



The bridge

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We are More than Meets the Eye

We are making way. There is visible progress across the country, we are attracting new members, moving our average age down, organizing events of benefit to our members and the future of the Navy and beginning to educate our leaders as to the need for a capable and effective navy. We use terminology such as camaraderie, outreach, naval affairs and education, but how does this all play together in NAC?

I suggest there are three areas where we need to concentrate our efforts—we are in some ways combining what otherwise might be three different organizations:

- Continuing our 'traditional' role of camaraderie,
- Developing a professional home for serving members,
- Educating Canadians and particularly Canadian leaders as to the need for a capable and effective navy.

■ AN RCN ALUMNI

One of our traditional roles, and indeed a driving force in establishment of the Association following WWII, was the desire to maintain the camaraderie and connections forged during the war.

I suggest this is still the case. The desire to maintain connections when leaving the RCN remains as strong as ever. Whether service was relatively short or a full career, the bonds forged during service are deep and enduring. These are possibly the strongest bonds we make and they are worth preserving.

We need to attract more retiring service members. For the past few years NAC-Ottawa (NAC-O) has been using the idea of a year's free membership presented at the retiree's DWD (depart with dignity) ceremony. It has proven to be successful and as a result the Branch leadership is now composed of 'relatively' young individuals who found their way into the Branch via this channel.

More recently, your National Board approved an 'Introductory Membership' which waives National fees for one year. This

allows Branches to promote NAC to retiring folk. This should not be limited to only RCN retirees, but extended to others who have worked with the RCN in our dockyards and HQ staffs.

A weakness in the process has been our ability to identify these individuals. It has to date been done through informal personal connections, but it seems to me that establishing a NAC link would be of benefit to the service as well as the individual. We need to formalize this for both regular and reserve force formations.

Getting these 'young' folks in the door is only the start. The Branch needs to mentor them for awhile, making sure they are properly introduced to other members and feel at home.

Every successful enduring organization establishes such a home for its 'graduates'—called an alumni organization. I submit that the NAC is the RCN's alumni association.

■ PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY

While the attraction of retired members is important, we also have an interest, indeed an imperative, in attracting serving members in order to support our profession.

Shortly after commissioning, I joined the US Naval Institute (USNI) and remain a member today. I suspect some of you did the same. I also joined the IEEE and became a PEng in the knowledge that professional development did not end with service courses—that exposure to informed debate, examination of new ideas and tracking of developments was a critical part of my professional development.

We provide some degree of exposure to such debate and discussion through *NAC News* and *Starshell*. We also support the *Canadian Naval Review* (CNR) published by Dalhousie University. The founders of CNR tell me they set out to establish the magazine as a Canadian parallel to the USNI *Proceedings* based on the belief that the RCN needed a place for debate and discussion. We are talking with CNR leaders regarding how we might join more closely together to achieve what seem to be common goals.

Our annual conferences—staged by volunteers from our Branches

—are a great means of examining specific issues in some detail, thereby raising the understanding of those serving members who attend. Subsequent to the conference, papers published provide solid research on the subject and engender further discussion.

The Commander of the RCN, fellow NAC member Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, has written supporting NAC membership [See page 3, *Summer 2015 Starshell*]. RCN leaders such as Commodores Art McDonald, Luc Cassivi and Simon Page are active in support of our Association. We recently stood up an informal advisory group composed of Luc and Simon with the task of promoting closer links between the RCN, its serving members and the NAC.

The 'introductory' membership mentioned above with regard to alumni also serves a second purpose—this time at the start of careers providing a bridge to new serving members. Part of the concept was that we would offer new RCN members under training an introductory membership for the duration of their training period with the intent of introducing a concept of life-long membership. Work started at Royal Military College (RMC) and the first group of graduates are now on the coasts—we need to transition the individuals to local Branches. The group now at RMC totals thirty-six, and through donors we are affording them the opportunity to join us in events such as our National Conference and the NAC-O Battle of the Atlantic Gala dinner where they not only benefit from exposure to their profession beyond the army centric environment of RMC (in my opinion...) but they also add a unique flavour to the events.

Canada needs a professional home for its naval war-fighters. I submit that NAC needs to be that professional home.

■ EDUCATE CANADIANS

As we have said many times, our main reason is to educate Canadians and in particular Canadian leaders, as to the need for a strong and capable Navy. With the new Cabinet just announced—a Cabinet which arguably reflects Canada—it would seem that the new ministers also reflect the general population's 'sea blindness.' We will need to start at a basic level of awareness and build their understanding block by block. But how can we tackle this?

While our sense of urgency is triggered by the election of a new government, our work needs to be long term, ongoing and persistent. We need to repeat our message(s) over and over again. I suggest we can divide the education mission into three segments.

One initiative should be to 'op-ed' type commentary where the 'product' is a 600 word or so short piece that usually is focussed on a single issue that would have fast turn-around if needed, and often will be written by a NAC member. Length is severely restricted if the piece is to be acceptable to news type media. Given the length restriction, the writing would be commentary, perhaps offering a solution but without analysis.

We must also generate analysis type pieces of several thousand-words, looking into issues in some depth. Fellow member, Dr. Eric Lerhe has suggested an interesting wrinkle with the idea of sponsor-



Our Navy at Work

The Enhanced Naval Boarding Party from HMCS *Winnipeg* loads into the ship's rigid hull inflatable boat to conduct a boarding exercise with HMCS *Athabaskan* during NATO Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE in the coastal waters of Spain as part of Op REASSURANCE on October 24, 2015.



LS Ogle Henry, HMCS *Winnipeg*.

ing an essay contest with a significant prize as a way to get academics to focus on issues of importance to the NAC. Such analysis will also come from our membership but it is expected that we will also need to commission articles.

Our OUTREACH program hopes to educate Canadian leaders with a focus on local leadership. Given all the new Members of Parliament, we need to concentrate on local ridings through the OUTREACH program focussing on MPs, staff and local influencers back in their ridings using local Branches. A second approach will be Ottawa based, identifying those MPs who are sympathetic to our cause—a 'naval caucus' if you will. Following that, an ongoing effort will be needed to keep the 'caucus' informed. Regular appearances before House and Senate committees should be part of the mix.

I submit we need to develop a 'naval caucus.'

■ TOGETHER

So we are different things to different people. Some members may find all foci of value but most will concentrate on fewer. Hopefully in some way we will all support our work to educate Canadians as to the need for a capable and effective Navy. Together we can make a difference. What do you think?

Yours aye,

Jim