringing American men into its war effort. On 18 May 1940, O.D. Skelton (Under Secretary of State for External Affairs) received the State Department's response to the Canadian diplomatic inquiries: the 'highest quarters' concluded "United States authorities will not be embarrassed by the enlistment in Canada of United States citizens who proceed to Canada for that purpose." The only request was that American citizens would not be required to take an oath of allegiance to

14 Hatch, 89; "Seek Pilots Here to Fly Warplanes Across Atlantic" in *Minneapolis Tribune*, 6 January 1941, DHH File 80/68 Part 50.

15 Douglas, 634; Undated letter (first page missing), DHH File 80/68 Part 11.

16 Douglas, 634; 19 March 1940 letter, Major-General HH Arnold (Chief of the U.S. Army Air Corps) to Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 9; "Contribution to Victory, 1939-1942" by Clayton Knight, DHH File 80/68 Part 2; 17 June 1965 interview with Clayton Knight by Major Robert Hays (USAF), DHH File 80/68 Part 3.

another head of state, for this would cost the airmen their American citizenship.¹⁷ Skelton had approached the Deputy Minister for Air about this complication earlier on 4 May 1940. He explained the problematic consequences of forcing foreign nationals to take the oath of allegiance upon entering the Canadian armed forces:

Under the laws of the United States of America, the taking of an oath of allegiance resulted in the forfeiture of United States citizenship ... It is ... possible that there will be at the conclusion of the war thousands of members of the Canadian armed forces who will be stateless and who will present a very serious problem from the domestic point of view and from the point of view of the external relations of this government.

Skelton suggested the creation of an oath that did “not involve allegiance and consequently forfeiture of national status.”¹⁸ According to the military’s Judge Advocate General, removal of the oath of allegiance created neither administrative nor disciplinary problems:

From a purely legal point of view, insofar as the Department of National Defence is concerned, I should not suppose that it would make any material difference whether or not the individual took an oath of allegiance ... The result is that by accepting appointment to, or engagement to, serve in the armed forces, the individual places himself under, and is susceptible to, all the obligations which the laws relating to the service concerned impose.¹⁹

The Chief of the Air Staff would not oppose the removal of the oath for foreign nationals, although he did express his “personal regret, which I feel will be shared by many, that tradition and custom have been discarded.”²⁰ The oath of allegiance was replaced by an oath of obedience to superior officers.

The CKC was set up as a civilian information agency for the express purpose of keeping the Department of National Defence from being directly involved in securing Americans for Canada’s air force. American authorities knew that the CKC was helping the RCAF, but since it appeared as though the Canadian government was in keeping with the letter of American law, this diplomatic fiction was tolerated. Unfortunately, members of the CKC got too

17 Douglas, 634; Hatch, 87; 18 May 1940 telegram, Canadian Minister to O.D. Skelton (Under Secretary of State for External Affairs), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-2.

18 4 May 1940 letter, O.D. Skelton to JS Duncan (Acting Deputy Minister of National Defence for Air), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-2.

19 8 May 1940 letter, Judge Advocate General to Adjutant-General, NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-2.

20 16 May 1940 memorandum, Air Vice Marshal G.M. Croil (Chief of the Air Staff) to J.S. Duncan (Deputy Minister of National Defence for Air), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-2.

zealous in their attempts to acquire American pilots. This, in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) inquiry, the discovery that Homer Smith was on the RCAF reserve list, and the fact that the committee was providing funds to cover candidates' travel expenses, alarmed the State Department. Nevertheless, the State Department raised the issue with Canada's Department of External Affairs not to shut the committee down, but for the express purpose of ensuring that the committee remained within American laws so that it could continue to function and avoid prosecution.

On 4 November, John D. Hickerson (Assistant Chief of the State Department's Division of European Affairs and Secretary of the American Section of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence)²¹ met with Loring Christie (the Canadian Minister to the U.S.) to voice complaints about the conduct of the Clayton Knight and Homer Smith: these two men had put "the political side of the State Department ... in a somewhat embarrassing position." Complaints about Knight and Smith's activities were being received from "official quarters"; the committee was attracting too much publicity; the FBI was investigating the committee's actions; travel loans to potential candidates were usually not repaid (thus making them gifts in reality); Homer Smith was not only receiving pay cheques from the Canadian government, but he was also not the private citizen he claimed to be, seeing as he was on the RCAF reserve list. The State Department had no difficulty in having the CKC inform applicants before going to Canada about the availability of jobs with the BCATP and about the qualifications airmen had to meet to secure one of these positions. Unfortunately, the financial conduct of the committee and Smith's status with the RCAF raised two troubling legal questions. Providing funds for an Americans to join a foreign armed service was a violation of the law against recruiting U.S. nationals. Furthermore, being a member of the RCAF meant that Smith might also be violating the law which necessitated the registration of agents working for foreign governments. According to Hickerson, "these features would not jibe well with the ostensible picture that Mssrs Knight and Smith are simply public-spirited or patriotic private persons doing what they can to help Canada and the Allied cause." A further complication arose from the fact that the committee was very "close to advertising the organization's existence and purpose." The volume of correspondence between the committee and possible applicants was ever increasing, and the committee was even asking other flight related organizations to direct potential applicants to the CKC and its Canadian jobs for the war effort.²²

21 Dziuban, 32; According to Lieutenant-General Maurice Pope, Hickerson "had done a tour of duty at the American Legation in Ottawa during the twenties ... [H]e was ... a good friend of Canada about which he was always extremely well informed." *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 162.

22 4 November 1940 letter, L.C. Christie (Canadian Minister to the United States) to O.D. Skelton, NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794 pp. 8-15.

The State Department did not ask for the CKC to be terminated. Instead, Hickerson – with his actions and his advice – clearly aimed to keep the committee from being closed-down by other American authorities for breaking the law. In the meeting with Hickerson, Christie was informed that no memorandum of their conversation would be made for State Department records. Despite the fact that Smith was a member of the RCAF, Hickerson intervened on behalf of the CKC in the matter of registering government agents:

The branch of the State Department which registers agents of foreign governments have learned of the operations of the Knight-Smith organization and have raised the question whether it ought not to be registered under the Act requiring the registration of agents of foreign principals and of foreign governments ... Mr Hickerson ... has persuaded this branch not to press the matter on the ground that Mssrs Knight and Smith state that they are acting as private persons and not as agents of the Canadian government.

Hickerson then suggested to Christie that the committee should employ “a wide-awake practical lawyer who could constantly advise them about what risks they were running of violating the laws.” This State Department official had no intention of prosecuting or closing down the CKC; he was merely cautioning Knight and Smith to “slow down and pull in their horns.”²³

On 12 November, a legal adviser for the Canadian government wrote to Prime Minister King, confirming that the CKC was obviously financed by Canada’s government. Nonetheless, despite the technical breeches of American neutrality laws, the legal adviser did not consider this to be a very serious matter. The committee’s accomplishments were great – it had secured American airmen to fly bombers across the Atlantic for the RAF, and it had furnished instructors for the BCATP. This success fueled the air force’s determination to keep the scheme alive. If American public opinion did eventually sour, then the legal adviser proposed, “it should be possible to dissolve the committee and start again, if necessary, in a different way and under a different name.”²⁴

Despite the legal adviser’s nonchalant approach to the matter, the Cabinet War Committee initially reacted adversely to the State Department’s communications. In its 19 November meeting, the Cabinet War Committee discussed its concern over the CKC’s overt advertising in newspapers. The CKC was only mandated “to give information to would-be recruits for the RCAF.” Although American authorities were not opposed to the committee’s existence, and

23 *Ibid.*

24 12 November 1940 note from Legal Adviser to Prime Minister W.L.M. King, Document 33 in David R. Murray, ed, *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER]* Volume 8 1939-1941 (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1976), 52-3.

despite the fact that the FBI had given the CKC “a clean bill of health,” Prime Minister King and his Cabinet did not want to embarrass the U.S. government. President Roosevelt had told King “that recruiting in the United States would constitute a serious embarrassment to the administration,” and King had promised that Canada would not be undertaking a recruiting mission in the borders of its neutral neighbour. Much to the dismay of Cabinet, “recruiting was, in fact, being carried on, and ... such activities could not be regarded as in keeping with his [King’s] understanding with the President” Because the government did not want to support – either directly or indirectly – recruiting in the U.S., the Cabinet War Committee directed the Minister of National Defence for Air “to see the immediate discontinuance of the activities of the Clayton Knight Committee.”²⁵

The Acting Deputy Minister for Air (J.S. Duncan) wasted no time reacting to the proposed closure of the CKC. Coming to the committee’s defence on 21 November, Duncan stressed the importance of this supply of pilots for the BCATP. To date, over 300 pilots were contributing to the air training plan. They were experienced, required only short refresher courses, and would be very difficult to replace: “Their securing these men had been an essential factor in the speeding up of the whole scheme, and further recruits from this source had been counted on for continued development.” Duncan challenged the decision to terminate the committee: since no adverse comments had been made in the American press, why was such remedial action being taken, especially when the FBI had deemed the committee’s activities acceptable?²⁶

The concerns of Deputy Minister Duncan and members of the RCAF were brought to the attention of the Cabinet War Committee on 22 November. These men heard how the U.S. army and navy held no objections to Canada’s securing the services of American pilots for the war effort; the United Kingdom was openly recruiting Americans, and United States citizens were being trained in American army schools for service with the RAF. The Cabinet War Committee agreed to approach the State Department and ask directly “whether the US government had any objection to the activities such as those of the Clayton Knight Committee.”²⁷ Under Secretary of State Skelton wrote the Canadian Legation in Washington on 25 November, requesting that the importance of the CKC be expressed to the State Department: the BCATP would be hampered if this source of pilots were discontinued; no negative comments had arisen out of the wide publicity that the committee had created; senior air officers in Washington approved of the Canadian scheme; the FBI took no exception to the commit-

25 19 November 1940 Extract of Cabinet War Committee Minutes, Document 34 in *DCER* 8, 53-5.

26 21 November 1940 memorandum, O.D. Skelton, NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 29-32; also in NAC MG 26 J4 Volume 382 Reel H-1548, 268447-40.

27 22 November 1940 Extract of Cabinet War Committee Minutes, Document 36 in *DCER* 8, 57-8.

tee's activities; and terminating the committee's work for the RCAF might also hurt the work it was doing in securing pilots for the RAF. Once these points were brought to the attention of the State Department, Skelton wanted the Canadian Legation to ask, "if there are any special phases of the past or present operations of the Clayton Knight group as to which special difficulty is felt."²⁸

The Canadian Chargé d'Affaires reported his findings to Skelton on 27 November. The State Department was told that "the [Canadian] government would like to be sure that the administration is now definitely of the opinion that the activities of the committee are embarrassing and should be terminated." Hickerson replied that "the Administration does not want to say that the activities should be terminated and has never asked that they should be terminated." Hickerson then reiterated the actions that the State Department had taken in support of the CKC. Enquires from private individuals about the committee's activities were being "given a good meaningless bureaucratic answer." The State Department was not requesting that the committee be registered as an agent of the Canadian government. Hickerson also advised that a critical examination of the committee's conduct be done and that this study be reviewed by an American legal adviser; Dean Acheson's name was recommended.²⁹ The State Department's discussions with the Canadian Legation revealed that the 'highest quarters' actually expected the CKC to go beyond merely providing information. When Jay Pierrepont Moffat (Chief of the State Department's Western European Affairs Division) informed the Canadians on 18 May 1940 that the U.S. Administration would not be embarrassed if Americans went to Canada for the express purpose of enlisting in the Canadian forces, he also wrote a secret communication to Sumner Welles (Assistant Secretary of State) expressing acceptance of a more pro-active role for the CKC:

Now, if Mr Mackenzie King wished to adopt a more liberal policy and to indicate in some careful manner (without of course indicating in any way that the matter had been discussed with American authorities) that Americans of proper age, who, of their own volition, came to Canada and desired to join the air corps or other fighting forces, would not be automatically turned down, this would not be embarrassing to Washington.³⁰

28 25 November 1940 letter, O.D. Skelton to M.M. Mahoney (Canadian Legation in Washington), NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 37-9; also in NAC MG 26 J4 Volume 382 Reel H-1548, 268431-3.

29 27 November 1940 Letter, Chargé d'Affaires to O.D. Skelton, NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 41-8; also in NAC MG 26 J4 Volume 382 Reel H-1548, 268435-6. Acheson was Under-Secretary of the Treasury in 1933. Then this lawyer became Assistant Secretary of State from 1941-5, Under-Secretary of State from 1945-7, and Secretary of State from 1949-53.

30 *Ibid.*

Hickerson was aware of how borderline the CKC's activities were. He hinted that the committee should "get rid of a certain amount of its incriminating correspondence in case its files are investigated." Hickerson feigned ignorance as to the exact workings of the committee: "The Department of State does not know much about the inner workings of the committee, and they do not want to know more than they at present know." Nonetheless, Hickerson knew enough about the committee to advise that it cease lending travel money to potential recruits; he also advised that the advertising be discontinued. The committee needed to be more circumspect in its conduct.³¹ After being in contact with Adolf Berle (Assistant Secretary of State, an official "next to Mr Welles in the State Department and very closely in touch with the President"),³² Hickerson spoke with the Canadian Chargé d'Affaires again. Berle agreed with Hickerson "whole heartedly". The activities of the CKC need not be terminated. The Canadian government was asked to make sure that the committee stayed within the law. The CKC should get "the advice of a friendly United States lawyer with the 'instinct of an ambulance chaser' ... [someone] who would be able to stretch the law a little." Canada's scheme to secure American pilots for Canadian service was accepted; the State Department simply wanted the committee to be less "careless."³³

On 18 December 1940, Skelton wrote Prime Minister King, conveying the legal advice that had been given – free of charge – by Dean Acheson. Acheson confirmed that existing laws made recruiting on American soil against the law. Nevertheless, "there would be no objection to men being engaged in the United States for a civil task. If later, when in Canada, some of them wished to join the RCAF and were accepted, no objection could be taken provided it was not done in such a way as to make it appear a colourable evasion." Consequently, in its determination to prolong American tolerance of its procurement of pilots, the Department of National Defence for Air devised a new organization that would take Acheson's advice to heart.³⁴ Privy Council Order 739 (of 31 January 1941) brought the Dominion Aeronautical Association Limited (DAA) into existence – a Crown Corporation that would keep the RCAF one step removed from the activities of the CKC. The committee was given the duty of acting as an agent of the DAA in the United States; it had the mandate of securing eligible pilots for "civilian employment in Canada in connection with the

31 *Ibid.*

32 30 November 1940 letter, O.D. Skelton to C.G. Power (Minister of National Defence for Air), NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 52; also in NAC MG 26 J4 Volume 382 Reel H-1548, 268463.

33 3 December 1940 letter, Chargé d'Affaires to O.D. Skelton, NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 53; also in NAC MG 26 J4 Volume 382 Reel H-1548, 268466.

34 18 December 1940 memorandum, O.D. Skelton to W.L.M. King (Secretary of State for External Affairs), NAC RG 25 Volume 779 File 379 Reel T-1794, 60-1.

British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.” Because the official focus was on civilian employment, it could be argued that the committee was not breaking American laws. Conveniently, though, the DAA office in Ottawa was situated next door to the RCAF headquarters. Hence, if civilian jobs happened to be ‘unavailable’, DAA officials simply advised applicants to go next door to see what might be open in the RCAF.³⁵

Canadian determination to stretch the law and American support for the CKC’s activities continued as the organization moved in a new direction to procure American air crew for training in the BCATP. The number of experienced pilots available in the U.S. was decreasing for two reasons. First, the RCAF was no longer in desperate need of instructors and staff pilots for its air training program, so the air force set higher standards for American candidates to meet. Furthermore, as the war progressed and the likelihood of American participation increased, the demand in the U.S. for this same group of airmen was increasing as well. In February 1941, Group Captain J.L.E.A. de Niverville (Director of Air Force Manning) suggested that the CKC might begin looking for American men who could be sent through the BCATP as air crew trainees. The Minister of Defence for Air, C.G. Power, did not approve of this new mandate since there was still a large number of Canadians waiting to enter the RCAF and commence training. As summer arrived, Stuart Armour (managing director of the DAA) noted the dwindling numbers passing through the CKC and decided to pursue another approach that would prolong the need for the committee’s services. When the CKC predicted it would be producing no more than five or six experienced pilots a week for the RCAF, Armour decided to approach air force officials about the possibility of recruiting trainees. At the request of Armour, Air Commodore Robert Leckie (Acting Chief of the Air Staff) called a meeting of RCAF officers on 9 July 1941 to discuss the issue.³⁶

At this meeting, the Chief of the Air Staff confirmed that the need to find instructors and staff pilots was “daily becoming of less importance to the RCAF The continuance of its [the CKC’s] activities upon the present scale would not be justified on the basis of sending up only thirty pilots per month.” Armour suggested that the committee could find a new *raison d’être* by finding a supply of air crew. Group Captain J.A. Sully (Acting Air Member for Personnel) was in support of this plan. Not only did he tell the meeting that the

35 Douglas, 636-7; “Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau”, DHH File 181.003 (D3639); quote from April 1941 Clayton Knight Committee General Regulations, DHH File 80/68 Part 28.

36 22 July 1941 letter, Stuart Armour (Managing Director DAA) to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44; “Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau”, DHH File 181.003 (D3639).

CKC “should not be allowed to disintegrate”, but he also recommended that “the time had come when it was necessary for the RCAF to secure air crew trainees in the USA in substantial numbers.” The RCAF officers at the meeting agreed to seek the Minister’s approval of the CKC’s procuring 2500 American air crew by 1 September 1941. The Minister did not consent to the new change outright, but he did approve Armour’s going to Washington to explore the American government’s reaction to this new plan.³⁷

On 11 July, Frederick King, the CKC’s legal adviser, met with members of the DAA to discuss the air crew scheme. He advised extreme caution in making sure that nothing was done contrary to American laws. Securing air crew trainees was definitely of a different nature than offering employment to already trained pilots. Presidential announcements to the press on 24 June 1941 did make it clear “that any man wanting to join the Canadian or British armed forces had a perfect right to do so, subject to the limitations of certain statutes with regard to oaths of allegiance to foreign rulers and to recruiting for foreign armed services in [the United States].”³⁸ Nonetheless, isolationist sentiment still had to be taken into consideration. Despite the fact that members of the CKC (Knight and Colonel Harold Fowler) declared themselves willing to take the risk and face the consequences of running afoul of American law, the legal adviser stressed that “they should not place themselves in jeopardy if only for the reason that to do so would destroy the usefulness of the committee, quite aside from the fact that they might also embarrass the President.” He felt that contacting graduates of the Civil Pilot Training Plan (CPTP) by mail and informing them of Canada’s need for air crew was an acceptable methodology, as long as great care was exercised in the letters’ wording. Frederick King thought perhaps the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) could spread, by word of mouth to CPTP graduates, the fact that Canada would welcome Americans into its air force. King offered more hints as to how CKC policy could be shaped. Seeing as foreign governments were not allowed to help Americans financially in making their way to other countries to enlist, the committee could not pay for the potential recruits’ travel expenses. Nevertheless, the legal adviser believed there was a way around this issue: “there would not ... be any

37 18 June 1941 letter, Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44; “Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau”, DHH File 181.003 (D3639); “Recruiting in the United States of America” Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7; quote from 22 July 1941 letter, Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44.

38 F.J. Hatch, “Recruiting Americans for the Royal Canadian Air Force 1939-1942” in *Aerospace Historian* 18.1 (Spring-March 1971), 16, DHH File 71/192; “Recruiting in the United States of America” Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7.

objection to the Canadian government's making a reimbursement of traveling expenses, but in order to protect the Clayton Knight Committee from possible embarrassment, any grant made to the trainees by the Canadian government should not be called a traveling allowance."³⁹

Officials of the CAA and CPTP were very receptive of the suggestions when they met with Stuart Armour on 12 July. They believed that 2,500 civil pilot training graduates willing to enlist in the RCAF could easily be found. Mr. O.P. Howard (a CAA Inspector) and Mr. G. Andrews (a CPTP Supervisor) were willing to spread the word about the RCAF's need if permission to do so was given by the CAA. Two days later, Armour and Fowler proceeded to meet with Mr Robert Hinckley (Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Air) to get the CAA's official pronouncement on the air crew procurement scheme. Hinckley declared himself "fully in sympathy with [the] plan for securing air crew trainees in the United States, but he could officially go no further then to tell those of his subordinates immediately concerned that [the CKC's] efforts had his blessing." One such subordinate, Mr John Morris, was willing to provide the committee with the names and addresses of students who graduated from the CPTP primary course in 1940 and 1941. Morris would also include the contact information for 674 CPTP Coordinators and Flight Contractors providing flying instruction. With these, Morris suggested that the committee could contact potential candidates directly and inform them that the RCAF had openings for men willing to undertake air crew training and overseas service. Morris did warn, though, that "there was a considerable body of isolationist sentiment in the United States and that it was rather more dangerous then it had been a few months ago because the United States was now closer to being at war and the isolationists were more desperate as a consequence."⁴⁰

Armour's trip to Washington had been extremely successful. With a little imagination – and much caution – the committee's legal adviser and the CAA and CPTP officials all felt that American air crew could be secured without breaking the letter of American laws. Even Major-General Arnold of the army and Rear-Admiral Towers of the navy approved of the committee's plan to

39 "Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau", DHH File 181.003 (D3639); first quote from "Recruiting in the United States of America" Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7; second quote from 22 July 1941 letter from Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44.

40 "Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau", DHH File 181.003 (D3639); first quote from 22 July 1941 letter from Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44; second quote from "Recruiting in the United States of America" Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7.

approach CPTP graduates. Consequently, the Canadian government revised the CKC's mandate in August 1941 to include recruiting Americans for air crew training.⁴¹ With the advent of this changed mandate, Homer Smith recommended to the Air Member for Personnel that the DAA and the CKC be absorbed into one organization called the Canadian Aviation Bureau (CAB). On 27 August, the Air Member for Personnel forwarded this recommendation to the Deputy Minister for Air. In consultation with the Minister of Defence for Air, the Deputy Minister approved the reorganization on 2 September 1941. All CAB correspondence purposely made no reference to the RCAF and spoke only of Canadian aviation so as to leave no trails of direct links between the CAB and air force.⁴²

Nonetheless, almost immediately after the Canadian government approved securing American air crew trainees through the CAB, the State Department faced a complaint about Canadians' recruiting United States nationals. American newspapers, on 12 and 13 August, carried the story that Democratic Representative Walter Pierce (of Oregon) called for the American government to "investigate reports that persons posing as representatives of the Canadian Royal Air Force [*sic*] were seeking to enlist American flyers in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho."⁴³ On 15 August, Hume Wrong, Chargé d'Affaires at the Canadian Legation in the United States, contacted King, in his capacity as Secretary of State for External Affairs, with more details about the complaint. Apparently one CAB representative had sent a letter on 9 August 1941 inviting Americans to enlist in the Canadian Coast Guards. The parents of one recipient complained to Representative Pierce, who then voiced his constituents' concerns to the State Department. The State Department immediately sided with the Canadian scheme, despite the fact that they felt this particular committee representative was very close to crossing the line of recruiting on American soil. The State Department told Pierce that "there is no legal barrier to the enrollment of civilian personnel in the United States – and also that

41 Douglas, 638; 18 June 1941 letter, Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, 22 July 1941 letter, Stuart Armour to President and Directors of DAA, DHH File 80/68 Part 44.

42 Hatch, 90, 92; "Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau", DHH File 181.003 (D3639); "Recruiting in the United States of America" Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7; 29 July 1941 Memorandum, W/C F.H. Smith to A/C H. Edwards (Air Member for Personnel), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-3; 27 August 1941 memorandum, A/C H. Edwards (Air Member for Personnel) to J.S. Duncan (Deputy Minister of National Defence for Air), 25 September 1941 memorandum, Homer Smith (Director CAB) to W/C Crabb (Director of Manning), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-9.

43 "Says Canada Tries to Enlist US Flyers," New York *Sun*, 12 August 1941; "Canadian Recruiting in US to be Probed," unnamed Washington DC newspaper, 13 August 1941 "US Will Probe Bogus Air Agents," New York *Daily Mirror*, DHH File 80/68 Part 50.

Americans are free to go to Canada to join the armed forces if they so desire.” The State Department even contacted the Department of Justice and recommended that no further action be taken; this was “to forestall an attempt by Mr Pierce to stimulate an investigation of the Clayton Knight Committee by the Department of Justice.”⁴⁴ Once again, the American Administration defended the existence of Canada’s recruitment organization, and it excused and protected Canada’s stretching of American laws without hesitation.

The entry of the United States into the war, after Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, brought a swift end to the CKC/CAB. On 17 January 1942, the White House requested that Americans wanting to transfer into American services be allowed to do so. The next step was for the RCAF to determine the future of the CAB’s work; at a meeting of RCAF officers on 22 January 1942, the representative for the Directorate of Personnel recommended the cessation of recruiting Americans. Consequently, the RCAF decided that, effective 30 January 1942, American citizens “were no longer eligible for appointment or enlistment in the Royal Canadian Air Force.”⁴⁵ CAB offices in Canada closed in February 1942; branch offices in the U.S. closed in June 1942, although the headquarters in New York remained opened to write letters of apology to Americans still inquiring about enlisting in Canada’s air force; such inquiries continued to arrive until 1944.⁴⁶

By the end of the war, 8,864 American nationals had been members of the RCAF; 5,067 of these remained with Canada’s air force until the end of hostilities. Some 49,000 American airmen contacted the CKC/CAB for help; over 2,600 volunteers were sent north to Canada. Of the 950 pilots directed to Canada by the CKC, 763 were accepted to help with the BCATP. The CAB sent 1,805 individuals for consideration as possible air crew trainees; 1,455 were permitted to enlist and train in the RCAF.⁴⁷ These numbers – and the entire venture – would not have been possible without the combination of Canadian determination and American support and tolerance.

44 15 August 1941 letter, H.H. Wrong (Chargé d’Affaires) to W.L.M. King (Secretary of State for External Affairs), NAC RG 24 Volume 5368 File 45-10-5.

45 “Recruiting in the United States of America” Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7.

46 Douglas, 640-1; 26 December 1942 letter, Beatrice Thomas (Secretary CAB) to Richard Landfear, DHH File 80/68 Part 30; 1 February 1943 letter, Thomas to R.H. Davison, 2 February 1943 letter, Thomas to James Dougall, 9 February 1943; letter, Thomas to RE Brandon, DHH File 80/68 Part 22; 9 March 1944 letter, Thomas to John Arthur Sage, DHH File 80/68 Part 30.

47 Douglas, 640-1; “Recruiting in the United States of America” Chapter 11 of *RCAF Personnel History 10 September 1939 - 1945* Volume III, DHH File 74/7; “Dominion Aeronautical Association Ltd: History and Statistics of Activities of the Clayton Knight Committee and its Successor the Canadian Aviation Bureau”, DHH File 181.003 (D3639).

When the American pilot procurement scheme was first proposed, the RCAF and the Canadian government (Clayton Knight and Homer Smith, civil servants, ministers of the government, and the prime minister himself) knew that the U.S. had declared itself neutral and that laws existed prohibiting the recruitment of Americans on their home soil for service in foreign armed forces. Nevertheless, private citizens and the RCAF were bold enough to devise such a scheme, and the Canadian government not only allowed the CKC to go ahead, but the government was also privy to the committee's fictitious separation from the armed forces. Despite the fact that American officials, on a number of occasions, had to remind the Canadian government that the committee was branching off into illegal activities, the Canadian government, in the end, did not terminate the committee, but instead let it evolve into an organization that was securing American airmen as air crew trainees for combat duty with the RCAF. The Canadian government had the wherewithal to take full advantage of the American administration's sympathy for the Allied war effort.

The American government was also willing to tolerate Canada's clandestine activities because the Canadians were paying special attention to American concerns. The oath of allegiance was replaced with an oath of obedience so Americans would not lose their citizenship if they joined the RCAF. The CKC, the DAA, and the CAB were created so that non-governmental agencies were directly helping Americans make their way to Canada. Committee officials stressed the focus on providing information for civilian jobs so that attention was drawn away from the reality of how easy it was for American fliers to be directed toward the RCAF once they were in Canada.⁴⁸ The committee and Canadian government also heeded American legal advice as to the necessity of finding less overt ways of advertising and providing travel funds.

The absence of the CKC episode from American secondary literature is a fitting reflection of the attention paid to it in American primary sources. Neither the Clayton Knight Committee nor the implications of American citizens enlisting in the Canadian services were discussed in F.D. Roosevelt's office files.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that Major-General H.H. Arnold (Chief of the United States Army Air Corps) had been personally contacted by CKC mem-

48 "Seek Pilots Here to Fly Warplanes Across Atlantic" *Minneapolis Tribune*, 6 January 1941; "Canada Wants US Fliers in Any Number, Says Envoy" *Oakland Tribune* 28 January 1941; "Canada Seeks Aviators Here: Office Set Up in Boise to Give Information on Royal Air Force" *The Boise Capital News*, 16 August 1941; "Hundreds of US Fliers Accept Canadian Posts" *Oregon Journal*, 16 August 1941; DHH File 80/68 Part 50; 9 March 1944 letter, Beatrice Thomas (Secretary CAB) to John Arthur Sage, DHH File 80/68 Part 30.

49 *F.D. Roosevelt Diplomatic Correspondence, Confidential Files, and Subject File Series* were consulted; microfilm and published finding aid are located at the Royal Military College of Canada's library in Kingston, Ontario.

bers, General Arnold's memoirs do not mention any discussions.⁵⁰ As Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall was ultimately in charge of the Army Air Corps. Despite being very interested in aviation – he himself could fly – his personal papers make no mention of Canada's request for air instructors nor the impact competition for potential recruits might have on American air power.⁵¹

In his personal diary, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr. only once briefly refers to Canada's search for American fliers. In a memorandum to himself dated 12 June 1940, Berle noted that Harry Hopkins (personal representative and advisor to President Roosevelt) asked "what we can do to help fliers go to Canada;" Berle answered "this we could arrange." Berle did not record any details about the request, about the State Department's discussions, or about the official response planned. After replying in passing that the United States could accommodate the request, nothing more was said in Berle's diary, not even when the CKC brought negative attention to itself by its over-zealous conduct.⁵² This casual approach to the CKC subject clearly demonstrates the committee's existence and activities did not distress the Roosevelt Administration. The Secretary of the American section of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (an advisory body mandated to study maritime, land, and air problems relating to the defence of the Western Hemisphere's northern half) was involved in warning officials of Canada's Department of External Affairs that the CKC was close to breaking American laws, but discussion about the CKC's conduct was never a part of the agenda of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence meetings.⁵³

50 *American Air Power Comes of Age: General Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold's World War II Diaries* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2002).

51 Microfilm and finding aids for *The Papers of George C. Marshall – Selected WWII Correspondence* are located at the Royal Military College of Canada's library in Kingston, Ontario. Also consulted – Larry Bland, *George C. Marshall: Soldier of Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1997).

52 *Adolf A. Berle Jr Diary* – the original and microfilm are located at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York.

53 Permanent Joint Board on Defence Agenda 1941-1953, NAC RG 24 Volume 8067 File 1270-15-2; Permanent Joint Board on Defence Recommendations 1942-1954, NAC RG 24 Volume 8067 File 1270-15-4; Permanent Joint Board on Defence 1940-1947, NAC RG 24 Volume 5174 File 15-1-204 Parts 1, 2; Permanent Joint Board on Defence – Coordination of Aviation Training Programs Canada-United States 1942-1943, NAC RG 24 Volume 5366 File 45-9-26. The only reference found to American fliers participating in Canadian training schools occurred on 23 December 1941 when the Board discussed the effect U.S. belligerency would have on RCAF aviation training programs. It was decided that American citizens still in training would complete their courses, that Canada would cease accepting any more Americans, and that Americans wishing to transfer to American services would be allowed to do so as long as the transfers did not impair Canada's war effort. See 23 December 1941 Memorandum, NAC RG 24 Permanent Joint Board on Defence 1940-1947, NAC RG 24 Volume 5174 File 15-1-204 Part 1.

It must be remembered that the U.S. was not overly concerned with continental defence, seeing as Canada was its neighbour and Great Britain was its ally. Once it was accepted that the United States would reach naval parity with Great Britain, tensions between the rising New World power and the Commonwealth dissipated, as did the possibility of war between Great Britain (or Canada) and the United States. The establishment of arbitration procedures with the signing of the Boundary Water Treaty of 1909, the renunciation of war as an instrument of foreign policy in the 1928 Pact of Paris, and the naval limitations agreed to in the Washington Treaties of 1921-2 also helped stabilize relations on the North American Continent.⁵⁴

American foreign policy of the mid-1930s was taken up with the formation of cooperation amongst the twenty-one American republics in the Western Hemisphere and the restoration of healthy international trade.⁵⁵ According to Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles in 1936,

the United States, by joining forces with its fellow democracies of the Western Hemisphere [could] provide an example – first in cooperating toward the removal of the fundamental causes which lead to war, and secondly, in perfecting the machinery for the arbitration and conciliation of controversies when they arise – that example will have a powerful effect upon the history of the rest of the world, and will strengthen and supplement the efforts of the League of Nations and of all other peace agencies.⁵⁶

In 1940, Welles articulated his government's belief "that one of the surest safeguards against war [was] the opportunity of all peoples to buy and to sell on equal terms."⁵⁷ As long as participation in another world war was still not definite, the American government used diplomatic rhetoric as the logical and well-reasoned course to world peace.

Nevertheless, the Roosevelt Administration did not wait until the outbreak of war in Europe to begin planning the continental defence of North America. As early as 14 August 1936, the president publicly pledged that the U.S. would defend Canada in time of threat. At Chautauqua, New York, Roosevelt announced, "our closest neighbours are good neighbours. If there are remoter

54 12 November 1935 "Requirements of Canadian Defence – a Review of the Present Position" by Major-General E.C. Ashton (Chief of General Staff), DHH 74/256 Imperial Conference Data.

55 Dziuban, 161.

56 "The Way to Peace on the American Continent," Address by Sumner Welles (Assistant Secretary of State) Before the Maryland Federation of Women's Clubs (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 15 April 1936), 7.

57 "Our Foreign Policy and National Defense" Address by Sumner Welles (Assistant Secretary of State) Before the Foreign Affairs Council (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 28 September 1940), 5.

nations that wish us not good but ill, they know that we are strong; they know that we can and will defend ourselves and defend our neighbour.” Two years later, on 18 August 1938, President Roosevelt gave another pledge on defence solidarity. In a speech given in Kingston, Ontario, Roosevelt promised, “the Dominion of Canada is a part of the sisterhood of the British Empire. I give to you assurance that the people of the United States will not stand idly by if domination of Canadian soil is threatened by another empire.” On 20 August 1938, at Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada’s Prime Minister King reciprocated the pledge: “We, too, have our obligations as a good friendly neighbour, and one of these is to see that, at our own instance, our country is made as immune from attack or possible invasion as we can reasonably be expected to make it, and that, should the occasion ever arise, enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way either by land, sea, or air, to the United States across Canadian territory.” These promises were institutionalized in the Ogdensburg Agreement of August 1940 and the creation of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence.⁵⁸

Along with pursuing Hemispheric cooperation and defence, the American State Department was preoccupied with avoiding being drawn into the European conflict and with working within the limitations of the country’s neutrality laws. The fact that so little official attention was paid to the CKC is actually consistent with other small, but significant, actions the Roosevelt Administration authorized so as to be able to help the Allied war effort while public opinion kept the United States from officially participating in the war. In August 1939, when it was clearly obvious that war in Europe was imminent, President Roosevelt considered some devious tactics that would stall any neutrality proclamation and arms embargo, thus allowing the British and French a few extra days to purchase American manufactured goods. Roosevelt suggested to Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle that a flaw should be placed deliberately in the neutrality proclamation; hence, the Attorney General would have to return the proclamation to the State Department for redrafting. It was expected to take a day or so before the proclamation could be forwarded in its revised format to the Attorney General again. President Roosevelt calculated “that it would take at least five days after hostilities before the neutrality proclamation could go into effect.” When Berle suggested that an additional twenty-four hours could be added to the process by sending the revised neutrality proclamation to the Interdepartmental Committee again for review, “the President grinned.” Berle made a notation in the margin of his diary that “This we did not do. Better to play straight.” Nevertheless, the mere consideration, by the President, of such a delay tactic clearly shows the administration’s desire to help the Allies any way it could.⁵⁹

58 Dziuban, 3–4.

59 26 August 1939, *Adolf A. Berle Jr Diary*.

President Roosevelt's October 1939 correspondence with Lord Tweedsmuir (Canada's Governor General) reveals that the President was trying to get a bill passed that would repeal the arms embargo. While he was waiting for the bill to go through Congress, he was "walking on eggs" and "saying nothing, seeing nothing, and hearing nothing." The President's quandary arose from the fact that he wanted his personal friends, Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir, to come to Hyde Park for a visit. Nonetheless, Secretary of State Cordell Hull believed such a visit to be inadvisable:

As the head of a belligerent state and a man well known in this country, it would seem to be quite impossible for him to 'slip down inconspicuously', even to Hyde Park.... The press, I feel sure, would learn of his visit, and any attempt of its being inconspicuous would only increase the amount of speculation as to his purpose. Such publicity, I feel sure, would be used to advantage by the administration's opponents to the repeal of the arms embargo.

Consequently, Roosevelt deferred the invitation, telling his friend, "I think that the bill has a good chance of going through within the next two or three weeks, and when that time comes, it will be not only wholly fitting but 'all to the good' to have you and Lady Tweedsmuir come down for a weekend."⁶⁰ By September 1940, the Roosevelt Administration felt less inhibited about vocalizing its position on the European War. Although still bound by the declaration of neutrality, the government had clearly taken sides in the war. According to Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles, "it is the policy of your government, as approved by the Congress of the United States, and, I believe, by the overwhelming majority of the American people, to render all material support and assistance, through the furnishing of supplies and munitions, to the British government and the governments of the British dominions in what we hope will be their successful defense against armed aggression."⁶¹

Canada was not the only recipient of American fliers for the war effort. The fall of 1941 found the Roosevelt Administration agreeing to send more Americans to help the Chinese air force. The Chinese government had previously arranged a pilot training program in the United States. Seeing as graduates were not expected to be ready for combat until the summer of 1942, the Chinese government had arranged to hire 100 American pilots and 181

60 19 September 1939 Cordell Hull (Secretary of State) memorandum to President F.D. Roosevelt, 5 October 1939 President F.D. Roosevelt letter to Lord Tweedsmuir (Governor General of Canada), *F.D. Roosevelt Diplomatic Correspondence*, Reel 3, 278-9, 284.

61 "Our Foreign Policy and National Defense" Address by Sumner Welles (Assistant Secretary of State) Before the Foreign Affairs Council (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 28 September 1940), 14.

American ground crew to serve immediately. Because the United States would be delivering 269 pursuit planes to China, and because there was an immediate need to replace casualties in the original 100 fliers procured, the American government was willing to accept resignations of any army or navy pilots and ground crew wanting to volunteer to help the Chinese air war effort.⁶² Turning an almost blind eye to the CKC's recruiting of Americans for Canada's air force was much less involved than providing planes to the Chinese and inviting American airmen to resign from American military service to help the Chinese.

The American tolerance of the CKC was clearly in keeping with American foreign policy and the desire of the Roosevelt Administration to circumvent the United States' neutrality laws. Repeatedly, the State Department protected the CKC from prosecution; repeatedly, American legal advisers suggested creative – but acceptable – ways to bend American laws; and repeatedly, the President expressed his support for the committee's activities and existence. The American administration did not see Canada's surreptitious actions (and disregard for American law) as a threat to the American government or to cooperative Canadian-American relations. The Canadian government did not see its accommodation of American concerns or its bold participation on the world stage as a threat to Canadian sovereignty. The Clayton Knight Committee is an example of the power and influence Canada's government can have continentally and internationally when the country stands on firm principles, creates bold policies, and pursues both with unwavering pride and determination. The story of the Clayton Knight Committee also demonstrates that it is not a mere episode in the history of Canadian-American relations. The greater context of the Canadian-American relationship, and American foreign policy historiography for that matter, need to be reconsidered in light of what the CKC escapade reveals about this relationship and the two countries' attitudes toward participation in the Second World War.

62 30 September 1941 letter, Harry Hopkins (Presidential Advisor) to F.D. Roosevelt, 30 September 1941 letter, F.D. Roosevelt to Secretary of the Navy; 2 October 1941 letter, Henry Stimson (Secretary of War) to Roosevelt; 3 October 1941 letter, Lauchlin Currie to President Roosevelt, *F.D. Roosevelt Confidential Files*, Reel 8, 933, 934, 936, 938.