



From the bridge...

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NAVAL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION NAVALE DU CANADA

The following “From the Bridge” column was published in the Spring 2015, No. 70 edition of the Naval Association of Canada’s quarterly “Starshell” magazine. Ed.

◆ SOME ISSUES

Over a number of months I have heard a few rumblings, questions being asked:

- What is NAC? What is our role?
- How does this function with our National and Branch structure?

While we have discussed these issues at our AGMs and during visits to Branches, these discussions have not touched the majority of Branches or members. Past ‘From the Bridge’ columns have covered the issues from different perspectives but perhaps it is worthwhile to discuss these questions further.

◆ WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

Perceptions and interests vary widely from Branch to Branch, however, the core interests, especially as they relate to the National organization, should be in sync. We might ask: what does Canada need, who are we, where do we want to go and how do we get there?

We operate on the thesis that Canada’s Navy needs support and we as members of the Naval Association of Canada accept this as our primary role.

The question as to who we are is perhaps confusing and I suspect the genesis of angst that some Branches and individual members may be feeling.

I belong to the Legion to support veterans, the Navy League of Canada because the cadet program is an important part of our future, the Canadian Naval Technical History Association (CNTHA), I lead the RMC Foundation in order to help our aspiring young officers be all they can be, I am a mess member because of the camaraderie it affords and I support both *Sackville* and *Haida* as important initiatives focused on our naval heritage. The key is that I belong to these other organizations as I do not expect my NAC membership to cover those very real needs. I belong to NAC because I know Canadians must work to make sure Canada has the capable and effective Navy it needs.

◆ ARE BRANCHES LOSING?

Some debate continues to bubble up regarding individuals as members versus Branches. It has been said that with all the changes, Branches are losing.

This is not a zero sum game—we are growing NAC both in numbers and what it does. Branches continue to be the core of NAC, but hopefully with a richer program, younger, larger and more diverse membership.

Part of this feeling is no doubt related to fact that we have moved from a Branch focused Association with little National impact, to a new member based structure intent on building national presence and supporting our Navy. We have not reduced the importance of Branches. Indeed, initiatives critical to explaining to Canadians why we need a navy epitomized by our OUTREACH program can only be delivered at the Branch level. So instead of reducing the role of Branches, I submit that the role of Branches has expanded as we have grown the pie.

◆ ARE BRANCHES MINI-NATIONALS?

Branches might think a Branch should mirror National. They might feel, for example, a need to have a Naval Affairs Director on the Branch executive. I suggest that this is not productive. Both segments are of course involved in our core activity of educating Canadians on the need for an effective and capable Navy. However, the execution is very different. There are initiatives that only National can accomplish but there are even more initiatives that only a Branch can deliver. If we take that the *raison d’être* of NAC is to educate Canadians as to the need for an effective and capable Navy, how does this Branch/National thing work?

The work is best segmented. Essential tasks are to educate the Canadian federal political leadership as to the need for a Navy and to relate to RCN headquarters. This happens primarily in Ottawa and is executed, in the main, through writing and

publishing position papers. However, to be successful we also need to educate Canadian voters and prospective voters, nationwide at the local and provincial levels. We plan to accomplish this nationwide task through our OUTREACH program which can only be executed at the Branch level. It isn’t a choice between one and the other—we have to do both—but we cannot have both segments of our association mucking around in both areas. We each have a different part-ship.

Of course National has other jobs to do such as communicating with members to help ensure we establish a common base of understanding of issues, awards, endowment fund operation, administrative and legal functions, and so on. Branches have a larger role in recruiting members, creating and running NAC events, generating financial support, building bridges to local ‘naval family’ members and engendering community camaraderie that is so important to members. While there is some overlap, where the rubber meets the road National and Branches do different things. The same destination but different courses.

◆ WHAT DO WE DO?

In closing, a very few words on what we as the Naval Association of Canada do...

- *We educate, we do not lobby. Other like-minded organizations may, but we do not.*
- *We produce position papers not opinion papers. Members are encouraged to state opinions but NAC does not.*
- *With naval ships being a 50 year endeavour we educate all politicians of all parties for they will certainly change.*
- *We welcome all who are interested in ensuring Canada has an effective, capable Navy.*

Yours aye

Jim