



## Some observations on where we are and the way ahead!

First, thanks to Mike Morres and the team from our Vancouver Island Branch who conceived and staged an outstanding multi-day series of events — a great conference and meetings in a spectacular setting. The meetings also provided a platform for discussion of ideas which I suspect will be the basis of our development over the next few years.

I would also like to thank Ken Summers for his stewardship over the past two years. Developing and achieving agreement on new by-laws — the basis for organization of our association going forward — required patience and leadership. The outstanding Victoria conference program was also lead personally by Ken.

I presented some ideas to both the National Board and the AGM regarding who we are, what Canada needs, where do we want to go and how do we get there. With regard to where we are, NAC membership has been in decline for two decades as shown by Figure 1 — you have probably seen this graph before. Figure 2 shows trends by the largest Branches. This is anything but unique — almost all similar organizations are experiencing such a decline, which if allowed to continue, will in short order result in the organizations disintegrating.

### ♦ WHY NAC?

I submit that:

- Canada's Navy needs support.
- We as NAC members accept this as our primary role.

As a maritime nation with 90% of its trade moving by sea, Canada is indeed a country whose economy floats on salt

water. Canada needs:

- Citizens who understand the need for a Navy.
- Government leaders who understand the need for a Navy.
- Informed, critical debate of naval issues of a quality that is beyond reproach.
- An industrial base capable of delivering ships and payload.
- An organization dedicated to these tasks. Let's call it an 'Institute' for purposes of discussion.

### ♦ WHO ARE WE?

Our membership has changed over the years but perhaps will change even more in the future. Historically, our membership has been composed of self-identified individuals who served. Originally, the membership was composed of all ranks but subsequently changed to officers only. Members were young.

Today we have very few serving members, some industry members but our association is overwhelmingly composed of older retired RCN officers.

In the future it seems likely we will have Branches with two different types of membership depending on whether the Branch is co-located with a RCN main base. It is likely that Halifax, Victoria and Ottawa will be dominated by retired and serving RCN types, both officers and non-commissioned members. Other locations will hopefully be able to attract those who may or may not have served, but want to support the RCN.

Most members view NAC from a Branch perspective. The main attraction is camaraderie. Education of Branch members and local population, including local government, is a core

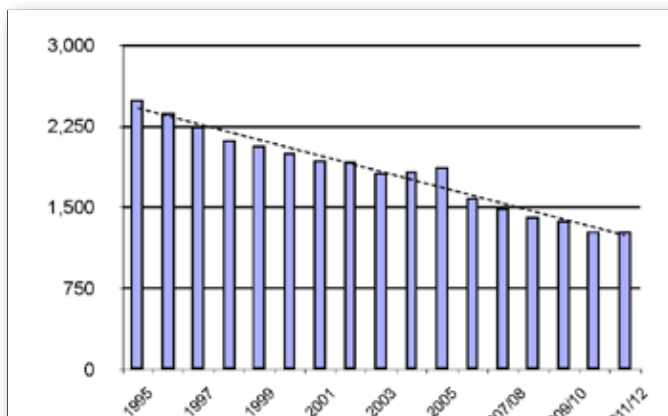


FIGURE 1: NAC OVERALL MEMBERSHIP TRENDS

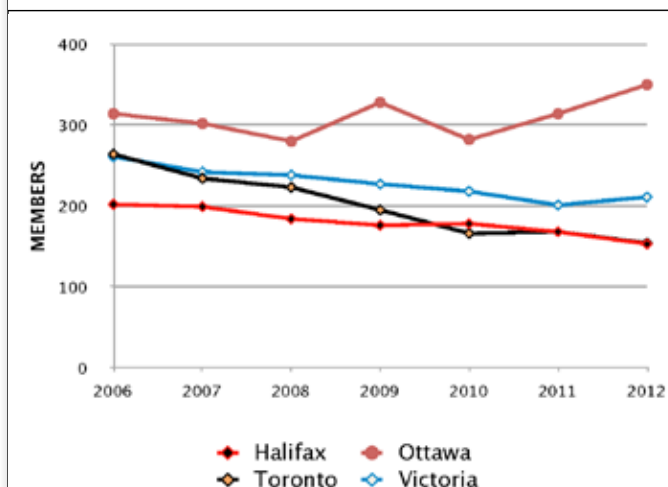


FIGURE 2: MEMBERSHIP TRENDS - LARGEST BRANCHES

function across all Branches; however, events vary Branch to Branch. The Branch is everything to some and will usually be the front line and represent the NAC to most members.

However, the outside world views NAC primarily from a National perspective and we also need to look at NAC from a different angle than the Branch. National interests will have involvement by a wider variety of members with interests beyond the offerings of Branches that may only appeal to a minority of our membership. An important National role is maintaining a strong relationship with RCN and government leadership while focussing on providing an open forum for informed discussion of the RCN and other naval oriented national security issues.

So are we members of a Branch or National? The answer is when we join NAC we are both and as members pay dues to both. It seems to me we are a bit schizophrenic on this issue which at times leads to differences of opinion where that need not be the case. Directors, under our new bylaws, developed in accordance with the new Canada Not For Profit Act, will be elected via separate elections on the same basis as Branch Directors — one member, one vote. How a Branch operates is up to the Branch Board. How National operates is the job of the National Board.

### ◆ THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE

Branches are the heart of our Association and we will only ever be as strong as our Branches. Change necessary to turn around our declining membership needs to start at the Branch level. I suggest that Branches need to:

- Be joined at the hip with the local RCN regular or reserve unit.
- Consider the needs and wants of prospects — be they serving members, retiring members, corporate members or the general public.
- Have meetings so that people can attend after work. Lunchtime meetings limit active participation to retired folks. The new generation of naval personnel value and protect family time on weekends and NAC membership cannot compete with that family time and win.
- 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 offer Introductory Memberships and make sure a NAC representative attends all retirement functions [DWDs] to present NAC Introductory Memberships.

At the same time, National needs to deliver more:

- Members may wonder what they get for their annual dues and National must demonstrate they are providing value for their money.
- Communications is a key. We need to reach out to members at least once per week with something of value.
- National needs to communicate directly with members in order to provide information in a timely manner.
- Perhaps we need to create a parallel electronic community

through such services as LinkedIn, email, Twitter — not Facebook.

However, these things will not matter unless we can reverse the downward membership trend and begin recruiting more members. Some suggestions:

- We have to offer value. Who are the target members, what do they want?
- To be successful we need not only retirees but also serving members, academics, government and industry representation.
- We also need to get the RCN leadership on board — both regular and reserve.
- We need to offer an Introductory Membership (IM) to draw in naval cadets, all those undergoing classification training and retiring RCN personnel.
- We must be on the DWD agenda and offer an IM, particularly in Halifax, Victoria and Ottawa.
- The focus must be Branch based and tailored to local conditions.

Canada needs a forum where naval issues can be discussed. Naval leaders, serving and retired, believe we need an organization which can help educate Canadians, advance the naval profession and provide an open forum for informed discussion of the RCN and other naval oriented national security issues. There are at least four models as to how this might be achieved: university based, a new organization, Navy League of Canada based or NAC based. A 'virtual' organization could be started with the funds available using volunteers and funding focussing on support of academics and authors interested in addressing items of naval interest. A primary task is to get the need for a strong navy in front of Canadians. For this to be successful, we must work closely with the RCN but tackle issues whether or not aligned with some particular aspect of RCN thinking. This must be, I suggest, the main focus of National.

These changes will only be possible if we can generate the funding required to support such initiatives. We seem to have little or no problem funding Branch operations from local dues. Increased funding however, is needed to support development of an 'Institute' and clearly member dues cannot support such an initiative. As a start, funding can be generated through Branch based functions such as our annual conference coincident with the AGM meeting and a recurring social function such as a Battle of the Atlantic dinner. Ottawa has implemented this and in the first go around it has generated a surplus of around \$50K. Later on we should also look at creating an ongoing continuous revenue stream — such as sale of high quality NAC and RCN logoed items.

The NAC is not alone in its interest in supporting the RCN — there are many sister organizations which share our interests. Many also share our dilemma of declining membership. The C&POs, RCNA, SOAC, WRENS, UNTD and CNAG are all generally losing membership and their futures are in doubt. We need to open up our thinking to reach out to the members of these organizations and explain how we share their interests. We should also look at how we can cooperate with university centres which share our interests.

## ✦ SOME STEPS

Some changes can be actioned immediately, others will take some time and some will take years. Initiatives we should immediately undertake include:

- Initiate direct and frequent National communication with members, delivering value.
- Establish a Branch Introductory Membership for retiring members, naval cadets and those undergoing initial naval training. This would be free to the retiring member for the first year, to the naval cadet until commissioning and otherwise during the period

of initial training. Branches would not have to remit dues to National.

- Reach out to like-minded national organizations. As an initial tranche we would approach UNTD, C&POs and NLOC to see how we might cooperate.
- Open a National dialogue with the Reserve leadership.
- Encourage membership by and become close to RCN leadership including Commanders and Command Chiefs.
- Examine Branch makeup, meetings and value offered.
- Start work for the 'Institute' concept.