

## FEATURE ARTICLE

# Untidys ho! The University Naval Training Division (UNTD) Story

By Bill Clearihue, UNTD Donnacona '64

*Photos courtesy the UNTD Association of Canada*

The UNTD was officially formed by Naval Order 2854 on June 19, 1943 as a wartime measure, but the inception actually dates back to 1938 and a chance meeting between Albert Wesley (Jack) Baker, and naval reserve Cdr Ernest Reginald (Reg) Brock.

Baker was a prominent entomology professor at the Ontario Agricultural College (now the University of Guelph), and a well-connected and prominent Navy Leaguer. While on vacation in Jamaica he was invited on board HMCS *Saguenay* (D-79) when the ship made a port visit at Montego Bay, and it was there he met Cdr Brock, the commanding officer of the Montreal RCNVR division, who was doing his summer reserve training on board the River-class destroyer. The two struck up a friendship that lasted for decades.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 all fit, male university students were required to join the Canadian Army's Canadian Officer Training Corps (COTC), which had formed in 1912. By 1941 the Royal Canadian Air Force had created its own campus University Air Squadron (UAS) recruiting program, but there was no such naval organization. With one of his own sons reaching university age, Jack Baker realized there was no way for young men to get involved in the wartime navy other than to quit school and join up. The navy was losing all potential officer candidates to the other two services.

Baker set about to correct this situation, and contacted his friend Reg Brock who was by now a captain in the RCNR, and Commanding Officer Reserve Divisions. When he pitched his plan for an equivalent navy program, Captain Brock not only bought into the idea but put Jack Baker in charge of making it happen, giving Baker a wartime commission as a lieutenant-commander. In conjunction with HMCS *Star* in Hamilton, a pilot training program was formed in 1942 consisting of eight senior COTC cadets. On the successful conclusion of that term in 1943, the UNTD was formally stood up, and Jack Baker set about visiting campuses and naval reserve divisions (NRDs) across the country to create the individual units and initiate recruiting. Winter and summer phase training began that year with 400 or so UNTDs being attested into the RCNVR as stokers second class (engineers), or as ordinary seamen (everybody else). A UNTD in his second year became an officer candidate, distinguished by an all-white cap tally.



The UNTD Association's motto is Learn, Serve, Lead.

At the conclusion of hostilities the compulsory nature of the UNTD, COTC and UAS was removed, which not surprisingly resulted in a sharp drop in enrolment. The RCN was willing to consider a retooled peacetime UNTD program for the RCN(R), and so Jack Baker set out to find the person who could do that. He persuaded the former wartime RCN Director of Naval Intelligence, himself a Rhodes Scholar and academic, Cdr Charles Herbert (Herbie) Little, to put off his return to civilian life and take up the cause.

There were a number of education assistance programs offered to Second World War naval veterans, and on campus they found a welcoming environment in the UNTD. They brought a maturity and experience to the program which contributed to its success. By the summer of 1949 Cdr Little had developed a robust training program and succeeded in elevating the UNTD to officer cadet status, properly kitted out, trained and treated as such.

In the early 1950s, Canadian Service College naval cadets were incorporated into the UNTD system for purposes of pay, administration and training, and attached to naval reserve divisions. The RCN was replete with war assets: people, ships and establishments, and the UNTD recruiting level was determined by that capacity. At its high point there were more than 1,000 "Untidys" in training.

The formation of the UN (1945), NATO (1949) and NORAD (1957), as well as the Korean War (1950-53), Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and Cold War kept interest in the military and the UNTD at a high level. In the mid-1950s the size of the RCN was four times what it is today on a per capita basis. The average naval reserve division had twice as many active serving members in the wardroom as there are members in the entire ship's company of an average NRD today.



This page from the 1948 University of Toronto yearbook shows what UNTDs looked like then. All 10 of these graduates entered the UNTD in the wartime years, some going on active service before returning to school and the UNTD.

By the mid-1950s the importance of a university education was embraced by DND for officers of all services. Cdr Little formulated the Regular Officer Training Plan as a combination of the UNTD, academia and Canadian Service College regimens he had experienced, and that program exists essentially unaltered to this day. In 1991, Cdr Herbie Little received the Admiral's Medal for his work in transitioning the UNTD from wartime to peacetime operations.

By the late 1950s enrolment levels for the UNTD and sister programs were in steady decline. The Defence White Paper of 1964 spelled the beginning of the end for the UNTD, and in that year the intake numbered only 150 cadets. A number of NRDs were closed. The last formal UNTD intake was in 1966, with an "accidental" intake of eight cadets in the fall of 1967. With Forces Unification in 1968, the UNTD ceased to exist at the end of that year's summer training. Jack Baker attended the graduation of the last UNTD class, which included his grandson. Commodore Reg Brock, who crossed the bar in 1964, himself had two sons in the UNTD in the early 1950s.

During its 25-year run the UNTD enrolled 8,000 members whose impact on the navy and society in general is still being felt in substantial ways. The UNTD ceased to exist in 1968, but reserve officer training did not miss a heartbeat. By 1969 the tri-service Reserve Officer University Training Plan (ROUTP) had fielded its first members and has been running under various aliases ever since. By the mid-1980s the UNTD graduates were filling the command structure of the naval reserve. They in turn trained and mentored the ROUTPs, who now occupy these same positions. Although the University Naval Training Division Association of Canada (UNTDA) has always embraced the ROUTP cadre, this was formally acknowledged by the UNTD Association in 2014 to make it abundantly clear that ROUTPs are welcome on an equal footing.

## The UNTD Association of Canada

In 1985 there were a number of major events celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the RCN. One of these was the renaming of the naval reserve ROUTP program back to the UNTD program, which prompted serving UNTDs to initiate a number of well-attended reunions across the country. From that connectivity the "White Twist Clubs" were formed as a national organization, but within two years both the White Twist Clubs and the UNTD as a renamed program were gone.

Regional and local groups continued to associate with varying degrees of formality and in 1987 the UNTD Association of Upper Canada was formed in Toronto. It was named to distinguish itself from the Ottawa group, and with a high concentration of ex-cadets was able to flourish. It was re-purposed and renamed in 2001 to the UNTD Association of Canada to reflect its increasingly national scope, although most of the members and executive were still from Southwestern Ontario. That demographic has been purposely shifted over the years and there are now regional directors for Newfoundland, the Maritimes, Quebec, Ottawa, Kingston, Manitoba, Saskatchewan/Alberta, BC Mainland and Vancouver Island. Of the 18 directors only seven are now from the Greater Toronto Area, and ironically none specifically represent Toronto.

The UNTDA has published a newsletter without interruption since 1987, as well as a book of anecdotes called *UNTiDy Tales of Naval Officer Cadets* (see our review on page 18). At least four books have been written by members that specifically chronicle how their UNTD experience shaped their lives. Well-known personalities such as author Peter C. Newman, crime writer Max Haines, politician and diplomat Roy MacLaren, and former Minister of National Defence Bill Graham have also mentioned their UNTD experiences within their own published autobiographies.

A publicly available UNTDA website was initiated in 1999 and serves as a repository for member information, archival files including yearbooks and newsletters, and links to related information.

The UNTDA continues to organize and host reunions of regional, national, and international scope as its primary mandate. The UNTD Association and individual members maintain strong leadership connections to virtually all other existing naval old-boy networks and heritage organizations. For example, about one-quarter of the membership of the Naval Association of Canada is comprised of UNTD alumni, and a number of UNTDs have served as president of the Canadian Naval Memorial Trust, and as commanding officer of HMCS *Sackville*.

The UNTD Association of Canada looks forward to welcoming new members. Membership in the UNTDA is \$25 per year, and is open to all alumni of any regular or reserve naval officer training program from any era. The primary use of member dues is to support reunions, various heritage initiatives, and incidental costs of running the organization. Directors are volunteers and receive no compensation for their time or travel.

A membership application is available from the website at: [www.UNTD.org](http://www.UNTD.org)



The last "accidental" group of UNTDs shown here in 1968 with their term lieutenant Roger Elmes (centre), current president of the UNTD Association since 2014.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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A photo from the 2009 UNTD reunion held at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. Dozens of reunions have been held across the country over the last 30 years, the most recent being in Victoria last April. Pictured here are Untidys from three decades (L to R): Bill Clearihue (Donnacona '64), Gil Hutton (Star '46), Bill Thomas (Prevost '59), and Bob Williamson (Star '57).

Gil Hutton crossed the bar in 2010, and his ashes were committed to the sea in October 2011 from the crew quarterdeck of *Queen Mary 2* in mid-Atlantic. The ceremony was officiated by Bill Thomas before a group of 70 UNTDs and spouses en route to the UK for yet another UNTD reunion.