

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE RESERVES: 10 YEARS LATER – SELECTED CONFERENCE SPEAKING NOTES

AIR AND NAVY RESERVE PERSPECTIVES

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In the interests of full disclosure, it's necessary for me preface my remarks with a few points.

Having been around as long as I have, I come from the old school of MARS officer, who had very little contact with naval reservists through his operational career. Actually, I probably had more than most of my contemporaries, due to a variety of unique circumstances, right from my earliest days in the Navy. Because I was at RMC, my MARS II naval training was in the summer, and to flesh out the numbers some reservists augmented our course. We were young and didn't know any better, and they were all university students too, so we didn't really notice any difference. If anything, my lasting impression was that our Course Training Officer had almost as low an opinion of the "shads" as he did of us "MilCol pukes".

My next encounter was a few years later, when I was serving on a West Coast destroyer. I reported to my captain late one June (I think it was 1982), having spent the previous four months on a long weapons course in Halifax. He observed that I had not been to sea for the previous four months, so I was to report Monday morning (this was a Friday afternoon) on board the gate vessel HMCS Porte de la Reine as the Training Officer. My wife was not too impressed with my taking off for a three week cruise up the Inside Passage, but I found to my surprise that those little boats were more than just an

obstacle to navigation when we big ships were entering and leaving harbour, and were peopled by some exceptionally well-motivated folks. The officer-of-the-watch manoeuvres were a little slow time at only 10 knots, but to spice it up we did them at half-standard distance. There were no serious accidents, it was my first experience with women at sea (only in the platonic sense, I hasten to add), and the fresh-caught salmon BBQ almost every night was excellent.

The next encounter was nearly 15 years later, in the mid-1990s, when I was researching my dissertation, and I had to hunt down someone who had signed out a box of records I needed to see at the National Archives. We were both investigating the mutinies in the RCN in 1949, which is the subject for an entirely separate presentation. It turned out he was a reservist at HMCS Carleton, a Leading Seaman in the signals branch, and not the only budding naval historian in the unit. A group of us started meeting informally and eventually I was invited to a junior ranks mess dinner as the guest speaker on the subject of the tradition of mutiny in the RCN. I suppose I should be happy to report I seem not to have been too much of an inspiration.

The final encounter came after David Bercuson invited me to address this conference. When I started asking questions from my former navy colleagues about the Naval Reserve, someone on the naval staff misinterpreted my interest, and to make a long story short, offered me a Class B position. It was not far removed from much of the analysis I've been doing lately, so I start in January as the Director of Strategic Communications for the Maritime Staff in Ottawa. This raises an interesting observation on the discussion of the supplementary reserve from yesterday: I had signed up for the Supp Reserve when I retired, but had received a letter last year that NDHQ was doing a

cull of the roll and I was being dropped; fortunately, the bureaucracy of ADM HR (Mil) seems not to have gotten around to actually doing it, so my re-enrolment is proceeding quite smoothly. The only hitch is a continuing discussion about hair length, my position being that it's one issue the European navies seem to be much more progressive on.

I offer all this as disclosure, because I am in very nearly complete agreement with my two impending bosses. Admiral MacLean and Commodore Blakeley, between them, have given a fairly exhaustive run-down on the Naval Reserve, and despite any appearance of bias, in all honesty I would say nothing much to contradict most of what they have said. Canada's Naval Reserve is a vibrant, generally well-run organization, with no major problems other than those of resource shortfall that Admiral MacLean identified yesterday as being in common with the regular force. It is an institution I have no hesitation in joining.

But in the interests of earning my keep, I really should expand a bit, and I think it worth stressing a few points they made, and observe on a couple of others they glanced over, or may not even be aware of. There are some underlying reasons for the Naval Reserve's success that may be of some use to the other services, and especially should not be tampered with as the Canadian Forces struggles to rationalize the larger reserve organization. There are also some challenges that need to be addressed to assure the continued viability of the Naval Reserve.

Looking first at the reasons for their success, I would like to refer back to a comment Admiral MacLean made in passing, that in 1990 the Navy had the choice as to whether the Naval Reserve should be an augmentation force or adopt a specialization role. You will recall that this came as the Cold War was ending, and many of the

traditional rationales for the reserves were disappearing. Critically, the Navy opted for specialization, allocating the new minehunting vessels being built, what would become the Kingston class, to the Reserves. The importance of this step cannot be understated. I'm not a fan of the MCDVs, as I will discuss later, but those vessels were the catalyst for renewal, converting what had been a well-meaning but operationally irrelevant organization into a key player in the defence of Canada. HMCS Kingston was commissioned in the fall of 1996, and a major concern back then was the long-term ability of the Reserve to man the ships, the common assumption being that they would increasingly have to be manned by regular force personnel. That evidently has not been the case. The success of the organization is due largely to three factors. These have been touched upon by the others, but they are worth stressing:

First, is having a dedicated operational mission. The specific and exclusive task of maritime coastal defence includes general coastal operations, sovereignty and fisheries patrols, support to RCMP preventive patrols, mine countermeasures and route survey operations, and initial at-sea training of MARS officers, regular as well as reserve. Importantly, a cap has been placed upon this role, to keep it in the box so to speak, in that there is no expectation that reservists will augment regular force crews of frigates and destroyers; some reservists have deployed in them, for example to the Persian Gulf, but they are the exception and not the rule. Additionally, there are a couple of subsidiary elements to this mission, namely the Port Security Units, which provide full-time waterside force protection to both the East and West Coast dockyards, and the Naval Cooperation and Guidance to Shipping mission (the NCAGS, formerly known as NCS, or naval control of shipping).

Second, is having a central command focus. An effective career management system, a national promotion system, and dedicated training resources, all coordinated out of a separate Naval Reserve Headquarters, have resulted in continued institutional stability and oversight, and also permit flexibility to address personnel manning shortcomings.

Third, is the distinctly naval manifestation of the Total Force concept. With the Naval Reserve constituting about one-third of the naval population, and because the Naval Reserve participates in domestic operations on a daily basis due to their dedicated mission, the Navy has achieved a high degree of total force integration. All headquarters in the Navy combine regular and reserve personnel in varying degrees, and training courses and facilities often combine reserve and regular members.

Turning briefly to challenges, there are two major ones. The first is the future of the NCAGS element, the Naval Coordination and Guidance to Shipping role, which is under threat of being done away with, partly due to its own success. Recently, the officers in this classification were converted to a new Intelligence (Sea) classification, unique to the reserves, combining intelligence functions with their traditional training in shipping control. This excellent new capability permits them to contribute effectively to what are evolving into the Marine Security Operations Centres (the MSOCs), one on each coast and another in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they will serve as watchkeepers and analysts. The ratings in the trade, however, have achieved no similar high profile visibility, and even though elements deployed to the Arabian Sea on Operation Apollo where they provided assessments of shipping traffic that were vital to the surface

picture compilation, it is distressing to hear regular force commanders not familiar with those operations to question the utility of their function.

The second challenge also is due to the success of the Naval Reserve, and it revolves around the future of the Kingston class. Essentially, in many ways the skill levels of the ships' companies now exceed the operational capabilities of the platform. Built for minesweeping in protected harbour approaches, the MCDVs flat out in a calm sea can barely make 15 knots, not what you would call a hot pursuit, and they are lousy seakeepers on the Grand Banks in February. Something bigger is required to fulfill the future expectations of the coast defence role, but that is a lower priority amongst all of the other ship replacement programs the Navy must manage. The choice of eventual platform replacement will be a critical factor in the continued contribution of the Naval Reserve.

Still, if all of your challenges stem from success, it's an enviable position to be in. The lesson here, in conclusion, is an important one, especially in this era of transformation. That is, that something doesn't have to be new and flashy or sexy to have a valid place in the future Canadian Forces. Give people a dedicated, useful and legitimate role, provide them the tools and institutional support to do it, and they will perform to exceed expectations.

Thank you.