

in 1917 when the company was moved to Trois-Rivières, with Norcross as president.³³

Norcross came to the management of trawler and drifter construction with considerable professional experience and not a little self-interest. He met with J.D. Hazen, minister of Naval Service, and his deputy minister, George Desbarats, in Ottawa on 10 February 1917, and was asked to take on supervision of the program since the department did not have resources to take on this role, and the British government was pressing for quick deliveries. It was an arrangement consistent with the Dominion government's propensity to appoint private-sector capitalists to head up procurement initiatives instead of relying upon departmental officials – an approach similar to the appointment of Sir Eric Geddes, one of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's "men of push and go," as controller of the navy and then first lord of the Admiralty to bring energy and innovation to shipbuilding in 1917.³⁴ As Norcross later recalled, the role required someone with knowledge of the business who would not be hampered by red tape in making decisions.³⁵ Hazen accepted Norcross's offer to donate his services and those of Canada Steamship Lines, and the sixth floor of the company's building in Montreal was turned over to newly formed departments devoted to traffic, labour, purchasing, production and accounting, each headed by managers from the steamship line. This arrangement was confirmed by an order-in-council on 27 February 1917, which recognized that, "The construction of such a large number of vessels at the present time, when it is extremely difficult to obtain delivery of steel, wood and machinery, necessitates special methods of administration and of purchase."³⁶

Calling upon his connections with the United States Steel Corporation and Lukens Steel Company in Pennsylvania, Norcross quickly placed an order for 3,000 tons of steel with plans to obtain another 2,000 tons, paying a premium of a cent a pound to ensure prompt delivery. Associated Mills in British Columbia completed the order for Douglas fir within thirty days to get work started on drifters. Canada's boiler and machinery makers were canvassed to take on new work despite the conversion of many shops to producing munitions. Norcross met with most of Ontario and Quebec's large shipbuilders, engine and boiler makers in Montreal on 15 February to explore the capacity of each plant, and waited upon final plans and specifications from the Department of Naval Service. It was Norcross's preference that drifter contracts be placed with one large company since they were not

³³ LAC, Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs fonds, RG 95-1, vol. 2775, "Tidewater Shipbuilders, Limited," Application for incorporation under the Companies' Act, 18 May 1916, and Declaration of J.W. Norcross for the application for supplementary letters patent under the Companies' Act, 22 January 1918.

³⁴ Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, "The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada" in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto, 1998), 14-15; Keith Grieves, *Sir Eric Geddes: Business and Government in War and Peace* (Manchester and New York, 1989), 14, 40-45.

³⁵ LAC, Department of National Defence fonds, RG 24, vol. 5605, N.S.S. 29-16-1, part 3, J.W. Norcross to C.C. Ballantye, 12 January 1918.

³⁶ *Ibid*, part 1, Order-in-Council P.C. 516, 27 February 1917.