



## From the Bridge

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### A Professional Home for Serving RCN and CCG Members

In my Fall 2015 column <http://navalassoc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Autumn-2015.pdf> I suggested there were three areas where we need to concentrate our efforts and that we are in some ways combining what might otherwise be three different organizations:

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

#### SOME BACKGROUND

The 'alumni' pillar has been and continues to be a mainstay of our Branches. We are moving ahead on educating Canadians but where are we with regard to building a professional home for serving members? Some may ask why should we even be thinking of this. Why NAC—are

there not other organizations among those who play in this sandbox who are already doing it?

'Back in the day' I can recall having some knowledge of what was then NOAC but it was for retired folks—certainly there was no promotion of a serving membership. Over the past few decades Commanders of our Navy not only discouraged NOAC membership, but in the case of some Commanders evidently forbade it. Have things changed?

Yes! Things are changing. We start with solid support from our naval leadership. We count members ranging from VAdm Mark Norman, C1 Tom Riefesel, VAdm Ron Lloyd, RAdm Darren Hawco, RAdm Art McDonald, Cmdre Simon Page, Cmdre Luc Cassivi, Cmdre Marta Mulkins, Cmdre Marcel Hallé, Cmdre Jeff Zwick, to fifty or more Naval Cadets at RMC this fall. More work is needed to fill in the gap. At the very least serving folks should have no concern that NAC membership is forbidden or frowned on and in fact, as evidenced by letters from Admiral Norman and others, NAC membership is encouraged.

We have also had some success in expanding our membership to seafarers outside the RCN. CCG Commissioner

Jody Thomas is a long-time member.

## WHAT IS NEEDED?

I first joined the US Naval Institute not long after commissioning and suggest we might look at its mission <http://www.usni.org/about/mission> in considering one aspect of how we might support serving members.

But service in the RCN and CCG is more than a profession that can be pursued through academic study alone. I would argue that in addition to formal discussion and debate via written commentary, there is much to be gained by personal relationships that go outside our circle of shipmates. Those who have gone before have a universe of experiences in other times but the principles are enduring and their subsequent experience outside the service environment provides a wider outlook. Contact with NAC member industry and government leaders provides a broader maritime perspective while helping us build a stronger base of naval and coast guard support.

## WHAT CAN WE OFFER?

With NAC NEWS, *Starshell* and Branch newsletters such as *Lead and Line*, we offer valuable and unique professional information sources to our membership. Our website hosts not only an historical record of these offerings, but various writings on naval affairs. We have a nascent but growing presence on *LinkedIn*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Branch programs such as Ottawa's monthly speaker's evenings fill an information gap while providing exposure to professional experts. Our support of Canada's premier naval publication *Canadian Naval Review*, as evidenced by our funding of the recent defence review special issue, is growing as we search for a means of developing a professional level journal.

It is important that we continue to expand and widen our membership and that we create a unique 'agora'—a meeting place—for those interested in maritime affairs. The informal contacts and discussions are not only key to an individual's professional development, but also Canada's future as we create an exchange of ideas. Much can be done via social media, but face-to-face interaction has real value.

Much effort goes into making our annual conference the success it is. This fall we will host 100-plus serving folks and have 40 or so Naval Cadets from RMC present. Joining the mix will be representatives from Government, Industry and Academia. As for our Battle of Atlantic Gala, what other venue provides this level of interaction reaching from those who have just joined through to our leadership with those having experiences stretching back to World War II?

## CHANGES NEEDED

It would be hard to imagine that dues for serving members are an issue. They are very low and NAC provides a charitable receipt. So there must be other reasons that there are fewer serving members than their numbers might warrant, particularly on the coasts.

Shortly after taking over as President I wrote in this column regarding the way ahead and suggested some changes we might consider <http://navalassoc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SSFromtheBridge-Summer2013.pdf> We have moved ahead on many of the suggestions and accomplished much, but there were suggestions which were expected to have an impact such as our offering more value to serving folks that we need to work on. Suggestions in this vein included:

- Be 'joined at the hip' to the local RCN regular or reserve unit.
- Have meetings so that people can attend after work. Lunchtime meetings limit active participation to retired folk. The new generation of naval personnel value and protect family time on weekends and NAC membership cannot compete with family.
- Meetings should, wherever possible, be held at a local RCN mess, which appeals to those retired, is easy for those working to reach, usually lowers costs and keeps NAC in front of the Navy.
- Branches should get involved with local ROTP/RETP/UTPM naval cadets and reserve division university students to offer introductory memberships.

Unlike our traditional membership, serving folks are posted every few years—we need to make the transfer between branches easier or perhaps establish a national membership. This spring a large group of RMC members were commissioned and went to schools on the coast. We need to maintain contact with these bright young individuals and bring them into the fold.

## WHAT NOW?

- Canada needs an institution that provides a professional home to those in the CCG and RCN that wear the uniform.
- At present there is no such readily identifiable organization although NAC has built some of the required structure.
- While there are other organizations that could perhaps provide this home, NAC is the best equipped to do so—it is what we do.