

# UNTDA – NRAC 2023 Conference Mess Dinner Address

by Commodore Marta Mulkins

May 12, 2023

President – many many distinguished guests - chers collègues - shipmates –  
In a room with so many perhaps quite literally – captains of ‘something’ – it is  
indeed an honour to be the one addressing you.

What a great moment we are having here together celebrating the legacy in  
friendships of the **University Naval Training Divisions**, and now also the  
significant accomplishment of moving forward with our new **Naval Reserve  
Association of Canada**. How fitting that this should be against the backdrop of  
Centennial celebrations for the Naval Reserve – of the generational historic  
moment of the coronation of a new King and Queen of Canada – and of course,  
last weekend’s commemoration of the ultimate, most selfless sacrifice of the  
Battle of the Atlantic-  
– we are at the confluence of many streams – each one of them, about service.

When Roger Elmes first approached me to consider speaking at this dinner, I  
thought that there was no way I could talk about the history of the UNTD – with  
names like Thomas (and others) possibly being present – nor could I really speak  
about the history of the Naval Reserve, recognising that as much as I know, again  
many in the audience know so much more!

When Roger nudged me in the direction of sharing a little bit of my own path that  
has brought me to the UNTDA – now NRAC – I welcomed the idea.

I first learned about the UNTD when I myself was in my first years in the Naval Reserve, when I met the parents of one of the new friends I made upon transferring to HMCS CARLETON. Mr. Eric Wang had been a UNTD at DONNACONA and subsequently went on to have a long diplomatic career in what we now call Global Affairs; partly through hearing his stories, which I would have to say were in the 'good old fashioned sailorly tradition' (naughty!) - and later at various naval reserve units I gradually came to understand just how powerful a program the UNTD was;

- you who were UNTDs made strong and life-long bonds of camaraderie through your university and naval reserve unit affiliations,
- you were introduced to how tough and rewarding a vocation of service (especially service at sea) might be - and
- you took that formative ethos forward with you - where you as a group - excelled in every walk of Canadian life.

In more recent years, while I was working in the Navy's Strategic Communication team we grappled with how to explain to Canadians the value of their Navy – how to overcome the much dreaded 'maritime blindness'. I appreciated even more the power of the UNTD as a strategic communications instrument which ensured that – wherever their eventual careers took them – to the Regular Navy yes but also to industry –public service - or the professions – the UNTDs did not need convincing of the value of a navy because they / you already understood it. You understood the capability of a navy - and you understood that, even in peacetime, navies - by virtue of ensuring freedom of navigation on the high seas - are also

one of the ultimate underwriters of the global economy from which we all benefit.

Most of all I learned that - along with the veterans of the Second World and Korean Wars, UNTDs were the generations which, sharing the very real and recent memory of the devastation of war - were determined to build a better country – which you did do and which is in no small part the stable and prosperous modern state that we all enjoy today. For that we owe a greater debt.

I would like to say that the Naval Reserve has taken on that mantle today – but perhaps not with such relative impact, as in the past. But the fact remains that generations of Naval Reservists have followed a similar pattern - have gone on to have equally consequential careers, including some in positions where they could influence decision-making about naval capability - but more generally–

- we have all benefited from those same lessons of leadership AND of teamwork -
- we've all learned discipline – and many of us have also learned a bit of diplomacy - unlike with Armies or Air Forces, when we visit a port in a foreign country – it is often for a cocktail party, not a war – and
- hopefully some or all of this may have enabled our success in our civilian careers - in our communities - along the way.

Certainly my own career has exemplified that and I do credit my naval experience with enabling me to meet with what success I may claim to have had. That said I am confident that my 19-year-old self would have been amazed at the

opportunities I have had – and might have asked – but I thought I was only going to stay in until I graduated university??

I grew up in a family of pilots- I had never heard of the Reserve – so how did I join?

Like some of you here tonight I joined in the era of the Summer Youth Employment Program - one of my best friends desperately wanted to join the SYEP because she had a crush on a boy who had joined the summer before. It wasn't even my crush!

I became a diesel mechanic; I really enjoyed being a diesel mechanic; I probably could have remained a diesel mechanic until one trip in Porte St Louis when we were transiting the East River past Manhattan and my engineroom supervisor would not let me stay on the upper decks to watch New York City slip by (rightly so – as I could later admit). But which at the time made me start to think maybe it would be better to be on the bridge. So there it really began.

But I have no doubt whatsoever, that my civilian career did at every stage- benefit from the training, hard lessons sometimes and experience that the navy gave me (and I note that a few of my “task masters” are in the audience here today...)

I became much more confident leading teams– as a junior architect - including leading rough and tough construction teams.

My career was just a series of little steps - These little steps eventually led me - like many of my illustrious forebears here Ms Orthlieb – Mr. Zuliani - Ms Bennett - Mr. Craig — to command the Naval Reserve. I was motivated to do it because I believe so strongly not only in the military capability that the Naval Reserve can and should offer to Canada – but also how it can make us all better citizens.

So when I was recruited to join the UNTDA by a certain Mr. Glenn Davidson and Mr. Graham Scott, I was intrigued – and honoured (at my age, it is actually kind of fun to join an organisation where you are one of the more junior members!)

When, a few months in, Graham asked me if I might assist the Board in determining the future of the UNTDA I was again intrigued – and motivated. I will not say that I put a thumb on the scale of all the consultations that I did with the Board members and then-regional representatives (I did not), but I was quite confident that the answer to the institution’s future could not possibly be ‘it’s time to fold up the tent of the UNTDA and say thanks for the memories’.

Simply, the motivations today in the now several post-UNTD generations - remain the same. We too want to protect and extend those amazing bonds of friendship; we want to preserve and share our stories – because no one will tell them as well as we will – and we have some pretty amazing stories – which sometimes improve in the telling... Institutional memories can be short... when they want to be. Best we take charge of our legacy.

There are some differences today however, ladies and gentlemen – we spoke about some of them in the panel earlier today. Recall the friend at CAR that I mentioned in my earlier comments, whose father had been a UNTD. Recently, she was the CTO of IBM Canada, and today is in charge of AWS Cloud Solutions. Very impressive – she is a bit of a captain of industry herself. But notwithstanding her father’s path – she remained steadfastly a diesel mechanic, and retired some years ago a CPO2, qualified as a CEng in a KIN Class. You all know – (but it is still fun to share) that this not exclusive of the Junior Ranks mess either. Naval Reserve NCMs are firefighters and carpenters, they are professionals, (lawyers, engineers, teachers); they are academics and even Members of Parliament. I just found out last week that DON is working on innovations for emergency broadcasts in dense urban environments because ...they can – they have an astrophysicist in the Naval Communicator department.

All to say – there is a very deep and wide ocean of Naval Reserve talent today – many of whom will reach out our new NRAC. At this moment of change of the watch, or refit or whichever analogue you feel is more à propos - the passion and principles of the UNTDA will live on in the NRAC.

I leave you with a thought. I think we all understand that institutions that succeed are often motivated by a clear, articulated vision or mission statement, often underpinned by values or ethics frameworks. In the not-too-distant past, institutions - especially military ones - accomplished this –in part - with mottos. Mottos can intrigue and inspire. They can be directive – like CAR’s – With these Arms we conquer’ – or HAIDA’s very fierce and inherited historical command to

‘Fear God – Honour the Queen-’ (which now takes on a nostalgic tone once again). Mottos can capture an ethos – DON’s ‘main dans la main’ or one of my personal favourites - YOR’s ‘Bon Espoir’.

Surely one of the best ones to capture an ethos and to inspire great deeds has to be the Naval Reserve’s motto –

**De l’audace – encore de l’audace – et toujours de l’audace!**

In this I hear great energy and optimism – maybe a little nod to the fact that we’ve had to work even harder to succeed in the face of extra challenge – but above all else, I hear determination – even bloody-mindedness – to succeed against the odds.

(We would do well to recall our motto every day as we embark upon the more serious ‘whither the reserve’ questions of the ongoing DPU.)

Which brings us to the UNTDA’s stalwart – and clearly prescriptive motto - which orders us to – Learn – Serve – Lead.

No, I am not going to propose a new motto for the NRAC here tonight – nor do I suggest that it necessarily must change – but if in the fullness of time - when all is said and done – and the new constituency does decide that indeed, a new motto would be in order, I do hope that it draws on that civilised discipline of the UNTDA commitment to service; that it also be inspired by the Naval Reserve’s daring ethos – but there is a piece that in my view is missing – and in fact we don’t see frequently at all in the mottos we typically see – but that breathes the life into the UNTDA – and hopefully now the NRAC – the camaraderie between shipmates, we all, in that island of steel - and beyond - together.

This is truly the tie that binds us; long may that be.

Thank you to the UNTD for your service –including in the UNTDA - and congratulations on this extraordinary transition, so skilfully executed under Graham’s – Jennifer’s – Daniel’s – and Ross’s leadership. We can only wish for another challenging and consequential 100 years for the Naval Reserve, and surely, in close formation, line abreast, 100 years for the new NRAC.

Thank you all!