

**Navigating Through The Navy:**  
**A qualitative inquiry into Royal Canadian Navy culture**

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**August, 2013**

**A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in Culture and Values in Education.**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study aims to describe and understand the cultural identity of those in the Royal Canadian Navy. In this inquiry I use the autoethnography as a methodology, and in-depth interviews with members of the Royal Canadian Navy to understand the meaning of navy culture and its implications on the daily lives of its members. My analysis is shaped by the works of Hall (1996, 2000), Ellis & Bochner (2002), and Barker (2000). The participants answered a series of questions in an attempt to better understand what they perceived to be the most salient aspects of Royal Canadian Navy culture. They also expressed their thoughts on how the Royal Canadian Navy has shaped their identities and whether being a member of the Royal Canadian Navy has instilled a sense of belonging and recognition in their lives. My autoethnography recounts my experiences with the Royal Canadian Navy and how I interpreted its culture. I conclude with the implications the findings may have for future studies into Royal Canadian Navy culture such as gender issues and alcoholism.

## Résumé

Cette étude qualitative a pour objectif de décrire et de comprendre l'identité culturelle de ceux de la Marine Royale Canadienne. Dans cette étude, j'utilise la méthode de recherche qualitative d'autoethnographie et j'entretiens avec des membres de la Marine Royale du Canada afin de comprendre le sens de la culture marine et de ses implications sur la vie quotidienne de ses membres. Mon analyse est façonnée par les travaux de Hall (1996, 2000), Ellis & Bochner (2002), et Barker (2000). Les participants ont répondu à une série de questions pour tenter de mieux comprendre ce qu'ils perçoient comme les aspects les plus saillants de la culture Marine Royale Canadienne. Ils ont également exprimé leurs réflexions sur la façon donc la Marine Royale du Canada a façonnée leur identité et si d'être un membre de la Marine Royale du Canada a insufflé un sentiment d'appartenance et de reconnaissance. Mon autoethnographie raconte mes expériences avec la Marine Royale Canadienne et la façon dont j'ai interprété sa culture. Je conclus avec les conséquences que les résultats peuvent avoir pour de futures études dans la culture de la Marine Royale du Canada telles que les questions de sexe et l'alcoolisme.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without a multitude of people who supported me completely throughout this odyssey. I would first like to thank my supervisor Dr. Mary H. Maguire who accepted me as her graduate student. Mary, I know I wouldn't have written this thesis if you hadn't convinced me to do so. I was unsure I would be able to accomplish such an endeavour while working full time as a secondary school science teacher and working as a reservist in the Royal Canadian Navy. However, you convinced me and I am glad you did as this thesis is a record of my life that I otherwise would have never done. Your phone calls, emails, and chapter revisions made it possible for me to get through my thesis efficiently.

I would like to thank the members of HMCS Donnacona who participated in my thesis. I am in debt to LS Charest-Trudel, LS Simard, PO Niro and Slt Wong. They took the time to answer my questions and made this thesis more meaningful in my pursuit to better understand Royal Canadian Navy culture.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife as I would be nowhere without her unwavering support. During the writing process of my thesis I was under a lot of stress and anxiety. We had a wedding to plan and a newly bought house to organize. She dealt with the brunt of the work so that I could have time to write. Thank you Emilie for being my best friend and my constant source of encouragement.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

"I walked past HMCS Donnacona's main entrance for the last time today. I paused for a moment and stood at attention as is tradition when leaving the building. This time my pause was a little longer as if only to prolong the inevitable. Today I lost the strongest cultural influence I have ever known and a piece of my identity goes with it. This place was a home full of people that shared in the same beliefs, customs, traditions, language and values as I. Despite knowing I made the right choice in leaving I can't help but feel a void slowly forming. I fear that losing this culture will not be an easy challenge to overcome."

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 15, 2012)

I begin with this field note taken during my last day with the RCN as an introduction to my inquiry into RCN culture. Why was this culture so important to me? What does culture mean in regards to the construction of one's identity? Culture is defined as "the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (Bates and Plog, 1990, p7).

I believe that the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) has been a culture largely unexplored academically. This is principally due to the fact that if one is to understand RCN one must generally be a member and join the Canadian Forces (CF).

I had been a member of the RCN for over twelve years and in that time I had never truly appreciated it as a cultural entity. I took what I learned and experienced for granted while never truly understanding the fundamental impact of its culture on my everyday life. Only now that I have left the RCN do I finally understand its cultural implications and the experiences I shared within that institution.

I aim to retell my life experiences within the Royal Canadian Navy in hopes of better analyzing its cultural aspects and enlightening those who might wish to join or learn more about this culture.

The exploration of RCN culture is important to me because it largely shaped my own identity as I came to adopt the values and beliefs commonly associated with the RCN, which I will examine in more detail in this inquiry.

## **My background**

I come from a rather mixed cultural background. My father originates from the former Yugoslavia. He was born in a small rural village in what is now Slovenia and came to Canada when he was thirteen years old. My mother was born in Mexico City and lived there until she met my father, who was travelling at the time. Much like a romance movie cliché they met, fell in love and got married. They decided that the belle province of Quebec would be the place they would settle down and raise a family.

Neither of my parents spoke French and so I had to contend with learning a language that was foreign to me in a place that demanded it be my primary language of communication. English is my first language despite coming from a household that was at many times speckled with Spanish and Slavic lingo. My parents only spoke their languages to us when they were angry or upset, and I suspect it was their method of concealing words which were undoubtedly discourteous in nature. In truth my parents were concerned that if they spoke too many languages at home my siblings and I would not become proficient in either English or French and so they made the decision to only speak to us in English at home.

I think the exclusion of learning the languages of my ancestors was the origin of my identity crisis. I could not label myself as a Caucasian or as coming from Slavic descent due to my obviously Hispanic physical features. Nor could I label myself a Hispanic, as despite having

tanned skin I could not speak Spanish. In essence I was too dark to be considered Slavic and too English to be considered Hispanic. My identity eluded me.

In high school I was told by other students of Hispanic descent that I was 'fake Spanish' due to my inability to converse in the language at their level. As a result I was not accepted into the Latino group in my culturally segregated high school. Students at my high school congregated only with those who shared their respective cultural background. I felt exceptionally lost in my high school years. I was an outcast without a cultural identity of my own. I found this situation to be extremely challenging. I was not white, and I did not speak Spanish or French particularly well. I was not part of my father's Slovak culture and I was not accepted in my mother's Mexican heritage. I was plagued with the many awkward aspects of teenage life, while contending with an identity crisis for which I saw no viable solution.

My first thought was to identify myself as Canadian. It was, in reality, a choice of convenience. I was constantly being told by the media and at school that being Canadian meant being a part of a multicultural nation. Being Canadian implied that we can all come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but still shared commonalities. I thought that being born and raised in Canada would mean that people would accept me as Canadian whenever they would ask the questions "What are you?" or, "Where are you from?"

Regrettably, I found that most people were unsatisfied with me stating that I was Canadian. "Seriously, what are you?" and "Ok, but where are you really from?" became common follow up questions.

I recall a Thanksgiving gathering at my in-laws' house when I was asked by my wife's aunt where I was from and if I was born in Canada. I know that she meant no malice, yet to me those questions embody something I was never able to escape from. I know that these questions are asked mostly out of curiosity, but they have always left me with a sense of resentment and at times even self-loathing. They strip me of the foolhardy belief that I belong to my envisioned definition of Canadian culture.

Today as a thirty year old secondary school science teacher, my students still occasionally ask: "Where are you from Mr. Lucu?" to which my reply is always, "From here". However, when I think of the questions "What culture do I belong to?" or "What culture do I identify myself with?" I could answer with enthusiasm and conviction that my culture was the RCN.



## **Focusing my research**

My aim in this thesis is to explore the various aspects that define RCN culture, and to explore the reasons why people join the RCN. My own experience in joining the military was motivated by a lack of identity and the urge to find one, and I am curious to understand the stories of other members in the RCN.

I only became part of the RCN due to my poor eye sight. Had I passed the eye exam I would have been part of the army instead of the navy, and the narrative of this inquiry would have undoubtedly looked very different. The RCN is very different from the two other branches of the Canadian military, which include the Canadian Army (CA) and the Canadian Air Force (CAF). They are different in their beliefs, customs and traditions, language, and artifacts. All three branches have distinguishable cultures due largely to the different jurisdictions that they fall under. The army is land and combat based and its culture reflects a 'brothers-in-arms' mentality more than the other two branches. In the army one needs to rely on the person next to him in battle. One's comrades can die at a moment's notice while in combat. There is a strong kindred trait in the army that is exclusive to its culture. In contrast the navy is sea based, and so much of its culture reflects life at sea, while the culture of the CAF reflects the trade of the sky.

One day I would like to compare and contrast these three military cultures, but my focus on this particular inquiry will be on the RCN and the cultural aspects I find most significant.

My twelve years in the RCN motivated me to conduct this inquiry in order to enlighten others of the RCN and its rich cultural background and historical trajectory. Many aspects of RCN culture were unfamiliar even to me as I began conducting my research and discovering some of the history of the rites, customs and traditions currently in practice in the RCN.

I feel a sense of vindication in regards to my own identity as I explore RCN culture. I hope that my inquiry may serve as a guide to better help those wishing to join the RCN so they have a clear sense of the organisation they are joining and don't feel lost in their introduction to RCN culture. When I joined I had no idea what my role, expectations and responsibilities would be. For me, my joining was a means to an end. It was a necessary measure to end the struggle I felt within myself, yet I was unprepared for the cultural shock that occurred after I became part of the RCN.

When I first entered my home naval unit and met with my trainer Petty Officer (PO) I proceeded to salute him in civilian clothing. That was my first faux-pas in RCN culture. There would be more. Many more.

## Research Questions and Themes

When I initially came up with the idea of writing a thesis dedicated to the understanding of RCN culture I asked myself the following questions:

- (1) What is RCN culture?
- (2) What are the reasons individuals may have for joining the RCN?
- (3) What are the key aspects, features or characteristic that makes up RCN culture?
- (4) What role does the RCN have in the formation of its members' identities?
- (5) Do members of the RCN feel a sense of recognition by being a member of the RCN?
- (6) Do members of the RCN feel a sense of belonging in the RCN?

In my endeavour to answer these six questions I grouped them according to the themes of identity, recognition and belonging. I chose these themes because I felt they best fit my reasons for joining the RCN. They became the framework of my research. Reflecting on these themes permitted me to delve deeper into my own experiences with the RCN and analyze their cultural and personal significances and the role they played in the construction of my own identity.

***Belonging.*** One of the most important contributions I believe that a culture can provide to its members is a sense of belonging. Members of any culture should feel that they fit in with

those around them or that they would be missed if they left. We all want to belong and to be wanted. The first time I truly felt like I belonged to a culture was when I joined the RCN. I have always been welcomed by other members. Every time I would walk into my home unit I was greeted by name at the door. Sure, they always carded me (part of the security protocol), but I like to think their smile was genuine. The colour of my skin and my inability to speak the languages of my parents were non-issues within the context of this new found culture. I learned the RCN language, navy customs, and the way of life at sea. Being in the Canadian military has largely shaped me into the person I am today. When I joined the navy I was a 17 year old high school graduate. Today I am a 30 year old secondary school science teacher with a wife and a baby on the way.

In this qualitative narrative self study I want to examine RCN culture and how the culture forms a sense of belonging among its members. I aim to examine the particular factors of the RCN that enabled me to feel an acceptance within its culture. I would also like to determine in this inquiry whether other members of the RCN share in this same feeling of belonging. Have others joined the RCN because they themselves felt a lack of belonging in a culture in their own lives?

***Recognition.*** When I joined the RCN it not only filled me with a sense of pride, but also provided me with a sense of validation and a renewed feeling of self-worth. There is an innate satisfaction when one is recognized as a member of a culture. I have only truly felt that sort of recognition when I donned my navy uniform.

My skin color and ethnic background no longer mattered when people saw the black and white attire and the golden Canadian leaf. The public parades I have marched in around the country gave me public recognition as a member of a culture and played a significant role in increasing my self-confidence and instilling in me a positive self-image.



**Photo 1: A photo of me in my navy uniform**

*Identity.* Identities are “increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicalization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.” (Hall, 1996, p.4).

My experiences as a teenager led me to feel that finding an identity was an issue of great importance. As I had discovered in my adolescent years, there was no escaping one's ethnicity. I could not change the physical features that seemed to conflict with being recognized as simply Canadian. When I joined the RCN I began to associate the RCN with identity. For instance I began to use navy language in my everyday life. The RCN became a significant identity marker of who I was. Knowing the importance the RCN held in the development of my identity influenced my aim to conduct interviews of fellow RCN members to see if they perhaps viewed their identities as linked to the RCN.

### **Rationale for research**

My research builds on my belief that the RCN is a distinctive culture because it has its own language, forms of literacy, rites and ceremonies, code of ethics and lifestyle. Many eager recruits often join the RCN directly from high school or college with little to no experience with ships, the military or navy culture. I will admit that when I joined the Canadian military I had no idea what to expect and I did not understand what being in the RCN would entail. I had absolutely no knowledge of the military, let alone the navy. I didn't even know how to swim. Despite all this I held on, and to my surprise discovered a rich tapestry of cultural traditions which made up a culture I could identify with and that contributed to the formation of my identity.

I hope that this inquiry can explore the RCN's effect in the formation of identity. The RCN never advertised itself as a remedy to identity crises, but it did prove effective in filling a void in my own sense of self, and I wonder how many others have joined the military because they were struggling with their own identity and culture.

In this inquiry I hope I can provide a realistic portrait of why people join the RCN and what makes them stay. I also wish for my inquiry to serve as a guide for those who initially joined and now feel overwhelmed by the culture shock of the Canadian Navy. I hope in this thesis the readers may get a glimpse into the psyche of those currently in the RCN, or in my case at the end of their careers. I aim to provide needed information on the socio-cultural aspects of RCN such as its shared beliefs and values, behavior, rites, traditions and customs.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I introduced my research topic, which is the examination of Royal Canadian Navy culture. I introduced my research questions and the themes that acted as the framework of my research. In the next chapter I review the literature that exists on RCN culture and I elaborate on the concepts and theories that shaped my data analysis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical framework and Literature Review**

In this chapter I present my theoretical framework based on the themes of belonging, recognition and identity. I critically examine the existing literature on RCN culture in an attempt to explore what aspects make it a distinguishable culture within Canadian society. I also discuss scholarly literature on autoethnography as a methodology within qualitative research.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Identity asks or answers the question "Who are we?" Barker (2000) stated that there exists two basic kinds of identity. One is social and the other personal. "The conceptions we hold of ourselves we may call self-identity, while the expectations and opinions of others form our social identity" (Barker, 2000,p. 165). Woodward (1997) believed the positions we take up and identify with constitute our identities, while Hall (1996) expressed that we are not only positioned by identity; we can also position ourselves, reconstruct and transform historical identities.

Drawing on identity theories has made it clear to me why I was in such turmoil when my identity was in question and why I felt such a sense of liberation when I found my identity through the RCN. The themes of belonging, recognition and identity are the three dominant concepts that frame my inquiry. For the purpose of this inquiry I am defining belonging as the



sense of inclusion one feels when accepted as a member of a culture. I describe recognition as a feeling of acknowledgement and pride in being a member of a specific culture. Finally, I use identity as a key concept in answering the question "Who am I?"

**Belonging.** Dayley (1999) claimed that in order to understand the military one must view it as an occupational culture "which can be relatively isolated from the rest of society" (Dayley, 1999). I believe that Dayley (1999) portrays an accurate depiction of RCN culture in regards to its isolation from the rest of society. The men and women who serve the navy through the occupation of a sailor often find themselves isolated on a naval base or on a ship on the high seas, far from the rest of the civilian world. Perhaps it is this isolation from the rest of society that enables the feeling of belonging to develop among its members. The concept of belonging as in Yon's (2000) study is often formed through differences and shared experiences. The military has always held a significant power in establishing a sense of belonging among its members. Realistically if the military had not established or cultivated a sense of belonging it would undoubtedly not have such a prevalent workforce to back it. Nearly every base in the CF is designed with the basic infrastructures of a community: grocery stores, living quarters, swimming pools, gym, department stores, theaters, hospitals, schools, post office, etc. When I did my initial military training I was sent to CFB (Canadian Forces Base) Borden in Borden, Ontario. CFB Borden is a military base with all the previously mentioned infrastructures. From the lowest ranking to the highest ranking person, everyone knows to whom they are accountable and responsible. Daley (1999) states "the principle of *taking care of our own* is ingrained within the military (Daley, 1999, p.294). The idea of "taking care of our own" is one of the main driving forces that instills a sense of belonging to all military members. Regardless of where one is

stationed one can expect the same kind of lifestyle and amenities, which is a comforting notion when one is deployed on a regular basis.



**Photo 2: A picture of CFB Borden. Taken near the commonly visited all goods store CANEX.**

**Recognition.** Taylor (1992) argued "Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves." (p. 25). Recognition, viewed as the acknowledgement of a person's existence by others, is a fundamental component in understanding one's self. The military provides a refuge for those experiencing a lack of recognition in their lives. When one joins the CF one adopts the recognition that goes along with that organization. Lang (1965) conducted a study utilizing wide research in which he pointed to

various specific aspects of military organizations. He argued that the military organization had three main components that made it recognizable; communal life, hierarchy, and discipline. 'Communal life' referred to the distinct differences between uniformed (military) and ordinary organizational life. A soldier's behaviour is an example of communal life that extends beyond the working hours of someone's normal work day. Members of the RCN are seen as accountable for their actions regardless if they are on duty or not and especially if they are wearing their uniforms. When a member joins the RCN he or she must maintain the 'military image' in all aspects of one's life. I define 'military image' as the set of shared beliefs and/or code all branches must adhere to, such as one's public deportment.

The second emphasis that Lang (1965) discusses is hierarchy. This characteristic refers to the importance of the hierarchy and of rules and regulations in the organization. All branches of the CF have a firm hierarchy set in place and an equally strict doctrine to follow. In a comparative study among military academies around the world (Soeters, 1997; Soeters and Recht, 1998), these researchers show that military cultures, as compared to the cultures of business organizations, are more coercive due to the simple fact that the consequences of not following established protocols in military cultures can result in much more severe consequences. If one uses the CF as an example of an organizational culture, its hierarchy can be initially divided into two main groups: commissioned (officers) and non-commissioned members (NCM). Officers lead and NCMs follow. Within these two groups there exists a very rigid hierarchy within the ranks. The ranks are also different between the army/air force and that of the RCN.

In the army the first 3 ranks of non-commissioned are private, private first class, and corporal, while in the RCN they are ordinary seaman, able seaman, and leading seaman. The previous mentioned ranks are low in the proverbial totem pole of power. Those bearing low ranks are, for the lack of a better term, the 'grunts' of military hierarchy. The insignia in which the ranks of members are shown also differ between the commissioned and non-commissioned members and between all three branches of the CF.



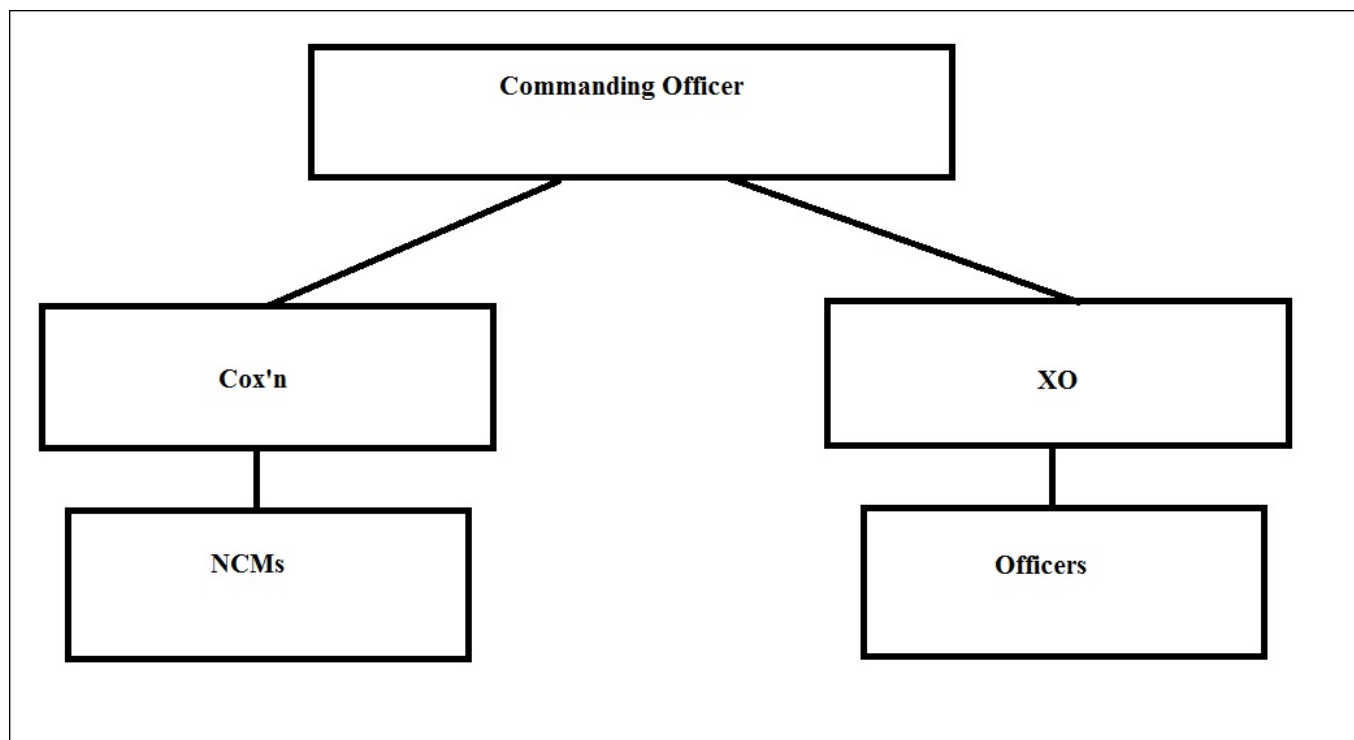
**Photo 3: A picture taken of the Leading seaman/Corporal rank insignia.**

The third emphasis that Lang (1965) highlights is discipline. This defining feature of military culture encompasses compliance with rules, the acceptance of orders and authority, and the way the organization deals with disobedience through overt punishment (Shalit, 1988). The degrees and levels of discipline vary greatly among military organizations. The obvious discrepancy between the discipline found in the military and that of other occupational

organizations would be the presence of military police. In the military discipline can be differentiated between formal/ceremonial discipline (i.e. saluting) and functional discipline (following the orders of the Commanding Officer). Formal discipline can be looked upon as an aim in itself, as "a generalized behavioral pattern that can be considered appropriate to a wide range of situations" (Shalit, 1988, pp. 122-126).

Functional discipline is used as a means of "enabling the members to perform better in specific circumstances" (Soeters, Winslow and Weibull, 2004). An example of functional discipline in the military would be drills. Drills can be anything from parade practice, firefighting exercises, to fitness training. Drills are conducted in a very serious and organized manner and are sometimes used as a method to correct previously underwhelming performances by the members.

In the CF there is the chain of command, which defines the authority and accountability that extends from the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to the smallest member of the CF and back to the office of the CDS. The chain is formed when the CDS assigns a portion of its authority to a selected subordinate commander immediately below the CDS and directly accountable to the CDS. Each of these commanders in turn assigns a portion of their entrusted authority to subordinates directly accountable to them. No other person, including ministers and public servants, is part of the chain of command, nor does any other person have any command authority in the CF.



**Photo 4: A basic chain of command chart illustrating the power of authority.**

Members of the CF must submit to the Code of Service Discipline as set out in the *National Defence Act*. That code allows formal trials by military tribunals of members of the CF and punishment of those convicted of service or criminal offences. For instance if a member performed an act of gross incompetence (i.e. pointing a loaded weapon at another member) he could be convicted under the *National Defence Act* and face fines, expulsion of the CF, or incarceration in a military prison. Part of being a member of the military is being held accountable for one's actions and accepting the potential disciplinary actions that might be held against one.

Dorothy E. Smith (2005) stated that institutional ethnography "works from the local of the people's experience to discover how the ruling relations both rely on and determine their everyday activities" (Smith, p.44). If one considers the CF as a form of institutional ethnography with rules and expected behaviors then one might think of identity within this culture as an ascribed identity.

**Identity.** A major identity theorist in cultural studies is Stuart Hall (1996), who states that the self was understood to be formed in its interactions with the outside world, and specifically "in relation to 'significant others' who mediate to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited" (p. 597). The formation of one's identity is not something that is steady, but rather constantly changing depending on what surrounds and influences individuals in particular contexts. The unified sense of an individual's existence is created through the stories or narratives that they construct for themselves in order to make sense of who they are (Hall, 1996). Therefore, the identity of those serving in the CF is a mosaic of their experiences within their respective branch (army, air force or navy). My identity within the CF was formed through the navy. I experienced and participated in naval customs and traditions. My experiences at sea were undoubtedly different from the experiences one would have at an army base. It should be expected that the identities of members throughout the CF vary depending on whether they are in the army, air force or navy. After all, identity is defined in relation to differences. There is always an 'other' in relation to which a person defines oneself (Fine, 1999). Even within the same branch there will be differences within the identities being constructed. For instance, a clerk in the RCN will have a very different set of experiences than a naval diver. Naval divers have more rigorous physical requirements than other naval trades and

most of their active duty lies beneath the waters. In contrast a naval clerk will most likely never sail and spends most of their time in an office. A sailor will also experience a significantly different culture onboard a ship as opposed to those on a submarine. Submarines are more confined and have a smaller crew than naval ships.

Regardless of one's trade in the RCN all individuals who embrace military lifestyle develop over time "an increasing identification with the military as a core component of who they are, much like an ethnic identity" (Dayley, 1999).

My identity was under constant transformation throughout my twelve years of service in the CF. Who I was at the beginning of my RCN career was very different from who I became at the end. My identity as Hall (1996) stated, was "constantly in the process of change and transformation" (p.4).

### **Background to the study & Literature Review**

Unfortunately the amount of literature on RCN culture is limited. However, since much of RCN culture can be traced back to the 1800's British Royal Navy I found some BRN literature that provides helpful insight into cultural aspects of the Canadian Navy culture.



**The Royal Canadian Navy: A history.** The Canadian Navy came into existence on May 4, 1910, when the Naval Service Act became law. Permission to add the prefix “Royal” was granted by King George V in 1911. In 1968, the Canadian Navy merged with Canada’s army and air force to form the Canadian Armed Forces, later the Canadian Forces. The maritime component was named Maritime Command, replacing the title Royal Canadian Navy, in an attempt to make it distinguishable from the British navy.

Prior to the Second World War, Canada’s navy, unlike its army, had not participated in any nation-defining historical acts, and from 1910 to 1948 the Royal Canadian Navy ships had no official badges or insignia. Choosing a ship's badge was left to the vessel's commanding officer, without Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) becoming involved. It was only after 1948 that the NSHQ began recognizing official badges and mottoes of the RCN. The Second World War truly accelerated the progress of the RCN. When the Second World War broke out, Canada had just thirteen vessels. However, by the end of the Second World War, the Royal Canadian Navy had grown to become one of the largest Allied navies with 434 commissioned vessels including cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes and auxiliaries (Graves, 2003). The beginning of the Cold War drove major change upon the RCN. English (2004) points out that "For the first time in its history, Canada committed itself to a fairly large standing navy, with a fleet of large and powerful new ships to be manned by a professional force." (p.91). The Cold War also enabled the RCN to develop numerous advances in ship design and anti-submarine warfare that became world-recognized (Milner, 2009). Milner (2009) stated that when the RCN started its transition from the British to the American way of doing things, the RCN was “perhaps the only navy in the world capable of working effectively and easily” (Milner, 2009, p.169).

**Customs, rites and traditions.** The RCN is deeply entrenched in customs and traditions spanning from the old British Empire to that of ancient Rome. These customs and traditions form the very distinct culture of the RCN, which separates it from the other branches of the CF. The following are among some of the more recognizable elements in the RCN that have helped provide the RCN with its own identity.

***Saluting.*** There is much debate over the origin of the hand salute. Some theories state that the open hand salute was a sign to ensure that no weapon was being concealed, others that the palm of the hand was turned down to conceal a dirty hand (a common occurrence while onboard the old wartime sea vessels), and still others claimed that it emerged from the age of chivalry when a knight would raise his right hand to his visor in quiet assurance that he would not un-horse (knock down) his approaching rival (Arbuckle, 1984). Arbuckle (1984) remarked that the salute was described as follows in the Royal Navy's Training Ships Regulations of 1883:

"The Naval salute is made by touching the hat or cap or taking it off, looking the officer saluted in the face. Admirals, captains, officers of the same relative rank, and the officer commanding the saluter's ship of whatever rank, are on all occasions saluted by the hat being taken off. The hat is to be taken off by the right hand taking hold of it by the right side except when passing, when it is taken off with the left hand." (Arbuckle, 1984, p. 11).

The salute at this point became an act of acknowledgement and respect to officers and high ranking military officials.

Regardless of its origin, the salute was back then and is still today a symbolic act embedded in the behavior of all members of the RCN. It has several meanings: a greeting, a mark of mutual respect and trust, an act of courtesy, and a recognition of the authority vested in the Queen's commissioned members (officers). In the RCN all non-commissioned members must salute any commissioned officer (above the rank of officer cadet) regardless of their own rank.

***Naval uniform.*** Perhaps the most recognizable symbol of the RCN (aside from ships sailed) is the uniform that the members wear. The naval uniform has always been a symbolic identity marker synonymous with naval identity. Before the unification of the CF in 1968, the uniforms of the Canadian Army, RCN and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) were similar to their counterparts in the forces of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries, with the exception of national identifiers and some regimental accoutrements. It wasn't until the late 1980s that the CF introduced the Distinct Environmental Uniform (DEU). Members of the naval, air, and land forces received uniforms distinctive to their service or environment (i.e. land, air or sea). The army got camouflage green, the navy received the colors black and navy blue, and the air force obtained light blue uniforms. Canadian Naval Cadets still wear uniforms that bear a striking resemblance to that of years past (in particular the old navy hat).

***Naval Signaling.*** Navy signaling is one of the RCN's oldest and simplest forms of communicating. This form of communication dates all the way back to the Romans when the 'signum', a military ensign, was raised and lowered to convey orders on the battlefield. Signaling with flags was common practice on ships throughout the history of the British Royal Navy until

it virtually disappeared by the time of the First World War with the advent of the electric Morse lamp and wireless telegraphy (Arbuckle, 1984). In 2013 the RCN uses a variety of communication methods on ships at sea, and still includes the age old method of flag signaling.

### ***Naval Ceremonies.***

*Colours.* I feel one of most salient aspects of my formed identity within the RCN can be attributed to participating in naval ceremonies. There is a modern practice for all ordinary occasions on HMCS ships and units to hoist the national colours (i.e. the Canadian Flag) in the morning and keep them up until sunset. It is not known exactly when the hoisting of colours at sunrise was first introduced, but it was not before the seventeenth century (Arbuckle, 1984). It is a practice that endures today and is an integral part of the daily rituals found in the RCN. Even if one is not on a ship, so long as they are in a HMCS unit the practice of colours is respected.

*Battle of the Atlantic.* The Battle of the Atlantic (1939-1945) was the longest battle of the Second World War; it started at the beginning of the war in September and concluded when the U-boats surrendered in May 1945 (Graves, 2003). At one minute past midnight on 28 May 1945, all Canadian ships at sea turned on their running lights signaling the end of the Battle of the Atlantic (German, 1990). The battle is commemorated every year on the first Sunday of May in locations where the Canadian Navy is present. For the past twelve years I have been part of the Battle of the Atlantic parade which, until recent years, took place in the Old Port of Montreal. It

is a ceremony that HMCS Donnacona takes very seriously and which all active members are expected to attend and participate in. It is a tradition all maritime RCN units practice.

I remember my first Battle of the Atlantic parade with HMCS Donnacona (my home unit in Montreal). The parade was held in the Old Port of Montreal and I recall being awed at the sight of old navy war veterans present at the parade. Some were standing and some were in wheelchairs. I was touched to see their dedication and commitment to brave a two hour ceremony on a hot day to honor their fallen brethren.

*Christmas dinner.* Christmas dinner is a long tradition in the RCN. It is held everywhere on the last weekend before the winter holiday break. It is traditionally called Christmas dinner although there is no mention of religion on that day; it is merely a day of festivities. During this event the officers and senior staff serve the junior rank members the Christmas meal. This tradition comes from the British royal navy though its origins might be traced further back. Wells (1930) described the day back in early naval days as follows:

"The decoration of the ship on Christmas day, the rounds of the mess-decks by the officers, the wearing of petty officers' rig by the boys, and so on, are believed to be a survival of the Roman custom; this was that, during this festival, the masters took the places of, and waited on, their own servants." (p. 38).

In the current RCN tradition the Christmas dinner is held at the home unit of the naval members usually on the Saturday preceding the holiday break in mid December. The evening consists of a three course meal prepared by the naval cooks and served by the senior NCMs and officers. The CO also switches roles with the youngest NCM, entitling that member all of the CO's power and authority for that one day.

**Navy language.** One of the defining aspects of RCN culture is in its use of language and key terms that is only understood by its members. The origin of much of the naval vocabulary can be linked back to its British Royal navy roots. When I initially joined the RCN I had no knowledge of ships or of anything nautical in nature. This proved to be a source of much confusion as members of the RCN see the unit (building) as a ship and refer to navy language when giving instructions. For instance when my PO was giving orders for us recruits to form up at the port side of the parade square I was at a loss as to what he was referring to.

One of the most common words one will hear in the RCN, whether at sea or on land, is cox'n. The cox'n is the title given to the most senior NCM who serves the CO. It is a word that is often used, however not many people would know it's origin. Wells (1930) looked into the origin of that word:

"The 'cockswain' or 'cockson' as the steersman of the 'cock,' is defined by N. Bailey (1992) as 'An officer of the ship, who takes care of the cockboat, barge or shallop, with all its

furniture, and is in readiness with his crew to man the boat upon all occasions. In 1634 the 'cockson' was the lowest of the four officers entitled to use and wear silver whistles, the others being the Captain, Master and Boatswain." (p.21).

**Naval Music.** Music has always been an integral part in naval ceremonies. The most celebrated ceremonies in RCN, such as Remembrance Day and the Battle of The Atlantic, have a military musical band playing while the sailors march on parade. "Hearts of Oak" is the official march of the RCN. "This should be called 'Heart of Oak', and is a song from the Garrick's *Harlequin's Invasion* of 1759. It was written and composed in commemoration of the victories of that year, namely Quiberon, Lagos and Quebec, and was a favorite in the Navy." (Wells, 1930, p.110). I've always enjoyed the naval rendition of the Austin Powers' theme song during lengthy parades.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I presented the theoretical framework that frames my research questions and themes. I critically reviewed the existing literature related to cultural aspects such as customs and traditions, ceremonies, and language. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology I employed and the methods I used to pursue my inquiry into RCN culture.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology and Data Collection Process

#### Methodology

Ellis & Bochner (2002) outline the reasoning for choosing a narrative style of inquiry:

“I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try and understand an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life.” (p.737).

I am guided by the questions "What is Royal Canadian Navy culture?" and "What does it mean to its members?". I decided that the best way to answer those questions was to answer them in the form of an autoethnography. Autoethnography is “research writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. This form of writing usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection...” (Ellis, 2004, p.xix). It is important to note that an autoethnography is not limited to the written form and may be expressed through poetry or even through song (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this thesis, my autoethnography took the form of a personal narrative with many visuals, such as photos, as data sources so that both researcher and reader may share a sort of collaborative journey.



Autoethnography is “a self narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with other in social contexts” (Sprey, 2001, p.710). “Readers and audiences are invited to share in the emotional experiences of an author” (Jones, 2002, p.764). Bochner (2002) calls this form of narrative an “evocative narrative” with the “reader as a co-participant in dialogue” (Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p.744). With autoethnography Ellis & Bochner (2002) ask the readers to “feel the truth of the stories and to become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually” (p.745). The use of autoethnography is an appropriate methodology and method for this inquiry in that I aim to pull together personal experiences within the larger context of understanding and bringing meaning to the RCN culture.

Initially I was unsure of how to structure my autoethnography as it was difficult to determine what aspects should be more prevalent in it (i.e. my emotions, cultural analysis, my reflections, etc). Ellis & Bochner (2002) stated that an autoethnography (narrative inquiry) should be written in the first person voice in which “concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectally revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language” (p.739). I write about my life experiences with the RCN from the beginning to the end of my naval career.

In this chapter I describe my data collection process. I first describe the data that I have collected during the course of my inquiry and then the process I established for conducting interviews. I also explore the observations I made at the naval unit HMCS Donnacona and

explain how I categorized them. I place my narrative near the end of my thesis because I want the reader to have a better understanding of RCN culture before delving into the story of my twelve year odyssey in the RCN.

## **Data Collection**

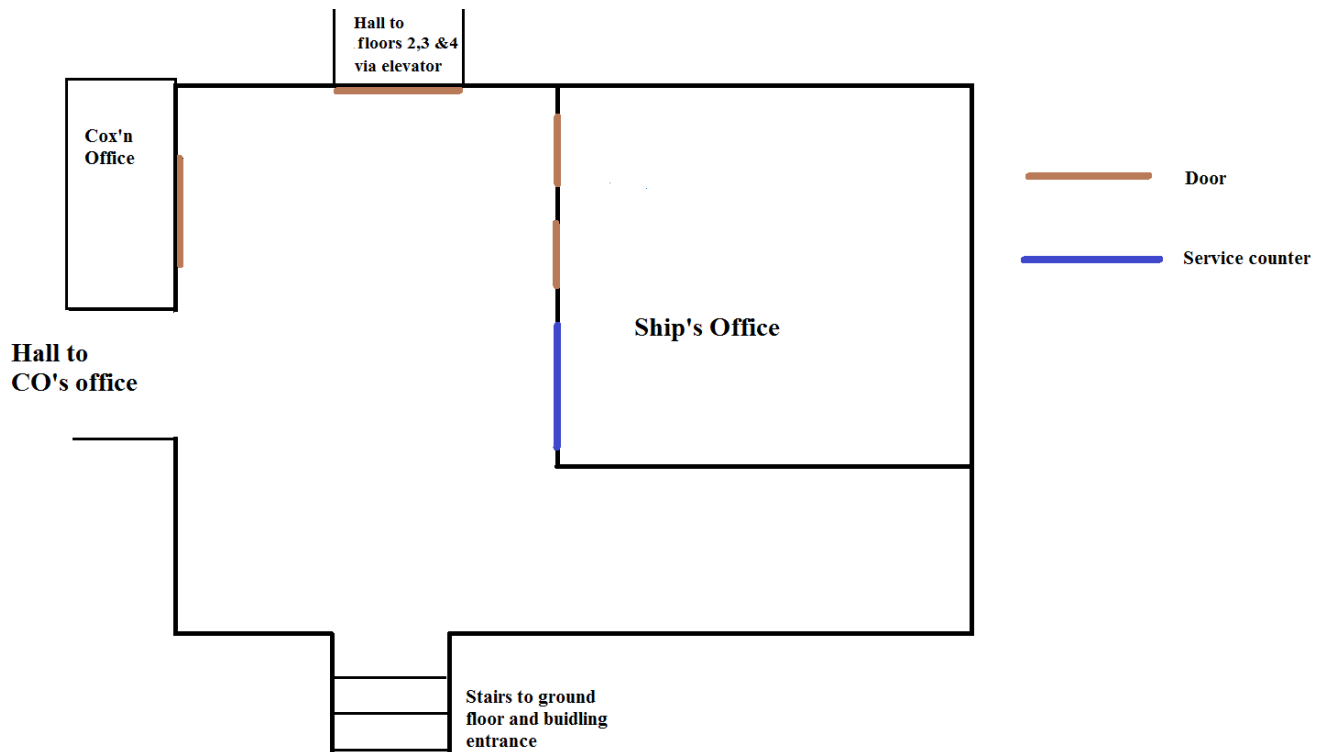
I spent four months (September 2012-December 2012) at HMCS Donnacona, located at 3525 St-Jacques Street near downtown Montreal, gathering data from various sources during the Tuesday and Saturday training. These training sessions are designed to keep the members proficient in their respective trades. Usually there are three Tuesday night sessions (3 hours) and one Saturday training (8 hours) a month. My three data sources include: 1) observational notes, 2) interviews, and 3) documents and visual data such as photos.

**Interviews.** I had never conducted an interview prior to this inquiry into RCN culture. This did not dissuade me in my attempt. As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) point out:

"Interviewing rests on the practical skills and the personal judgments of the interviewer; it does not follow explicit steps of rule-governed methods. The skills of interviewing are learned by practicing interviewing, and the quality of interviewing is judged by the strength and value of the knowledge produced." (p.17).

I focused on questions that encouraged the participants to reflect on their personal experiences with the RCN and what aspects, if any, contributed to the formation or change of their identities. I wanted to know if they felt a sense of recognition while being in the RCN. I also wanted to see what aspects of the RCN they found to be most significant to its culture.

Originally I had hoped to gather at least 8 participants, but only four participants volunteered. The interviews took place at HMCS Donnacona at the ship's office during our training sessions. All participants wanted the interviews to be conducted during the training sessions as they could not commit to an alternative time or location.



**Figure 1: Layout plan of the ship's office location at HMCS Donnacona**

Some interviews were conducted in a private office while others were in more open spaces throughout the ship's office. It depended on how busy that particular training day was at the unit and what rooms were not being occupied.

*Gaining access to my participants.* I initially sent out an email to twelve potential participants in the form of an email through my DND email account. It took me a few attempts to figure out what would be the best way to entice them to participate. In the end I just wrote an honest request that clearly laid out what I would be requiring from them.

"Hello my dear Donaconnians,

I am emailing you all to ask for your help. I am a M.A. graduate student at McGill University in the department of integrated studies in education. I am examining the aspects that identify the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) as a culture for my M.A. thesis. I would like to invite you to participate in my study to explore what you think about RCN culture and its impact on your identity formation, sense of belonging, and whether it has affected your feeling of recognition and the way you connect and communicate with others. Should you be interested in participating it will involve me asking you a series of questions relating to your experiences and thoughts of the RCN culture and having you fill out a short questionnaire. You don't have to participate, but I would really appreciate it. My inquiry would be much better if I could get the perspectives of a variety of members from as many different ranks and divisions as possible. If you are interested in participating please just reply to this email and we will arrange a time to meet during a Tuesday night training or possibly during a Saturday training day.

Here is my contact information:

Stephan Lucu

email: stephan.lucu@mail.mcgill or stephanlucu@hotmail.com

tel: (438) 832-8287

My supervisor's contact information:

Dr. Mary Maguire

email: mary.maguire@mcgill.ca

tel: 514-398-2123

Thank you kindly,

LS Lucu"

Of the twelve potential participants 8 replied with an interest and I received a couple of verbal agreements, but in the end only four of the six that signed the consent form actually followed through and participated in the interview. The majority of people who participated were from my own department (logistic) as they were the ones that I see on a regular basis, thus it was easier to arrange times to sit down and converse.

***The participants.*** I had four participants willing to be interviewed for my inquiry into RCN culture. Three were NCM members like myself and one was an officer.

Rank	Name	Gender	Division	Department	Trade
LS	Simard	Female	Junior rank member	Logistics Department	RMS Clerk
LS	Charest-Trudel	Male	Junior rank member	Logistics Department	RMS Clerk/ NPF
PO1	Niro	Male	Senior rank	Deck Department	Diver
Slt	Wong	Male	Officer	Logistics Department	Log Officer/ NPFO

**Table 1 : Participants involved in the interviews indicating their rank, name, gender, division, department and trade.**

*LS Simard.* LS Simard has been in the naval reserves for four years. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Montreal researching the gravitational patterns of the sun. HMCS Donnacona has always been her home unit and she has always been employed at the unit as an RMS (Resource Management Support) clerk. She works part time during the year, as most reservist do, and takes full employment contracts during the summer months while she is not at school. For LS Simard her employment at HMCS Donnacona is her primary source of income and her only form of employment. She agreed to participate because as a scientist she felt strongly about the importance and merit of research work.

*LS Charest-Trudel.* LS Charest-Trudel has been in the naval reserves for five years. He is studying political science at McGill University and aspiring to move on to law. HMCS Donnacona has always been his home unit and he is currently employed at the unit as an RMS clerk in the NPF (non public funds) office. Much like LS Simard he works part time during the year and takes full time employment during the summer months when he is not at school. As well his employment at HMCS Donnacona is his primary source of income and his only form of employment. He agreed to participate because he wanted to help a fellow sailor and McGill student.

*PO Niro.* PO Niro is has been in the RCN for twenty four years. He is one of the HMCS Donnacona's most senior members. He works part time at the unit and the RCN is not his primary form of income. He is a diver by trade and spends most of his time outside the unit participating in diving exercises.

*Slt Wong*. Slt Wong has been the in the RCN for three years. He works part time at HMCS Donnacona as a logistics officer in NPF office. He is a full time university student and his work at the unit is his primary source of income.

***My interview style.*** I began my interviews with some direct questions about the members' involvement in the RCN and then proceeded with questions relevant to RCN culture. For example, this exchange illustrates my initial interviewing approach to posing questions.

### **Exchange 2: Interview of LS Simard**

**Lucu :** "When did you join the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN)?"

**Simard :** Le 26 avril 2007.

**Lucu:** "What is your current rank?"

**Simard:** Matelot de première classe.

**Lucu:** "Can you think of the reason(s) why you joined the RCN?"

**Simard:** Pour payer une partie de mes études, pour avoir une job a temps partiel souple durant mes études, et pour faire du sport.

Then I asked questions more relevant to RCN culture:



"Describe how a holiday/special occasion is celebrated in the RCN."

"How important is hierarchy in the RCN?"

"How are gender roles perceived in the RCN?"

"How important is the individual in the RCN culture? How important is the group?"

I attempted to create a casual atmosphere by telling a few jokes or asking about their lives before the interview so that the participants would feel more at ease and free to express their thoughts and feelings.

***Interview locations.*** For the purpose of accessibility I conducted all of the interviews at the ship's office as requested by the participants. The ship's office is essentially the human resource department of the unit. It was the best possible area in the unit to conduct the interviews as it is a familiar place for all the participants. Everyone passes by the ship's office at least once a month. However one of the disadvantages with conducting the interviews at the ship's office was that it is an open space.

The ship's office is big and noisy. It is an area with considerable foot traffic. It's not the best area for privacy and there can often be noise pollution due to the busy nature of the area. For Charest-Trudel and Sgt Wong it did not pose much of a problem due to the fact that they work in NPF which has its own private closed office within the ship's office.

## Observations

I used field notes derived from my observations. My field notes were based on what Emerson, Frets & Shaw (1995) deem important: “detailed accounts of [my] initial impressions, key events and incidents observed in the setting along with [my] personal reactions, what people in the setting treat as especially important, and any unusual happenings that depart from the routine and ordinary” (p.229).

### **Sample field note:**

"Today I wanted to observe how the members of opposite genders interacted with each other during the course of the training night. First, I noticed that both genders seemed to regard each other with equal respect and poise. When a male member addressed a female officer it was always preceded with and ended with 'ma'am'. I observed the same thing when male members were conversing with female members with the rank of MS and higher."

(S.Lucu, field note, December 11, 2012)

I focused my observations at HMCS Donnacona to distinguish what could be perceived as cultural aspects. I tried to note what I thought to be things unique to a culture. I categorized my observations into four themes:

- 1) Shared beliefs and values
- 2) Customs, rites and traditions
- 3) Behaviour
- 4) Artifacts

### **Documents and visual data**

Documents and visual data, such as military organizational charts, written records, pictures of uniforms, insignias, and medals, were a source of data that I collected. I had access to the documents and visual data by being a member of the RCN. I collected a wide range of documents and visual data through my Tuesday and Saturday training sessions at HMCS Donnacona. I also used many photos in conjunction with my autoethnography so that the reader could have an accurate visual representation of my narrative. The photos in my autoethnography were taken over the course of my twelve year career in the Canadian military.

### **Ethics and Ethical Issues**

By the time I received the approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board to conduct the interviews I was no longer a member of the RCN. The participants treated me no differently

when I interviewed them as a civilian rather than a colleague and member of the RCN. They all chose not to remain anonymous for the interview and agreed that I could use the transcripts of their interviews for my thesis and any other future studies. All data were transcribed into a password-protected Microsoft Word document and placed in a folder on an external drive. I am the only person to know the password to these documents. One of the difficulties I had with the REB was with the publication of photos in my autoethnography. I was unfamiliar with the rules of having pictures with other people in them. I was told I couldn't use any pictures with other people in them unless I had their consent. Seeing as many of my photos were a decade old getting in contact with the parties involved was unrealistic. I therefore had to remove many pictures that I wanted in order to respect the rules and regulations.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this inquiry, I aim to create a better understanding of RCN culture. In this chapter I explained my methodology, provided a rationale for using an autoethnography, and explained my data collection process. In Chapter 4 I critically examine and discuss my data and data analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Collection & Data Analysis**

In this chapter I focus on four different data sources. My autoethnography is my overall methodology; however I also use interviews, observations, documents and photos.

I felt as an insider of the RCN I could offer a unique perspective of what a member of a naval reservist unit perceives RCN culture to be. I observed shared beliefs and values, customs, rites and traditions, behaviours, and artifacts. I also took photographs to complement many of my observations since I perceive the RCN to be a very visual culture. I also conducted interviews with four members of HMCS Donnacona to gain their perspective on many questions I had on RCN culture.

#### **Observations**

I made the following observations over the course of three months at HMCS Donnacona. The majority of these observations of RCN culture were made during my break periods taken in the ship's office while some were done during the course of routine naval activities. I wrote my observations on a notepad while at work, and then proceeded to transcribe them as my field notes on my computer at home.

**Shared beliefs and values.** The first thing that becomes obvious upon entering a RCN or any military unit and/or base is its order and uniformity of decor, behavior and personnel. The navy likes repetition and a set routine that is followed to the letter.

***In-Routines.***

"Today marks my twelfth in-routine at HMCS Donnacona. It's an annual event that every navy unit (and to my knowledge all army and air force reservist units) goes through. It follows a standard procedure that has not deviated during my time at Donnacona. It's the day when our "leave expires" (time off ends) and marks the first work day of the year. It is essentially an administrative day during which every member goes around the unit and gets an in-routine checklist signed by appropriate sections and returns it by the end of the night to the ship's office. It might seem like a mundane task, but it is also the day when many get reacquainted after the summer months (the last work day at the unit is the first Sunday of May). I believe in-routines to be a prime example of the orderly value in RCN culture."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 11, 2012)

**NCSM / HMCS DONNACONA**  
**VÉRIFICATION ADMINISTRATIVE 2012/2013**

NM / SN	GRADE / RANK	NOM & INIT / NAME & INIT	DÉPARTEMENT / DEPARTMENT
R50 255 437	LS	Lucu S.	Log

NO	SECTION	SIGNATURE	DATE
1	ADM DU SYSTÈME INFORMATIQUE / INFO SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR (ISA)		11 Sep 2012
2	APPRO / SUPPLY		11 sept 2012
3	TRANSPORT		11 sept 2012
4	O ENTRAÎNEMENT / TRAINING O	 LCOB FABI DOUCHER HMCS DONNACONA 5800 (514) 269-8511 / 208	11 SEP 12
5	BUREAU DU NAVIRE / SHIP'S OFFICE Scolarité / Education	 LS FAB DOUCHER HMCS DONNACONA	11 Sep 12
6	BUREAU DU NAVIRE / SHIP'S OFFICE Administration		
7	BUREAU DU NAVIRE / SHIP'S OFFICE FNP/NPF Mess Dues	 LS FAB DOUCHER HMCS DONNACONA	11 Sep 12
8	CAPT D'ARMES / COXSWAIN		11 Sep 12
9	BUREAU DU NAVIRE / SHIP'S OFFICE	Retour liste complétée Return completed list	Date: _____ Signature: _____

**Photo 5: Photo taken of my unit in-routine sheet.**

### ***Notice Board and ROs.***

"One thing that anyone walking past the hallway from the ship's office may notice is the collection of notice boards (five of them, to be exact) lined side by side. The notice boards area is where superiors remind us to stay vigilant. The boards hold much of the pertinent information one in the navy should know about, such as the monthly work schedule, duty list, job opportunities, rules and most importantly the ROs. The Cox'n (the person responsible for the adherence of the unit's rules) annually orders us to read through the routine orders as it contains

all of the essential information sailors need to know. We are responsible to obey and understand the information being conveyed in the ROs."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 18, 2012)



**Photo 6: Photo taken of the board where the ROs can be found.**

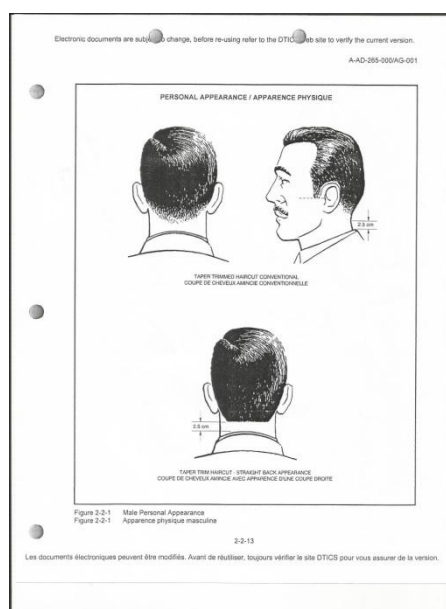
### ***Dress and appearance.***

"If I had to pick one thing to identify RCN culture I would choose its distinguishable dress and appearance. Today is our monthly inspection and this requires us to be in our full CF dress. Our CF is considerably different from our army or air force brethren. Our colors are white and black for our ceremonial dress, similar to those of our US navy counterparts. While we no

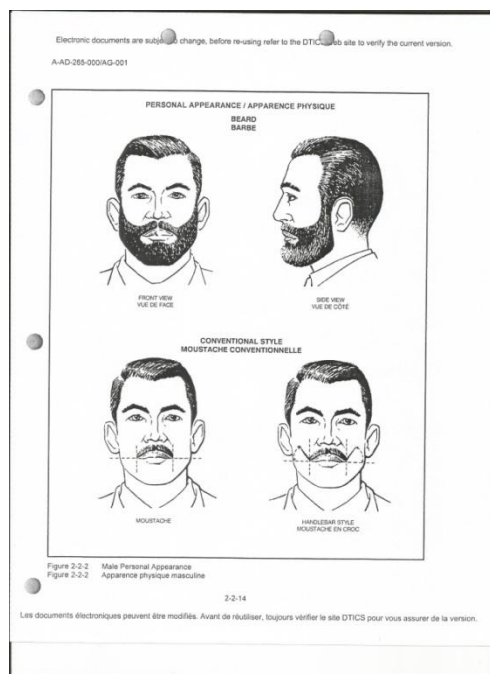


longer wear the uniforms of our WWII predecessors, the naval cadets of the RCN carry on that tradition. For a long time we were also allowed to have a beard while onboard a ship as traditionally sailors did grow full beards while at sea. It was only this year that the Canadian Forces removed that privilege and now we must shave our faces like all soldiers in the army and air force. Beards are only permitted now in special circumstances (i.e. for religious beliefs), however mustaches are allowed so long as they follow the CF guidelines".

(S. Lucu, field notes, November 5, 2012)



**Photo 7: Photo taken from a page in the manual found on the bulletin board pertaining to the appearance of males in the military. This page dealt with hair styles**



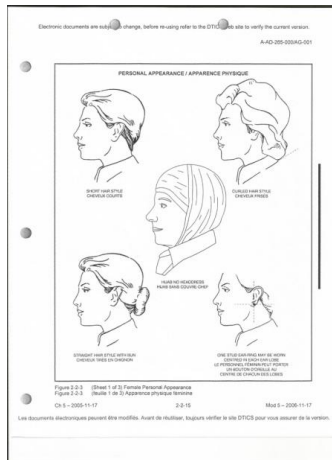
**Photo 8: Photo taken from a page in the manual found on the bulletin board pertaining to the appearance of males in the military. This page dealt with facial hair.**

I now reflect back on photos 7 & 8 and realize that for the past twelve years I've had my hair cut and groomed as per the RCN standards. A few months after I left the RCN and let my hair grow I quickly became aware of the fact that my hair is curly. Even though I no longer have to cut my hair on a regular basis, I feel compelled to as I do not feel comfortable having my hair grow out.

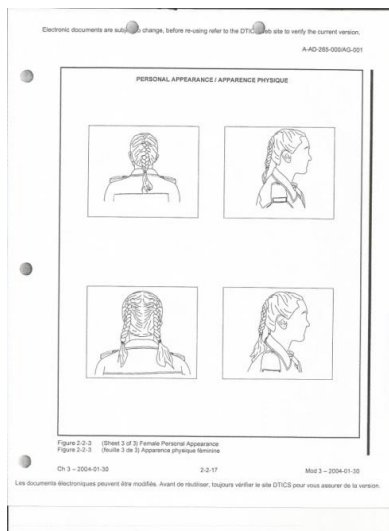
"Women have their own physical appearance guidelines to follow while serving in the RCN. Contrary to what some people believe, women in the military are not forced to mimic male hairstyles. They are allowed to have long hair so long as it is worn in a bun, or in a single or

double French braid. Most women at HMCS Donnacona do in fact have long hair and the majority of them keep it in a bun."

(S.Lucu, field notes, November 5, 2012)



**Photo 9: Photo taken from a page in the manual found on the bulletin board pertaining to the appearance of females in the military. This page dealt with hair styles.**



**Photo 10: Photo taken from a page in the manual found on the bulletin board pertaining to the appearance of females in the military. This page dealt with the tying of braids.**

## Physical fitness.

"Today is a Saturday. However, instead of sleeping comfortably at home I am soon to go through my annual physical fitness test. This is yet another value the RCN and all military branches hold in great esteem. Everyone in the RCN is expected to be physically fit in order to be considered active and receive contracts. Every year around this time the members of the unit do their physical fitness test. It consists of four components: a running test, a grip test, and push up/sit up test. Depending on one's age and/or gender the requirements are different. The person with the best performance on the fitness test gets an award for that honor during the unit's end of year BBQ. I have never won one of those awards."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 22, 2012)

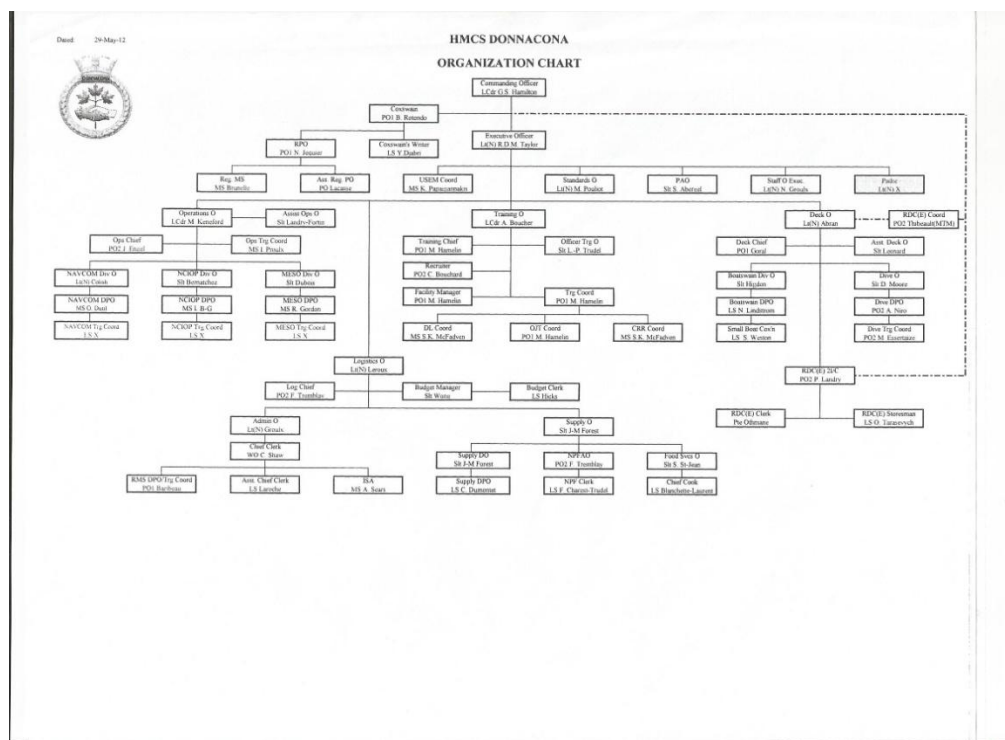
The image shows a 'CF EXPRES Program - Programme EXPRES FC' fitness test report form. It is a detailed document with multiple sections for recording personal information, health status, and fitness test results. The form includes checkboxes for various health conditions and fitness components, as well as numerical fields for test scores. The form is filled out with handwritten data, including a predicted VO2 max of 39 ml/kg/min and a muscular endurance score of 40. The form is dated 11/13/12 and signed by a member of the unit.

Photo 11: Photo taken of my fitness test report.

### *Hierarchy and order.*

"Another thing the RCN holds dear to its heart is hierarchy. The hierarchy provides order and a clear grasp of one's place in the RCN's power chain. Today I received this year's organization chart of HMCS Donnacona. It reminds me of the taxonomy of Greek Deities. There are so many branches of people on that chart from the all powerful Zeus (the Commanding Officer) to the lowly mortals (low ranking NCMs). It's a very neat and organized chart. It successfully establishes the order of power at the unit. I have been offered the position of Cox'n writer by my Chief Clerk (CC) and I told him I would do it, neglecting to tell him that I am unsure of how much longer I will be staying in the RCN. My CC told me it's a good job that will give rise to more opportunities and will provide me with an actual position at HMCS Donnacona which means a higher chance of moving up in the food chain. Currently I am of the rank of Leading Seaman and if I do this job my chances of being promoted to Master Seaman will likely be after my PLQ (leadership course) this summer. After 12 years it would seem like a waste to just quit now and not do what is necessary to obtain the Master Seaman rank. I guess that's another part of RCN culture, the need to move up in the ranks. At some point I guess it would be nice to be the one giving the orders for a change. It would definitely be an ego boost. Plus my name would be on that neat organizational chart."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 18, 2012)



**Photo 12: Photo taken of HMCS Donnacona's organization chart.**

### *Discipline.*

"Discipline is a definite part of RCN culture. Despite the good times we might have there are rules we must obey pertaining to dress, appearance, drill or punctuality. When we do something wrong we will hear about it and face the consequences. For instance today our Cox'n found our drill not to be of military standard during the parade. As a consequence we had to perform drill during what should have been a normal working period. It was not enjoyable and that's the point as it will deter us from delivering a less than stellar performance in the future."

(S. Lucu, field notes, October 1, 2012)

***Ethics.***

"One thing that caught my eye today was a pamphlet on the CF ethics that I found in the ship's office. The RCN does not have its own set of ethics, but rather shares a code of ethics with the other branches of the CF. According to one CF (Canadian Forces) document, it is generally accepted that there are three elements to military ethics":

"There is a military ethos which can best be understood as a general statement of what we serve in terms of the spirit of the profession. There is ethics or military ethics which is usually used as a title of the various components or facets of the military ethos, such as obedience, courage and so on. Finally there is the code of military ethics which contains obligatory statements of duty and responsibility." (DND, 1996)."

(S. Lucu, field notes, October 15, 2012)

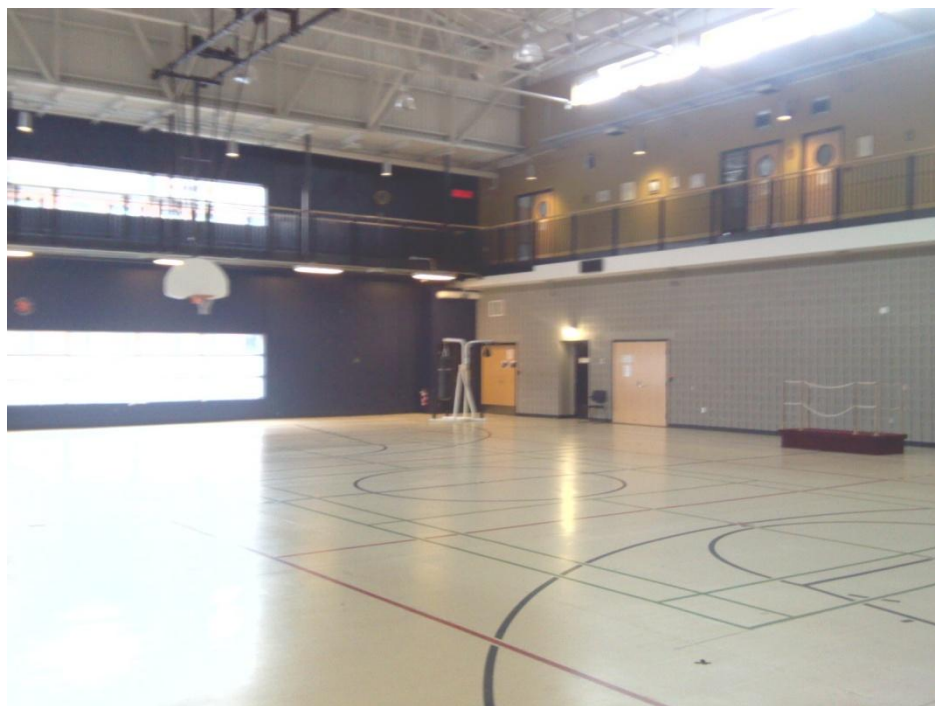
**Customs, rites and traditions.**

The RCN has a great many customs, rites and traditions. I decided to make note of some of the more prevalent ones performed at unit HMCS Donnacona.

### *Monthly Parade.*

"Generally we would be gathered at the parade square for inspection, but tonight the CO has decided to break with tradition. It is a common routine we have become accustomed to so tonight feels like an oddity. Perhaps the CO opted for no inspection tonight due to the fact that on Dec 15 we have the Christmas dinner and we will be already having a full inspect that day. I can't recall a time that we have had more than one full inspection a month aside from the month of November with the Remembrance Day parade."

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 5, 2012)



**Photo 13: Photo taken of the parade deck of HMCS Donnacona. This is where our monthly parade takes place.**



***The Naval Prayer.***

"Today was a parade night. However, one thing that was absent was the recitation of the Naval prayer which is a tradition in the RCN. I have been to special events at other naval units in Quebec and the Naval Prayer is always recited during a parade. This year marks the first year the prayer is absent as our Padre (our spiritual support officer) retired and our unit has yet to procure a successor. The Naval Prayer is usually recited in English and French and we always remove our cap and bow our heads during the prayer. It is often preceded by a few words of wisdom by the padre or an announcement of the sailors or soldiers we have recently lost."

(S. Lucu, field notes, November 5, 2012)

**Naval Prayer**

O Eternal Lord God,  
 who alone rulest the raging of the sea;  
 who has compassed the waters with bounds  
 until day and night come to an end;  
 be pleased to receive into Thy almighty and most gracious protection  
 the persons of us Thy servants,  
 and the Fleet in which we serve.

Preserve us from the dangers of the sea,  
 and from the violence of the enemy;  
 that we may be a safeguard unto our most gracious Sovereign Lady,  
 Queen Elizabeth,  
 and her Dominions,  
 and a security for such as pass upon the seas upon their lawful occasions;  
 that the inhabitants of our Commonwealth may in peace and quietness

serve Thee our God;  
and that we may return in safety  
to enjoy the blessings of the land,  
with the fruits of our labours,  
and with a thankful remembrance of Thy mercies  
to praise and glorify Thy Holy Name;  
Amen.

The Naval prayer was adapted from the prayer at sea first published in The *Book of Common Prayers* in 1662. Even though the RCN prides itself in its acceptance of all religions one must wonder how atheists must feel in praying to a god they don't believe in.

### *Awards, medals and promotions.*

"During some parades the Commanding officer hands out awards, metals and promotions to the ship's company. It's a big part of RCN culture. There are medals and awards for everything. At almost every parade there is an award or medal being given out. Today is kind of a big day for me because I've been informed I'll be receiving my CD (Canadian Forces Decoration) medal today. This day feels particularly significant and bitter sweet as this is the first and last medal I will ever receive in the RCN. The parade will start in about half an hour and I am going to begin the final checks on my uniform and boots soon. Those checks include me brushing off the lint from my ceremonial uniform and performing a quick spit shine on my

parade boots. It is a ritual I have done for twelve years and although at times it felt tedious I am feeling a bit gloomy knowing that I will never be doing this again."

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 15, 2012)



**Photo 14: Photo taken of my CD medal. This medal is especially important to me as it signifies my twelve years of service with the RCN.**

*Christmas dinner.*

"Of of all the naval holidays we hold dear in the RCN navy I don't think there's one that is more enjoyed by all than the Christmas dinner. It is a celebration with a long history dating back to the old royal navy days when the officers would serve the non commissioned members a Christmas dinner. Every Christmas dinner our CO and the youngest recruit switch roles for the day. The recruit receives all the power and privileges of the CO for that one day. This year the youngest recruit was persuaded by some of the senior LS or MS to relieve all us NCMs from doing drill, but had the officers march around and perform drill for our amusement. It was all in good fun and the officers were good sports about it. After that we went upstairs to the wardroom (the mess of the officers) and all sat down at our neatly set tables. We received a three course meal and had plenty of wine; all served by our friendly officer and senior NCM hosts. There is a tradition to leave a single table empty during the Christmas dinner to honor all those who have fallen."

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 15, 2012)



**Photo 15: Photo of the CO switching roles with the youngest recruit taken during the Christmas dinner parade.**



**Photo 16: Photo taken of the empty table used to honor the fallen members of the CF.**

***Battle of the Atlantic.***

"Out of all the customs and traditions in the RCN, I don't think there's one taken more seriously than the Battle of the Atlantic parade. Every first Sunday of May we march in a parade to honor all the ships and sailors that were lost during the "Battle of the Atlantic" and all other sea warring conflicts. On that day we are joined by the Legion, cadets, and honorary military members to pay tribute. Wreaths are commonly placed in the water and a bell tolls for each ship or sailor lost."

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 4, 2012)

### ***10 o'clock soup.***

"There is a custom here in the RCN. We stop what we are doing at 10 am for a stand easy (break) and go to the galley (cafeteria) for some soup. It's usually onion, pea or clam chowder. I noticed today that people take the soup quite seriously. When soup was announced everyone in the ship's office stopped what they were doing and all went upstairs to the galley to get their soup. This particular custom originates from those sailing at sea, but it has been adopted by naval units like HMCS Donnacona as well."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 22, 2012)

### **Behaviour.**

If one spent a day observing the members of a RCN unit one would surely remark upon certain key behavioural characteristics. I decided to concentrate my observations on three key aspects: navy language, camaraderie and socializing, and the interactions between genders.

*Navy language.*

"Another aspect of navy culture that I observed today that would be very apparent to those visiting this naval reserve unit is the language and slang we sailors use and how we address each other. The first thing I noticed today is that anyone with the rank of LS or lower refers to each other by last name only, while when communicating with those of rank MS or above they use the proper rank and then name. We also use the NATO phonetic alphabet. Its true intent is so that combinations of letters and numbers can be pronounced and understood by those who transmit/receive voice messages by radio or telephone regardless of their native language, or due to transmission static. However, today I noticed our XO using the phonetic alphabet in another way. At the end of the night he told the ship's company (all members of the unit) "BRAVO ZULU". By its phonetic meaning it amounts to saying BZ, however, he uses it in the meaning of a compliment. In the RCN when one says "BRAVO ZULU" it means "Good job". I created a table using some of the more common words we use in the RCN with their respective meaning."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 11, 2012)

<i>Navy word</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Galley</i>	<i>Kitchen</i>
<i>Heads</i>	<i>Washroom</i>
<i>Rounds</i>	<i>Complete walk about on the ship or unit. Checking on all the spaces (for safety)</i>
<i>Slider</i>	<i>To leave work early</i>
<i>Stand easy</i>	<i>Relax</i>
<i>Mess</i>	<i>Cafeteria or work lounge</i>
<i>Navy gravy</i>	<i>Ketchup</i>
<i>Gash</i>	<i>Garbage</i>
<i>Handsomely</i>	<i>Slowly</i>
<i>Chit</i>	<i>Note</i>
<i>Leave</i>	<i>Vacation</i>

**Table 2: A list of some of the most commonly used RCN words and their meaning.**

### *Camaraderie and Socializing.*

"I observed today a lot of camaraderie among the members of HCMS Donnacona. I sometimes forget that this is a military unit. The CO at HMCS Donnacona fosters camaraderie by providing time in the schedule for its members to socialize. At 21:45 of every Tuesday night we stop what we are doing and we all head to our respective messes (JR, senior, or wardroom).



The bar is open and sometimes we get free beer like we did tonight. This provides the members time to relax, wind down and talk about their day or whatever is on their minds. Technically this socializing is mandatory as we cannot leave the unit until 2200, but everyone in the mess today seemed genuinely content and most did not leave at 2200."

(S. Lucu, field notes, September 18. 2012)

### *Gender interactions.*

"Today I wanted to observe how the members of opposite genders interacted with each other during the course of the training night. Firstly, I noticed that both genders seemed to regard each other with equal respect and poise. When a male member addressed a female officer it was always preceded and ended with 'ma'am'. I observed the same thing when male members were conversing with female members with the rank of MS and higher. They always addressed the female member by her rank first then her last name as it is the custom in the RCN to do so. However, I did notice something today that I never really noticed before. There is a clear discrepancy between the ratio of males and females at the unit and it varies by trade. I recorded my observations of how many males and females were at HMCS according to the trades and made a data table from those observations. Based on the calculation from the table the percentage of females at HMCS Donnacona is about 30.1%. So, slightly less than one third. I find it remarkable that I have never noticed that difference in gender before today. I also noticed that the discrepancy between the number of male and females increases further with the higher ranks. Of the ten senior NCMs at HMCS Donnacona only two are female and officers who are

viewed as the leaders in the RCN only have three female representatives. It seemed odd to have so few females in higher levels of power at HMCS Donnacona considering the last two COs we had were both female".

(S. Lucu, field notes, December 11, 2012)

<i>Trade name</i>	<i>Number of males</i>	<i>Number of females</i>
<i>NCI OP</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>NAVCOMM</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>PID (Diver)</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>RMS Clerk</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>BOSN</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Supply Tech</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>MESO</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Officers (all trades)</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>3</i>
<b><i>Total: 123</i></b>	<b><i>86</i></b>	<b><i>37</i></b>

**Table 3: List of the trades at HMCS Donnacona and the number of males and females in each one.**

## Artifacts.

One thing visitors may notice if given a tour of a naval unit, or at least at HMCS Donnacona, is the amount of cultural artifacts that can be found throughout. In this section I provide seven examples of RCN artifacts one would find at HMCS Donnacona divided in the following categories: navy aesthetic artifacts, emblems, crests, symbols and flags, and trophies.

*Navy aesthetics artifacts.* The aesthetics in the RCN is of a nautical theme. There are a lot of paintings of ships and sailors hanging on the walls throughout the unit. There are also many pieces of decommissioned ships such as anchors, wheel helms, and empty old cannon shells that can be found on display. The unit also has quite a number of model ships on display ranging from old royal navy sailing ships to modern Halifax class frigates.



**Photo 17: Photo taken of a frame with a picture of an old Royal British Navy ship.**



**Photo 18: Photo taken a piece a naval art. It is wooden sculpture of what appears to be a naval officer.**



**Photo 19: Photo taken of two old cannon shells.**



**Photo 20: Photo taken of an old wheel helm nailed to the wall at HMCS Donnacona.**

I chose photos 17 through 20 as examples of navy aesthetic artifacts as I felt they represent the diversity of art found in the RCN. This form of art is not limited to pictures and paintings. One will find relics and mementos of war displayed as well.

***Emblems, Crests, Symbols and Flags.*** Emblems, crests and flags can be found all over the unit. There are a great many crests hanging on walls inside the messes. In the JR mess, for instance, you can find a wide variety of unit crests lined up side by side above the bar. All members of HCMS Donnacona wear the unit's emblem on their combat uniforms and if one sails on a ship then one wears the emblem of that particular ship. Those emblems are symbols of loyalty to where one serves. We also carry a symbol of our military allegiance in the form of dog tags around our neck. There are many flags in the RCN that have different meanings and can be found throughout HMCS Donnacona, like the navy jack. This is the flag placed at the bow of

RCN ships on special occasions, or when anchored or docked during daylight hours. The navy jack is the official flag of the RCN.



**Photo 21: Photo taken of the crest of HMCS Donnacona.**



**Photo 22: Photo taken of the emblem of the Logistic department in the RCN, which is worn on a military headdress.**

Emblems and crests are important facets of identity formation and in the development of a sense of recognition in RCN culture. Every unit has its own unique crest. All members wear that crest on their uniforms. It not only identifies the member with their unit but also instills a sense of pride. Every member also wears a unique badge representing their trade on their headdress.

***Trophies.*** Trophies make up a good percentage of the artifacts one would find at HMCS Donnacona. There are trophies and awards dating back from the end of the Second World War. The many trophies and awards range from training accomplishments to athletic performances. HMCS Donnacona even holds a Grey Cup which it won in 1944 against the Hamilton Wildcats. Awards and medals are also a common sight in the CF. It is the CF's method of acknowledging achievement and success.



**Photo 23:** Photo taken of HMCS Donnacona's 'Sailor of the year' trophy. This trophy is awarded every year to the member who has demonstrated an outstanding performance all year long that exemplifies the qualities of a great sailor in the RCN.

## **Interviews with the Donnaconians**

I chose to include interviews in this qualitative inquiry of RCN culture because I wanted to explore the key themes of identity, recognition, and belonging from the perspective of other members in the RCN reserves. I also wanted to know what these members perceived to be the most identifiable cultural features of the RCN and whether similarities existed among their answers and mine. The participants of the following interviews are all members of HMCS Donnacona that I interviewed during the course of several weeks at the unit's ship's office. Three of the members were colleagues of mine that I worked with on a regular basis. One of the members is a senior petty officer who has worked at Donnacona for many years. The first of the four members of Donnacona I interviewed was LS Charest-Trudel. At this time he was working for the non public funds (NPF) department and had his own office inside the ship's office. I sat across from him at his desk and began my interview.

### **Exchange 1: Interview with LS Charest-Trudel.**

**Lucu:** When did you join the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN)?

**Charest-Trudel:** I joined the RCN in December 2008.

**Lucu:** What is your current rank?

**Charest-Trudel:** Leading Seaman.

**Lucu:** Can you think of the reason(s) why you joined the RCN?



**Charest-Trudel:** Yes, I wanted to try a military experience. Also I joined for some of the advantages like pay and school reimbursement.

**Lucu:** Are there any typical styles of dress you associate to RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** Its uniform.

**Lucu:** Do you feel you are recognized as a member of the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** When I am in uniform.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any particular activities you do in the RCN for recreation?

**Charest-Trudel:** Sports, drinking, eat soup at 10.

**Lucu:** Do RCN buildings have identifiable features? If so can you elaborate on them?

**Charest-Trudel:** Yes, there is a federal government sign with the name of the unit, a Canadian flag, and the Naval Jack.

**Lucu:** What are typical foods served in the RCN culture (i.e. on ship or for special events)?

**Charest-Trudel:** Same as in regular life, though there are some traditions for formal events (like in mess dinners when it comes to drinking and serving drinks).

**Lucu:** How do people greet one another in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** In the case of meeting an officer, with a salute, otherwise by their rank or last name.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other forms of communication found in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** Emails, telephone, different pipes.

**Lucu:** Do you think being in the RCN has affected the way you communicate with others? If so, how?

**Charest-Trudel:** Not very much, communication technology is below how I usually write or talk.

**Lucu:** Describe how a holiday/special occasion is celebrated in the RCN.

**Charest:** For the Battle of the Atlantic, we have a parade with music and we throw flowers in a waterway to commemorate those who died at sea during the BOA.

**Lucu:** How important is hierarchy in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** Very important, it is crucial for good order and discipline.

**Lucu:** How are gender roles perceived in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** It is non-existent, a male or female has the same role, in similar positions. However, some trades are more likely to be predominantly male or female.

**Lucu:** How important is the individual in RCN culture? How important is the group?

**Charest-Trudel:** The individual is much less important than the group. There is a culture of success or failure as a group.

**Lucu:** What are the criteria for individual success in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** Leadership, good communication skills, recognition from superiors. However,

some are promoted after they served 'long enough' even though they may not have the potential; this has a negative impact on the institution as it destroys the legitimacy of the ranks.

**Lucu:** Is punctuality important in the RCN?

**Charest-Trudel:** Very, it is crucial to ensure the timely accomplishment of tasks and for good order and discipline.

**Lucu:** Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** Yes, at 10, we get soup during our break.

**Lucu:** What is the most important (or most celebrated) holiday in RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** I would say it is the Battle of the Atlantic.

**Lucu:** What is considered most disrespectful in RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** Not respecting an officer.

**Lucu:** What is considered most respectful in RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** Being punctual and having a clean uniform.

**Lucu:** Do you think alcohol consumption is a key feature of RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** Yes, it is a feature present at every social event and there are even some institutional traditions, like toasts to the Queen at mess dinners.

**Lucu:** Do you think your experience in the RCN differs from others because of your trade, department and/or whether you are a junior NCM, senior NCM or officer?

**Charest-Trudel:** Not within my trade, but the experience varies between junior NCM and senior NCM. However, the most significant difference is between junior NCM and officers.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other key identifying features of RCN culture?

**Charest-Trudel:** There is a different language for technical terms, and different social interactions.

My interview with LS Charest-Trudel provided me with my first insight into RCN culture from another member's perspective. LS Charest-Trudel found that the RCN had identifiable features with both the naval uniform and the Naval Jack being among his examples. He felt the consumption of alcohol was a key feature of the RCN and that one's experiences in the RCN differs depending on what division one is a part of. He expressed that there was a significant discrepancy in the experiences one might have as an officer as opposed to a NCM. I felt reassured in my choices of identifiable features of RCN culture when he listed navy language, the Battle of the Atlantic parade and 10 o'clock soup among his answers. However, I had forgotten to ask him whether he felt the RCN had affected his identity or if he felt a sense of belonging with the RCN.

The following week I interviewed LS Simard and PO Niro on two separate occasions. I interviewed them at the ship's office. However, unlike with LS Charest-Trudel I could not conduct the interviews in a private office and used one of the ship's office cubicles. I interviewed

LS Simard on the Tuesday night training of that week during her break period. LS Simard works as a clerk in the ship's office part time and studies full time at the University of Montreal, beginning her PhD in the field of science. She is French Canadian and felt more comfortable answering my questions in French. I decided that this time I would raise the questions that explicitly asked whether the RCN has affected the member's identity and sense of belonging with the RCN.

### **Exchange 2: Interview with LS Simard.**

**Lucu:** When did you join the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN)?

**Simard:** Le 26 avril 2007.

**Lucu:** What is your current rank?

**Simard:** Matelot de première classe.

**Lucu:** Can you think of the reason(s) why you joined the RCN?

**Simard:** Pour payer une partie de mes études; pour avoir une job a temps partiel souple durant mes études, et pour faire du sport.

**Lucu:** Has the RCN affected your identity? In the way you perceive yourself or how others perceive you?

**Simard:** Non, le RCN n'a jamais, bien sur selon mes perceptions, changé ce que j'étais.

**Lucu:** Are there any typical styles of dress you associate to RCN culture?

**Simard:** L'uniforme bien sur. En particulier, je dirais le CF est encore plus typique que les autres uniformes. Et encore plus particulier, le P-cap est le morceau de l'uniforme le plus typique.

**Lucu:** Do you feel you are recognized as a member of the RCN?

**Simard:** Oui, quand je suis en uniforme.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any particular activities you do in the RCN for recreation?

**Simard:** La plupart du temps on nous offre des périodes de sports collectifs, aller au mess prendre une bière, mess diner, diner de Noel.

**Lucu:** Do RCN buildings have identifiable features? If so can you elaborate on them?

**Simard:** Le drapeau de la marine canadienne.

**Lucu:** What are typical foods served in RCN culture (i.e. on ship or for special events)?

**Simard:** La chaudière de palourde servie souvent les vendredis.

**Lucu:** How do people greet one another in the RCN?

**Simard:** Si c'est un officier on fait le salut traditionnel, sinon on fait pas grand chose de particulier.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other forms of communication found in the RCN?

**Simard:** Le morse (signaux lumineux) et les drapeaux.

**Lucu:** Do you think being in the RCN has affected the way you communicate with others? If so, how?

**Simard:** Non, le RNC ne m'a rien appris en matière de communication.

**Lucu:** Describe how a holiday/special occasion is celebrated in the RCN.

**Simard:** En faisant une parade et en buvant beaucoup d'alcool.

**Lucu:** How important is hierarchy in the RCN?

**Simard:** Comme partout dans l'armée canadienne, la hiérarchie est très importante. De plus, cela dépend de chacun. Certains officiers sont très amical et respectent moins la hiérarchie tandis que d'autres nous font savoir assez vite qu'elle est très importante.

**Lucu:** How are gender roles perceived in the RCN?

**Simard:** Je crois que c'est assez équitable dans la RCN. La RCN se force et prend des mesures pour être équitable.

**Lucu:** How important is the individual in RCN culture? How important is the group?

**Simard:** Je crois que dans la RNC le groupe est plus important que l'individu. Surtout en tant que militaire du rang, le groupe est primordial.

**Lucu:** What are the criteria for individual success in the RCN?

**Simard:** Il faut savoir faire ce que l'on vous dit. Prendre des initiative. Venir a tous les entraînements. Montrer de la motivation.

**Lucu:** Is punctuality important in the RCN?

**Simard:** Évidemment la ponctualité est importante comme partout dans les forces. Le but de cette ponctualité est de discipliner les militaires. De plus, il est important d'avoir une unité organisé et discipliné, et c'est par la ponctualité que ca commence.

**Lucu:** Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to RCN culture?

**Simard:** La chaudrée de palourde le vendredi, le mess diner qui consiste d'un souper réglementaire avec pleins de réglés amusantes.

**Lucu:** What is the most important holiday in RCN culture?

**Simard:** Le plus important est certainement le jour de la bataille de l'atlantique pour se remémorer les marins perdu lors de la 2ieme guerre mondiale. Chaque unité fait une parade à chaque année.

**Lucu:** What is considered most disrespectful in RCN culture?

**Simard:** Manquer de respect envers ses supérieurs (comme les officiers).

**Lucu:** What is considered most respectful in RCN culture?

**Simard:** Être loyal.

**Lucu:** Do you think alcohol consumption is a key feature of RCN culture?

**Simard:** Oui, il y a toujours une grande consommation d'alcool pour chaque événement.

**Lucu:** Do you think your experience in the RCN differs from others because of your trade, department and/or whether you are a junior NCM, senior NCM or officer?

**Simard:** Pas vraiment, je suis dans le grade le plus commun des forces par contre mon métier étant administratif, je n'ai jamais pu aller sur des bateaux ce qui est plutôt particulier pour un marin.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other key identifying features of RCN culture (i.e. language, visual, behavioral, social, etc)?

**Simard:** Boire beaucoup d'alcool.



**Lucu:** Do you feel a sense of belonging in the RCN?

**Simard:** Pas vraiment. Je ne m'associe pas du tout au valeur véhiculé au seins de la RCN.

I was slightly disappointed with LS Simard's responses to questions regarding identity and belonging. I had hoped her answers would reflect my own. Perhaps she did not feel a sense of belonging due to her gender. After all there are far more males than females at HMCS Donnacona. I wish I had elaborated on that particular question as she was my only female participant. She did state many similar answers to LS Charest-Trudel in regards to key features with RCN culture. She mentioned the Battle of the Atlantic being the most important RCN holiday and how she felt recognized as a member of RCN while in uniform. It was interesting that she mentioned alcohol being a key feature of RCN culture. I began to suspect that perhaps all members would view the consumption of alcohol as a salient aspect of RCN culture.

I went into the interview with PO Niro with a lot of enthusiasm. I was eager to interview a member of the senior rank. Out of all my participants PO Niro has been at HMCS Donnacona the longest. He is well known around the unit and is very well liked with both the junior and senior ranked non commissioned members.

### **Exchange 3: Interview with PO Niro**

**Lucu:** When did you join the RCN?

**Niro:** June 1988.

**Lucu:** What is your current rank?

**Niro:** Petty Officer.

**Lucu:** Can you think of the reason(s) why you joined the RCN?

**Niro:** I joined by accident. During my last year of high school one of my buddies approached me and asked if I was interested in a summer job. He mentioned nothing about joining the military. To make a long story short, I wound up at HMCS Donnacona and assisted a recruiting information session. I decided to join on, although only for the summer, because it was relatively easy money for what the Reserves expected of me. As a matter of fact, I planned on leaving the Reserves after I completed summer boot camp. It was only when I found out after having completed boot camp that scuba diving was a trade and that the military would provide and pay for my training that I decided to give it a try. So I did. And after 24 ½ years, here I am, still.

**Lucu:** Has the RCN affected your identity? Or how others perceive you?

**Niro:** It has definitely affected my identity and the way I perceive myself. Your family members perceive you differently, your friends perceive you differently. Especially when I tell them what my trade is, they begin to ask a lot of questions and are very interested by what I do. You also carry yourself a little different; you hold your head up higher and feel a sense of pride for serving your country, even if it's part time.

**Lucu:** Are there any typical styles of dress you associate to RCN culture?

**Niro:** No.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any particular activities you do in the RCN for recreation?

**Niro:** Play sports on the parade square, work out in the gym and socialize in the mess.

**Lucu:** Do you feel you are recognized as a member of the RCN?

**Niro:** Yes, namely because of the RCN rank hierarchy.

**Lucu:** What are typical foods served in the RCN culture (i.e. on ship or for special events)?

**Niro:** Typical foods include various pasta dishes, a variety of chicken dishes, a variety of meat dishes, and who can forget delicious clam chowder on Fridays.

**Lucu:** How do people greet one another in the RCN?

**Niro:** Typical greeting gestures like a wave of the hand, hand shaking and verbal hello.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other forms of communication found in the RCN?

**Niro:** Flags, morse code and hand signals.

**Lucu:** Do you think being in the RCN has affected the way you communicate with others?

**Niro:** No.

**Lucu:** Describe how a holiday/special occasion is celebrated in the RCN.

**Niro:** Usually with a presence of several members that are dressed in full uniform and depending on the occasion, a guard will be present, ex. Battle of the Atlantic or Remembrance Day.

**Lucu:** How important is hierarchy in the RCN?

**Niro:** The RCN depends on it. The divisional system is based on the hierarchy of rank structure.

**Lucu:** How are gender roles perceived in the RCN?

**Niro:** In my opinion, all genders are treated equally.

**Lucu:** How important is the individual in the RCN culture? How important is the group?

**Niro:** The focus is less about the individual and more about how the individual interacts within their group. The individual is viewed as a component of a larger entity such as a squad, department, platoon, division, etc. The “group” concept is the main focus. This is why we dress the same and are expected to adhere to the same standards of conduct.

**Lucu:** What are the criteria for individual success in the RCN?

**Niro:** Strong leadership skills, strong team building skills and strong managerial skills.

**Lucu:** Is punctuality important in the RCN?

**Niro:** Punctuality is paramount as it is one of the core components of discipline.

**Lucu:** Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to RCN culture?

**Niro:** Clam chowder on Fridays.

**Lucu:** What is the most important holiday in RCN culture?

**Niro:** In my opinion, it would be the “Battle of the Atlantic”. The Battle of the Atlantic was a military campaign in World War II. It pitted warships of the German Navy against Allied merchant shipping. The convoys going from North America to the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were protected for the most part by the British and Canadian navies and air forces.

**Lucu:** What is considered most disrespectful in RCN culture?

**Niro:** Wearing a headdress in a mess and having an untidy uniform.

**Lucu:** What is considered most respectful in RCN culture?

**Niro:** Respecting conduct protocol, having a well kept uniform and respect of higher rank.

**Lucu:** Do you think alcohol consumption is a key feature of RCN culture?

**Niro:** No. It is a stereotype.

**Lucu:** Do you think your experience in the RCN differs from others because of your trade, department and/or whether you are a junior NCM, senior NCM or officer?

**Niro:** Yes. There is a certain respect that goes along with a higher rank and also a respect that goes with a high risk trade. If members perceive your trade to be difficult, usually they respect you more.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other key identifying features of RCN culture?

**Niro:** Military emblems and anchors. There are ship's guns and anchors. I've even seen torpedoes and some naval artillery type equipment.

**Lucu:** Do you feel a sense of belonging in the RCN?

**Niro:** I feel less of a belonging to the RCN and more of a belonging to my dive team sisters and brothers. We share a special bond because of the type of trade we exercise. In my opinion, the trade you exercise strengthens your sense of belonging. I am still in the Reserves in large part

due to my trade. If I were told tomorrow that I'd have to change trade, I doubt that I would remain in the Reserves much longer.

I felt better about my view of RCN culture after my interview with PO Niro. I could see parallels between his interpretation of RCN culture and my own. He joined the RCN by accident much like myself and he also felt that the RCN contributed to his identity. When PO Niro said *"You also carry yourself a little different; you hold your head up higher and feel a sense of pride for serving your country, even if it's part time."* I felt he was describing an important aspect of RCN culture that extends beyond the working military hours for reservists like us. I also appreciated his comments about feeling a sense of belonging with the members of his trade who he sees as brothers and sisters and how they play a part in him remaining with the RCN. I found it interesting that he thought the association of alcohol with RCN culture to be a stereotype when both LS Charest-Trudel and LS Simard said it was a key feature of RCN culture. Perhaps the association of alcohol with RCN culture was something only junior members felt. The next person I interviewed was Slt Wong who is a logistics officer that works with the NPF at the ship's office. I was really interested to hear the answers to my questions from the perspective of an officer in the RCN.

#### **Exchange 4: Interview with Slt Wong**

**Lucu:** When did you join the RCN?

**Wong:** September 19, 2009

**Lucu:** What is your current rank?

**Wong:** Sub-Lieutenant.

**Lucu:** Can you think of the reason(s) why you joined the RCN?

**Wong:** I wanted some adventure out of the ordinary. I wanted to break the routine and develop my leadership skills.

**Lucu:** Has the RCN affected your identity? The way you perceive yourself or how others perceive you? If so can you elaborate?

**Wong:** Yes, it did. I see myself as a person with more responsibilities and a potential leader. My mindset has changed. My friends and family probably see me the same as usual because I try to keep my professional and personal life separate.

**Lucu:** Are there any typical styles of dress you associate to RCN culture?

**Wong:** I would say a more conservative style of dress.

**Lucu:** Do you feel you are recognized as a member of the RCN?

**Wong:** Yes, when I wear the sailor outfit with the hat.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any particular activities you do in the RCN for recreation?

**Wong:** There is PT (Physical Training). I need to work out on a regular basis in order to keep myself in shape.

**Lucu:** Do RCN buildings have identifiable features? If so can you elaborate on them?

**Wong:** Other than the anchor outside of the HMCS Donnacona and the posters, there is no other identifiable feature because we are standard governmental buildings.

**Lucu:** What are typical foods served in the RCN culture (i.e. on ship or for special events)?

**Wong:** Regular food. Nothing special.

**Lucu:** How do people greet one another in the RCN?

**Wong:** We greet people with respect. Saluting the members of higher ranks.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other forms of communication found in the RCN?

**Wong:** Right now, technology has impacted on the way we communicate. Email and encrypted messages are used in order to safeguard the confidentiality of the information.

**Lucu:** Do you think being in the RCN has affected the way you communicate with others? If so, how?

**Wong:** In general no. But I am more careful of what I put on Facebook since I am a working for the Royal Canadian Navy.

**Lucu:** How important is hierarchy in the RCN?



**Wong:** Very important. The respect of members of higher rank is very important.

**Lucu:** How are gender roles perceived in the RCN?

**Wong:** The RCN tries to promote members of both sexes and there is a lot of awareness towards eliminating sexual discrimination or sexual harassment.

**Lucu:** How important is the individual in the RCN culture? How important is the group?

**Wong:** The RCN does not put importance in an individual because the individual is always dispensable or replaceable. The group is somewhat important but the most important is the organisation.

**Lucu:** What are the criteria for individual success in the RCN?

**Wong:** Taking more leadership roles and taking more initiative. Achieving higher ranks.

**Lucu:** Is punctuality important in the RCN?

**Wong:** Yes, because the timing can affect the effectiveness of a mission or any task at hand.

**Lucu:** Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to RCN culture?

**Wong:** I usually eat slowly and chew my food. During basic training, I had to eat fast and just swallow the food. During the field phase, eating food in the forest was something I wasn't too use to.

**Lucu:** What is the most important (or most celebrated) holiday in RCN culture?

**Wong:** I would probably say the Remembrance Day, followed by the Battle of the Atlantic.

**Lucu:** What is considered most disrespectful in RCN culture?

**Wong:** Insubordination.

**Lucu:** What is considered most respectful in RCN culture?

**Wong:** Subordination.

**Lucu:** Do you think alcohol consumption is a key feature of RCN culture?

**Wong:** Drinking is part of the RCN culture because when members are in their messes, some consumption is recommended in order to mingle and build a rapport with your colleagues.

**Lucu:** Do you think your experience in the RCN differs from others because of your trade, department and/or whether you are a junior NCM, senior NCM or officer?

**Wong:** Yes. As an officer, the experiences are more focused on leadership and people management skills. It is more about knowing who can get the job done than about knowing how to do the job at hand. As a Logistic Officer, my trade is more clerical and I am mainly dealing with clerks. I have zero experience at sea or in the field.

**Lucu:** Can you think of any other key identifying features of RCN culture (i.e. language, visual, behavioral, social, etc) ?

**Wong:** Acronyms and expressions are something particular to the RCN like AWOL, FOB, mess.

**Lucu:** Do you feel a sense of belonging in the RCN?

**Wong:** Yes, I feel a sense of belonging in the RCN. I believe it is the uniform. Every member has the same navy uniform and for me, that creates a sense of belonging.

I was content knowing that another member felt that the RCN had an effect on their identity. It was also interesting to see that Slt Wong believed that alcohol was a key feature to RCN culture as the junior members did. There also seemed to be consensus among all interviewees that the experiences one has in the RCN are largely dependent on the member's trade, rank and whether they are an NCM or officer. I have always felt that the division of ranks offered different experiences within the RCN. Three of the participants also thought that the 10 o'clock soup was part of their eating habits that were specific to RCN culture. Of the four participants three joined the RCN partly for financial reasons. Slt Wong joined to develop his leadership skills and break free of a routine life. PO Niro was introduced to the RCN by chance and only decided to stay because they provided him with a trade that interested him.

## **Emerging themes**

In this section I explore the themes of identity, recognition and belonging that emerged during my interviews with the members of HMCS Donnacona.

**Identity.** When it came to the theme of identity both PO Niro and Slt Wong answered that they felt the RCN has had an effect on their identity. For PO Niro he felt that the RCN not only affected his identity and how he perceived himself, but also how others perceived him. It is a sentiment that I share completely as I have always felt that my RCN identity was acknowledged by others, unlike my Mexican or Yugoslavian heritage. For Slt Wong he also felt that the RCN played a role with his identity in that he sees himself now in the RCN as a person with more responsibilities and as a potential leader. Slt Wong felt that his time in the RCN had changed his mind set. However, unlike PO Niro, he did not feel that others perceived him any differently because, according to him, he tries to keep his professional and personal life separate. LS Simard felt the RCN has had no influence on her identity and perceived herself to be the same person she had always been.

When I asked the members what they thought were the key identifying features of RCN culture I received a variety of answers. Both LS Charest-Trudel and Slt Wong thought that language was an identifiable feature of the RCN. For Charest-Trudel the identifying part of the RCN was language in regards to naval technical terms, while Slt Wong believed it was the language concerning acronyms and expressions. PO Niro said that emblems, anchors, torpedoes and naval artillery were the key identifiable features of the RCN. LS Simard believed that drinking large amounts of alcohol was a key feature identifiable with RCN culture. When I asked

specifically if the consumption of alcohol was a key aspect to RCN culture all, with the exception of PO Niro, said it was. It was interesting to see that PO Niro was the only one of the four who thought the association of alcohol consumption to RCN culture was a stereotype considering he was the most senior member I interviewed by far with twenty four years of service in the RCN.

**Recognition.** When I asked the participants if they felt that they were recognized as members of the RCN, LS Charest-Trudel, LS Simard and Slt Wong said they were when in uniform. I felt encouraged to hear them say that because I have always felt a strong sense of recognition whenever I had to put on my navy uniform and march in front of a crowd of people. PO Niro also stated members of the RCN carry themselves a little differently with their heads held up higher and a sense of pride for serving their country. He also thought the rank hierarchy was important with his sense of recognition. As a senior NCM in RCN and a member of HMCS Donnacona for over twenty four years I can understand why he would feel that the rank hierarchy was important. In his illustrious career as a diver he has obtained a high and established rank. I wonder if other members in RCN feel a stronger sense of recognition as they rise higher up in the ranks.

**Belonging.** When I asked LS Simard if she felt a sense of belonging in the RCN I was surprised when she said no. I was even more surprised when she said she didn't relate to all of the values of RCN culture. I wish I had asked her to elaborate on that answer because I am curious as to which values she was referring to. However, I was pressed for time that particular

evening and she had to go back to work. PO Niro said he felt a sense of belonging, but it had more to do with the people within his trade (divers) than with the RCN. He went on to say that his trade is the main reason he stays in the RCN and that he doubted he would stay much longer in the RCN if he was asked to change trades. Slt Wong also said he felt a sense of belonging in the RCN, but for him it is the RCN uniform which fosters that sense of belonging. I can relate my sense of belonging in RCN culture to the responses of both PO Niro and Slt Wong. The sense of belonging I've felt in the RCN was due largely to the friends I had made in the span of twelve years and the experiences I shared with them. However, the uniform also played a significant role in establishing my sense of belonging because it made me feel like "one of the guys" and made my skin color and ethnic background irrelevant.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I described my observations of some of the aspects of RCN culture. I focused my observations on shared beliefs and values, customs, rites and traditions, behaviours, and artifacts of RCN culture. I discussed the exchanges between my interviewees and myself. I had participants representing the three divisions in the RCN which are the junior rank NCMs, senior rank NCMs, and the officers. I was interested to determine if there would be similarities between what these members perceived to be the most identifiable cultural features of the RCN. I wanted to know if they felt the RCN had influenced their identity and whether they felt a sense of recognition and belonging. I explored the emerging themes of identity, recognition and belonging derived from the interviews with the members of HMCS Donnacona.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Navigating Through the Navy**

In this chapter I chronologically tell the story of my life in the RCN. I cover the most significant moments that helped me identify the RCN as my culture. Through this narrative I explore how RCN shaped my identity, and instilled in me a sense a belonging and recognition.

#### **Life pre-Borden**

As I touched upon in chapter 1, my early years were plagued with issues concerning my identity and the lack of a sense of belonging. My high school was perhaps the most culturally segregated place I had ever known and as a young teenager with no culture to identify with that school became the bane of my existence. Coming from a mixed background made my teenage life exceedingly complicated. The students at my high school unified themselves in very ethnically exclusive groups. It was as if my school had become a micro version of the United Nations and I was a boy without a country.

A friend of mine named Enrique was in a similar situation in that he too was from a mixed cultural background. His father was from Ecuador and his mother was French Canadian. However, unlike me, he spoke French quite well and being in a French school he had the

advantage. He had no difficulty integrating with the French students and spoke Spanish well enough to hang out with the Latin group. Quebec's bill 101 had sealed my fate. I was doomed to spend the next five years trapped in a building with others yet isolated from everyone. Well, perhaps not completely isolated. There were more people like me who did not fit in with the firmly established ethnic cliques at the school.

My best friend at the time was Jason. He was Chinese yet he was not part of the 'Asian group' that was present at the school. While others spoke Chinese to each other he spoke English. I don't remember if it was that he couldn't speak the language or just refused to. I am sure I asked him at some point, but all I remember was that I never heard him speak anything other than the required French and the conversational English. Whatever the case, we were always together. We became each other's shadow. By the end of high school we had established our own little group. It was a collage of misfits and outcasts that were united under a single blending banner. My last year of high school was enjoyable in large part thanks to the friendships I had established with others like me during the course of those five years. However, I still felt lost. I still envied the members of those segregated groups. I had never known what it was like to be part of a culture. I wanted desperately to experience that kind of inclusion and be a part of something greater than myself.

I remember during a diversity day at school we were tasked to bring in a dish native to our culture. I had no idea what to bring. I initially thought of asking my mom for help, but that thought was quickly extinguished when I realized that my mother had not cooked something



even vaguely Mexican since I was in kindergarten. I don't know why she stopped and I never asked. I wonder now if maybe she felt she needed to extend the exclusion of Spanish not only to language, but all aspects of her culture. It must have been very difficult for her as she was gone from all that she had ever known. Her family, her friends, and her culture were all in Mexico. In the end she did what she thought was best for us. She could not have known the turmoil not having a culture would cause me, but being a stereotypical teenager I didn't talk about my feelings with my parents. I ended bringing Chinese food for some reason. I think Jason gave it to me. The teacher was so perplexed when she came past my spot and saw the oriental food presented in front of me that she asked no questions and just moved on.

When I graduated from high school I was filled with a need to do something to find my identity. I thought about it for some time, then one day while I was walking around downtown Montreal I passed by a military recruitment centre. I stopped there and thought of my grandfather for a moment. I remember when I was younger my mother telling me that he served his country of Mexico proudly. I stood in front of that building with a question running through my mind:

"Can I do this?"

It is surprising that such a simple question would be so difficult to answer, however my high school years were not only plagued with the turmoil surrounding my identity, but also a severe lack of confidence. It started in elementary when I was put into a French school despite

the fact that my mother tongue was English and I could not speak any French at all. Quebec's Bill 101 had decided my academic career before I was even born. I had a hard time socializing and making friends in elementary due to my inability to speak the French language. I became shy and isolated and tried my best to remain unseen in class for fear of being asked by the teachers questions to which I would not know the answers. My teachers brought the topic of my very apparent seclusion up with my parents during the course of my elementary years. A few even proposed the idea to my mother that I should be tested for learning disabilities. One teacher told my mother that she shouldn't be surprised by my low grades as I was not the type of student who could achieve great academic success. Shyness and uncertainty became my ever present specters that continued to haunt me to the end of my high school years. So I stood there in front of the recruitment centre and asked myself:

"Can I do this?"

Like a diver ready to plunge into the ocean I took a deep breath and opened those doors. I was immediately greeted by a very friendly female officer. She had a very warm and inviting smile, and for a moment I paused to wonder if I was indeed in a military recruitment center. She told me she was a naval officer and asked if I liked sailing. I told her I had never sailed before and I couldn't swim, so I did not believe a navy pursuit would be the best option for me. She made a joke about how it didn't really matter if I knew how to swim in the navy as one always wears a life jacket while at sea, and if one should fall off a ship without a life jacket they would drown regardless of their ability to swim. Her joke did little to sway me and I told her I was more

interested in joining the army. She told me that was all right and politely directed me to an army sergeant and wished me good luck.

The army sergeant looked to be in her late forties, or possibly early fifties. Much like the naval officer she was very courteous and welcoming. She asked what brought me to the recruitment centre and I told her that I was interested in joining the military. She didn't pry any further than that and proceeded to ask me if I was interested in joining the reserves or the regular forces. I said that for the moment I would be interested in joining the reserves to see what it was like, and then perhaps seek a future in the regular force later on.

Perhaps it was the years of watching war movies with my dad or my fondness of the action genre filled with explosions and war machines that made me choose army artillery as my potential army trade when she gave me the rundown of the possible army reservist careers. I was surprised at how quickly the ball started rolling after I said I was interested in joining the army artillery. Within the span of an hour she had already booked my appointment with the recruitment centre to conduct the attitude and physical tests as well as a welcome session with the army artillery unit nearest to my residence.

"Is this actually happening?" I remember asking myself, somewhat in disbelief, at how rapidly things had progressed in such little time. Within a couple of months I was already being called in to do my last evaluation, which was the medical exam. I had already invested in the

idea that I was going to be in the army when I returned to the recruitment center to meet with the sergeant. I was then told that there was a mistake made with my medical exam and I had not passed the eye exam requirements in order to join the army artillery. I was disappointed, but she presented me with three options.

The first two would still have me joining the army, but they were my two least desirable trades; weapons technician and infantry soldier. I was told by an army corporal during my visit to the artillery unit that the weapons technician trade was no more than a glorified name given to the custodians of the army. At that time I was seeking a bit more glory than that, although I did not want the glory that would be associated with joining the army infantry. They are the front line and that did not sound too appealing to me. I did think it was strange that my eyesight was good enough to join the infantry, but not the artillery.

And so I went with option three. The sergeant noticed in my file that I was studying pure and applied sciences and recalled that I had said in our initial interview that I wanted to study engineering so the third option she presented me with was an engineering trade in the navy. I was hesitant at first, but weighing my choices at the time the third option sounded the most appealing. She directed me to the officer who would be taking care of my file. It was the female officer that had first greeted me upon my initial entering of the recruitment center. She remembered me and said with a warm smile, "I knew you would pick the navy. You'll see, it's more fun than the army". She gave me the outline of what navy life would be like and proceeded to talk a bit of my future naval trade, the Marine Engineering Systems Operator (MESO). I was

given the address of the only naval unit in Montreal. HMCS Donnacona would soon become my second home for the next twelve years of my life.



**Photo 24: Photo taken of the entrance of HMCS Donnacona over ten years ago before it moved to its current location.**

## **CFB Borden**

"When I left my home and my family I was no more than a boy". Whenever I hear those lyrics to Simon & Garfunkel's famed song, The Boxer, I am reminded of the first time I left home on a twelve hour bus ride to CFB Borden for my initial basic military training. I was just

eighteen years old and I had never been away from my home and family for anything longer than a few days. My excursion to Borden ON, however, was going to be for a period of ten weeks.

"My god, did I just make a huge mistake?" I thought to myself when the bus finally stopped in the front on the barracks that would be my home for two and a half months. Other than my time at sea, I associate my experiences of military culture most predominantly with my time spent at CFB Borden. I was about to experience a sudden and life altering culture shock.



**Photo 25: Photo taken near the barracks where I stayed at CFB Borden.**

Borden was my boot camp. It was my introduction to a twelve year relationship with the military, and just as in any relationship, you never quite forget your first love. In all honesty it began more as a love/hate relationship, with the initial four weeks being the roughest patch in my

military love affair. It seemed like the instructors made it their mission to only reinforce the stereotypes of military culture viewed in the media. There was a lot of yelling, cursing, and sleepless nights.

I felt as if I was trapped in a forever repeating loop of time. It was as if I was experiencing my own version of Bill Murray's 'Groundhog Day' in that I was basically living the same day over and over again.

"Every day is Monday," our drill sergeant would say.

That was my first fundamental lesson on military culture. Repetition and order are prized above all else. Perhaps they were trying to reinforce that idea into our brains. Get up, shower, run, eat, drill, water break, drill, run, eat, drill, water break, drill, clean room, polish boots, sleep, and then repeat over again.

Our drill instruction was done in a very rhythmic manner. It was as if I was back in fourth grade memorizing the multiplication tables. At times I felt I did the movements without any will of my own. It was as if my muscles were moving for me the moment commands were shouted by our drill sergeant.

We were all the same at CFB Borden. Despite the physical and mental exhaustion, I remember appreciating that fact. I wasn't constantly being asked about my nationality, nor did I feel like I was being isolated. For the first time of my life I felt like I was part of something. I had people I could identify with. We were all dressed the same, had our heads shaved the same way, and most importantly of all we shared in the same plight. Looking back I wonder if that was the intention. Was it their plan to make our lives so difficult and strenuous that we had no alternative but to rely on each other? If so, then it was a brilliant design, because that is what happened. I had never before experienced such a sense of camaraderie and selflessness with a group of people.



**Photo 26: Photo taken my platoon in boot camp. I am the one encircled.**

I was beginning to feel a sense of inclusion that had eluded me my whole teenage life. Was this what others with cultures felt? Despite the fact that I had to leave home and spend an



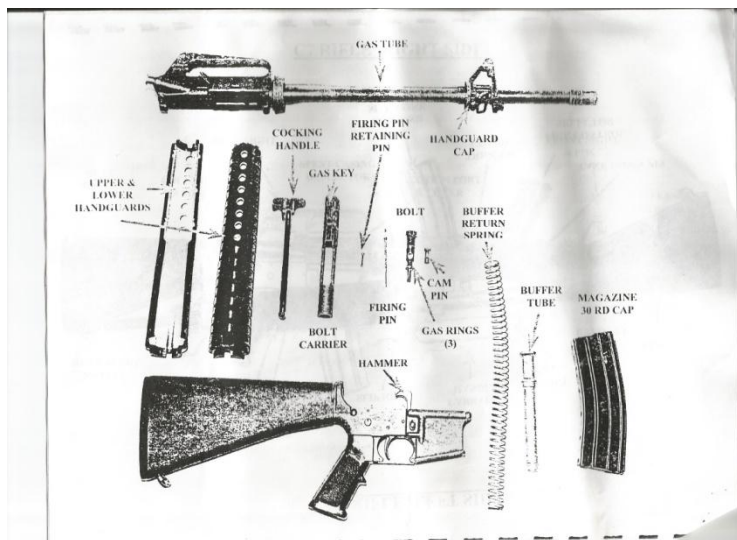
entire summer in a military base to experience being part of a culture I was content in the knowledge that I was part of a group of people united in shared beliefs.



**Photo 27: Photo taken during boot camp training of flash and smoke grenades.**

"We take care of our own".

I remember one of my instructors saying those words, and I recall a particular event that occurred during boot camp that illustrated the kind of helpfulness I associate with military culture. Shortly after we received some training with our C-7 rifles (a modified version of the American M-16), we were sent for some field training. The field training consisted of living for about a week out in a forest while conducting patrols, learning survival skills, and practicing emergency drills.



**Photo 28:** Photo taken from a page of the C7 refresher booklet labelling some of its components.



**Photo 29:** Photo taken of my tent during my boot camp field training.

One afternoon we were told that that we were going to conduct a field strip of our C-7 rifle. A field strip consists of disassembling the rifle into all of its components, which includes the bolt. Some of the pieces of the bolt are quite small. One particularly small piece is the firing pin retaining pin. We had to be very careful not to lose anything as we conducted the strip of the rifle over a small mat on the leafy and unstable forest ground. We were also told that if we lost any part of our rifle that we would be charged and most probably kicked out of basic training. I took the threat to heart, as during the course of a month and a half I had seen my platoon lose a dozen potential recruits for seemingly small matters, such as not keeping their room or rifle clean to military standards.

You could imagine my panic and horror when I discovered that I could not locate my firing pin retaining pin while I was reassembling my rifle. I began to frantically survey the ground around my rifle.

"It could not have gone far." I thought hopefully as I meticulously picked up every twig and piece of dirt searching for that pin. However, despite my best efforts, I could not find it. The fear was now very real and very apparent to those around me.

"What's wrong?" I remember my friend Lockhart asking, though he undoubtedly already knew the answer.

I explained my predicament and he immediately began to aid me in my search. Just like that; I didn't have to ask for help, it was given. Even though both of us searched the surroundings we came out fruitless in our pursuit to find that infuriatingly miniscule pin.

"I am so screwed," I told Lockhart, and he was too good a friend to tell me that I was right. A few other recruits came to us, no doubt noticing our frustration as we searched the ground in vain. Lockhart told them of my dilemma and again, without any hesitation, they began to help me in my hunt for that damnable pin. We all knew the severity of the consequences that awaited me should we not find it. Our instructors would soon be coming back and my hope in finding that needle in a hay stack was fading rapidly, replaced with an ever growing sense of fear.

There were about six of us now conducting a sweep of the area where the pin had fallen. We were lined up side by side and, in a straight line, began slowly advancing paying close attention to the ground we were walking on. It didn't take too long before I heard someone shout "I found it!" I was overjoyed. It was like winning the lottery. The recruit held the pin in the palm of his hand and presented it to me. I took the pin and hugged him as if we were long lost brothers finally reunited. It was quite the embrace.

After I composed myself I took the pin, thanked my saviors for their help and began reconstructing my rifle. When our instructors arrived they were oblivious to what had transpired

and congratulated us on our work. They even decided to give us a little nap time break to help us recharge from our exhaustion.



**Photo 30: Photo taken after the event of me misplacing my firing pin retaining pin.**

Finally I felt like I belonged. No longer was I the cultural outcast or the social pariah. I was with my people and I had found myself. From that moment onwards the military became the beacon of my identity. Not only did the military provide me with an identity and a feeling of belonging, but it also gave me a sense of recognition. I felt a sense of pride every time I donned my uniform. In my mind people for the most part knew and respected the military uniform, and that was a comforting thought. The ten weeks at Borden were long and often laborious, but they were perhaps the most self fulfilling ten weeks of my life. Soon came our graduation from boot camp and my parents were coming to attend the ceremony. I remember that day quite vividly. There was an air of both excitement and sadness that day. Our instructors were very friendly and

shook our hands to congratulate us in our successful completion of basic training. I put on my ceremonial navy uniform and Lockhart took a picture of me in the room where we spent many tiresome weeks together. While I was very content to be leaving Borden and returning home I was still filled with a conflicting feeling of dread that I would never see my friends again or experience the sense of belonging I had come to know during my stay there. My parents and all the other guests were seated outside for our two-hour-long graduation ceremony. Once it was over I was greeted by my parents. It was the first time I had seen them in a period of two and a half months. My mother hugged me as my father stood there smiling with tears rolling down his cheeks. This was the first time I had ever seen my father cry. It was a profound moment for me. My father was proud of me. He shook my hand and then saluted me. I was so happy that I didn't bother to tell him that you only salute officers.

## **CFB Halifax**

A year after Borden I received my Naval Environmental Training Program (NETP) contract for the summer. This was my life now. I would work part time during the school year at college and work full time with the navy during the summer months. This is the way of life for most reservists. This particular summer was to be my introduction to naval life. While Borden had given me my initial glimpse into military culture, Halifax was to provide me with some experience of what being in the navy was going to be like.

The differences between Borden and Halifax were quite apparent within the first week. People seemed, for a lack of a better word, more relaxed. It was yet another culture shock for me. There was still some drill, marching and the like, but the intensity of what I experienced and seen during my stay at CFB Borden was quite noticeably absent at this naval base. The people appeared to be happier and more casual compared to the military standards I had come to know at Borden. The instructors in Halifax were far more laid back than their Borden counterparts. They were professional and kept their dress and mannerisms to a military standard, but they presented themselves in a friendlier and open manner. I was unsure of what I thought of this new experience. I was somewhat in disbelief that Halifax could be so different from my time at Borden.

I wasn't the only one to experience this confusion. Many of my fellow sailors were also puzzled by the relative lack of stress. Where were the instructors yelling at the top of their lungs? Where were the daily inspections of our beds and closets? Where were the daily drill sessions? It was not that I minded the absence of those things, but I was perplexed by the current situation. During a class session on tying navy knots, one of my peers rather bluntly asked an instructor about the discrepancy between Borden life and that of Halifax.

"The navy is not like Borden," the instructor told us, "this isn't the army."

I was relieved, but partly disappointed as well.

I soon came to accept that things were now different. The rifle and field training were now replaced with rope handling and naval life instruction. In Halifax we learned some of the fundamental elements of navy culture. We learned sailing terminology, the names of ships and their histories, the customs we were to follow while preparing to sail, and colours. Colours is the name given to the Canadian flag, which is raised and lowered while aboard a vessel. It is a ritual that lasts no more than a few minutes, but one that holds deep significance to those who sail. We raised colours at sunrise and lowered them at sunset. A sailor sounds the pipe while another lowers the flag in the presence and command of an officer. This was expected to be done every day at any naval unit or aboard any naval ship. In the navy a unit is seen as a ship, and all rules that apply on a ship apply to the unit as well.

I had not been to sea yet, but Halifax taught me what to do when the time came. This was the point of the Halifax training. It was meant to familiarize us with the basics of naval knowledge.

Damage control (DC) school opened my eyes to the very different culture I would be experiencing with the navy. DC school consisted of a three-day training period where we learned the fundamental principles of fire fighting and flood prevention. We learned about what to do and what to avoid doing during a fire or flood. I shall never forget the day at DC school when they put us in a large room filled with fire and smoke and we had to act as a team to try and put the fire out. The fire, however, was not meant to be extinguished. It was too big and all around us. It was of course a controlled simulation and there was no real danger. The point of the



exercise was to have us experience what firefighting would be like if the situation were to deteriorate. While the fire was controlled, the fear and the heat were very real. It made me truly respect the profession of a firefighter as I now knew what it was like to be in their shoes for a day. It is one thing to watch firefighters on TV or in movies, and it is quite another to experience the difficulty of breathing through a mask in a room filled with fire and smoke, while supporting the weight of equipment on your back and holding on to large pressurized hose.

Before that training it had never dawned on me that fires and floods would be a very real and daily threat during life at sea. We were told that when we would be designated to a ship and set sail we would be on constant alert and have a very laborious schedule. Our instructors also pointed out that while at sea we should expect very little to no sleep for many days at a time.

"Laborious work and lack of sleep?"

Visions of Borden ran back through my mind. So the navy wasn't that much different from the army or Borden after all. It only seemed like the navy was an easier place compared to the army because we weren't onboard a vessel yet.

Besides the difficulty of life at sea, Halifax taught me something else about navy culture and life at sea: sailors like to drink and party. It seemed like every day my fellow sailors were having a beer before calling it a night and the weekends were an explosion of dancing, liquor and

music. Our instructors reinforced the importance of drinking and socializing responsibly, stating that even though we had weekends off we were always on the military clock and as such, the consequences of misconduct still applied. Still, I recall a few instructors telling us the philosophy which all sailors live by: we work hard, but we play hard.

After my time in Halifax ended I had a different mindset in regards to the navy. Things were relatively easy while on shore, with drinking and laughter. However, I was unsure as to what I was going to experience when I finally set sail.

### **HMCS Saskatoon**

While my time in Halifax theoretically prepared me for the sea, HMCS Saskatoon was the ship that put all that theory into practice. While I had been on a Kingston class vessel before the Saskatoon this was the first time I would actually be sailing. Not only would I be sailing, but I was going to be sailing for at least a month. Despite the words of caution given by my Halifax instructors, I don't think I truly appreciated the difficulty of what I was about to encounter in my endeavor to log some time at sea.



**Photo 31: Photo taken of me onboard the HMCS Saskatoon.**

This particular summer was my MESO on the job training (OJT). I was to be sent to CFB Esquimalt, close to Victoria, BC. It was my first time traveling to the west coast of Canada. Upon my arrival, I found the west cost of Canada to be much more beautiful than what I had seen on the east coast. When I arrived at CFB Esquimalt I was quickly briefed on what my tasks and duties would be for the next two months. The first month of my training was going to be purely academic. My comrades and I were going to learn everything about the mechanics and machinery on a Kingston class vessel. As a MESO we were responsible for the maintenance and proper operation of the naval systems onboard. It was a daunting task. We had to know every major system inside and out and there were a great many of them. We also had to be able to draw and recognize the layout for each system. We needed to know where each valve was located and

what their function was in respect to the system. It was of the outmost importance that we know our jobs well, as one valve could result in the salvation or destruction of a ship while at sea.



**Photo 32: Photo taken inside an engine compartment of a Kingston class vessel.**

We also had to familiarize ourselves with the engines of the ship as the engine room compartments was where we would be spending much of our time. Stokers was the term they appointed us, despite the fact that our job title was MESO. We learned in Esquimalt that everyone in the navy refers to MESOs as stokers. Our chief engineer told us that the term stoker came from the old Royal Navy days when those responsible for keeping the steam engines running had to shovel fuel, typically coal, into the engine's fire box. That first month at

Esquimalt I learned more about the navy and its culture than I ever had before. Of course I had learned things about navy culture through my part time work at HMCS Donnacona, but this particular summer I learned the history of why certain things are said and done in the RCN. There was a lot of hands on learning. Many times I felt like a little kid sitting near his grandpa waiting to hear another story of the good old days, or listening to why things were the way they were. I made good friends that summer and waited anxiously to be assigned to my ship for the second month of training. We were divided among four ships that would be sailing for a few weeks from Sitka, Alaska to Seattle, Washington to make it just in time for the Seattle Seafair fleet week.



**Photo 33: Photo taken off the coast of Sitka Alaska.**

I was assigned with a few friends to the HMCS Saskatoon. I was thrilled when one of our instructors in Esquimalt told me that the Saskatoon was an enjoyable ship to sail on. We took a

plane to Sitka to meet with the sailors who had already been sailing for a few weeks. I remember the overwhelming feeling of awe I felt as I approached the jetty where our four ships were docked. My friends and I were greeted by a fellow senior stoker at the docks. He was to be our instructor and mentor the next month while we sailed.

It was a few minutes after I boarded the HMCS Saskatoon that I learned something new about myself. I get terribly sea sick. We had not left the dock and already I was nauseous from the movements of the ship. Our instructor had a good laugh and told me not to worry as I would soon become accustomed to the waves on the ocean. He was wrong. I had never been sicker in my life than the first week I sailed on the Saskatoon. That first week I could often be found at the bow of the ship vomiting every hour like clockwork on the starboard side.

To make matters worse I had also to contend with very little personal living space. My bunk consisted of a small crawl space with a strap to keep me in place. I need not have worried about my bed as I did not get much sleep with the steady stream of emergency drills and rounds that I was expected to perform. Thankfully, much like at Borden, I was surrounded by helpful and friendly comrades. The cook onboard consistently came to see me while I clutched onto the side of the ship projecting my meals to the sea. He gave me crackers to calm my nausea and juice and popsicles to provide me with water and energy. My instructors onboard also did their best to keep me well by giving me periods of rest whenever the ship was calm.



**Photo 34: Photo of my bunk aboard the HMCS Saskatoon.**

Needless to say, when we arrived to our first shore leave at Nanaimo, BC I was overjoyed. My friends and I also discovered the meaning of the term 'land sickness'. We had indeed become accustomed to the movements of the sea, for when we arrived on shore we could barely walk in a straight line. During that particular weekend we were actually stopped by the local police while taking an evening stroll because it looked like we were intoxicated. When we told them we had just arrived from sailing they laughed and said "Ah, you are getting your sea legs." Developing 'sea legs' is a definite part of RCN culture. While my first week at sea was physically and mentally exhausting, once we left Nanaimo I felt more at ease on the ship and my nausea was no longer an issue. The moment my body became accustomed to the movements of the sea I began to appreciate all aspects of sailing. I started to enjoy the smell of the ocean. I now delighted at the beauty of the vast sea at night. I admired the moonlight which guided our way.

With the nausea gone I could now appreciate the food served on ship. While enjoying my meals I discovered this about navy culture: the RCN takes its food very seriously. I don't think I ever ate so well as when I was at sea. We had lobster one night, and steak with baked potatoes the next. It was a culinary feast every day of the week. While I still had a lot of work to do on ship and the lack of sleep was ever present, I was still grateful for the friendships I had established on the Saskatoon and for my time at sea. After a few weeks we reached Seattle and I was amazed by what I saw. The Seafair Fleet Week was certainly something to behold. It was also quite humbling when we arrived on our ships and saw how they paled in comparison to the massive size of US navy ships and aircraft carriers. The moment we docked we were greeted very warmly by the citizens of Seattle who complimented us on our very smart naval uniforms. It was nice to be recognized outside of Canada and be treated with the same kind of respect they bestowed on their own navy sailors. Much like Halifax and Esquimalt, Seattle was a navy city. There were welcome signs all over the old port. Some restaurants and stores even provided discounts with proof of military identification. When we left Seattle and made our way to Esquimalt for the end of our two month summer contract I felt a reinforced sense of pride at being a member of the RCN. I felt recognized and I had never been more confident in my identity. I was a sailor and a member of the RCN, and that was a very good feeling.

## **HMCS Donnacona**

HMCS Donnacona has been my home away from home for the last twelve years. It was the unit I was attached to when I initially joined the Canadian Armed Forces reserves. When I



finally decided that it was time for me to leave the military I was filled with the same sadness I had felt when I decided to move out from my parents' house.

It was more than just an end to a career. It was the end of an important chapter of my life. Most of the significant friendships I have made through the years were during my time in the RCN.

My decision to leave the RCN and the military was not taken lightly and without serious consideration. After all, I had spent more than a third of my life being a part of HCMS Donnacona. I had celebrated birthdays, Christmas parties, and many other special events there. I had worked at Donnacona before I even entertained the idea of becoming a teacher. I felt like I might be losing my culture, and I worried what my life would be like if I could no longer associate myself with the RCN.

I remember one of my instructors telling me many years ago that the navy was a young man's game. August 2012 marked my twelfth year in the RCN. I was eighteen years old when I joined and at thirty years of age I could now understand the meaning of my instructor's words. I am not saying that being thirty years old made me an old man, only that I was no longer that lost eighteen year old boy I had once been. I had become a teacher during the course of those twelve years and continued to pursue my graduate studies. Actually, one of the factors that led me to become a teacher was my time at CFB Borden. One of my comrades in my platoon was a teacher

and we became good friends during boot camp. He talked about his profession with great enthusiasm which I found admirable. We gave him the nickname "Professor". I liked the idea of becoming a teacher like him. A few years after Borden I applied at McGill for a Bachelor's in education. Now I have a new identity; that of an educator.

My time had become a precious commodity that could no longer support the lifestyle I had once enjoyed. The deciding factor that enabled me to make my final decision was when I met my wife. I knew I wanted to marry her and spend all my available time building a life with her, and staying in the RCN did not fit with that vision. While joining the RCN had provided me with an identity, a feeling of recognition, and sense of belonging, I no longer saw them as the defining components of who I was going to be. My identity, recognition and belonging were now forever linked to my teaching profession and the life I wanted to build with my wife.

When I told my chief clerk that I planned on leaving it was one of the most difficult conversations I had ever had. It was like I was breaking up with a long-term girlfriend and she was not going to make it easy. He asked me why I wanted to leave and if there was anything he could do to change my mind, and reminded me of all the good times we had had. It was hard to tell him I was firmly set on leaving. In the end he told me that he respected my decision and he promised he was going to make sure that my last day would be one I would always remember.

My chief convinced me to have my release date coincide with our unit's annual Christmas dinner. It was to be my final hurrah. It would also give me the opportunity to say goodbye to all of my friends and peers. I will never forget December 15th, 2012. I woke up that morning with a heavy heart. I had seen the changing of three commanding officers during my twelve years at HMCS Donnacona. I had been part of Donnacona back when it was still on Drummond Street in its original century old building before it made its move to the new building on St Jacques. I had seen recruits leave the navy as well as rise through the ranks. It was hard coming to terms with the end of an era. When I arrived at the unit I was greeted by the friends I had made throughout a long and meaningful career. They congratulated me and wished me the best of luck in my future endeavours. Every Christmas dinner is preceded by a parade, and in this parade I was awarded with the CD medal of the Canadian Forces. It is a medal that is awarded to all those who serve faithfully in the CF for a period of twelve years. It was my swan song. I was a bitter sweet moment that contained experiences and memories that will last a lifetime. It was hard to say goodbye, but I was proud to have served as a member of such a significant Canadian culture. The RCN will forever be a significant part of who I was and it made me realize who I wanted to be.



**Photo 35: Photo of my certificate of service.**

## **Chapter 6**

### **Reflecting on RCN culture**

This inquiry was meant to validate a culture that I believe played a significant role in the construction of my own identity. I stumbled upon the military and RCN culture by chance and as I write these final pages I wonder what would have happened had I not stopped at the recruitment centre door during my walk that day. Would I be the person that I am today? So I return to the purpose and objective stated at the beginning of my thesis. This inquiry was intended to answer these questions:

- (1) What is RCN culture?
- (2) What are the reasons individuals may have for joining the RCN?
- (3) What are the key aspects, features, or characteristic that make RCN culture?
- (4) What role does the RCN have in the formation of its members' identities?
- (5) Do members of RCN feel a sense of recognition by being a member of the RCN?
- (6) Do members of RCN feel a sense of belonging?

I feel after recording my observations at HMCS Donnacona and reflecting upon them while writing my narrative that I was able to answer the above questions. Keeping those guiding

questions in my mind I felt I could recall and appreciate the story of my military career in the context of culture. This thesis in itself was a labour of love and brought many memories and emotions to the surface. Through the interviews I was able to get a perspective on RCN culture from other members. It was interesting to hear their answers to the guiding questions of my research. It was comforting to know that I was not the only one who thought that the RCN influenced one's identity and created a sense of recognition and belonging.

It was also fascinating that the participants gave many of the same answers for what they believed were the key identifiable features of the RCN. Many of the participants believed the uniform of the RCN was important in their sense of recognition and felt that consuming the 10 o'clock soup was part of their eating ritual specific to RCN culture. All participants stated that hierarchy was important in RCN culture and for PO Niro it was an integral part of his sense of recognition. Not all participants felt a sense of belonging in the RCN, but those who did attributed it to the close bonds they formed with the people in their trade and the wearing of the RCN uniform.

This inquiry revealed to me that the reasons why members join the RCN are diverse. Money was a common theme for most of the participants, however it was not the sole reason and for some, like PO Niro and Slt Wong, it was not the deciding factor.

## **What is RCN culture?**

The guiding question in my research was "What is RCN culture?" and I think that now I can give an accurate answer. RCN culture means different things to different people. It is a culture that provides its members with what they are missing in their lives. It is an organizational culture that provides the members who join with what they seek. Some people see a chance to change or form their identity, while others see the chance to break out of the routine of their lives and try something different and new. Still others see the opportunity to have a steady income while they put themselves through school. No matter the reason why members join or choose to stay in the RCN, I discovered through this inquiry that many members share in the common values and beliefs of RCN culture. The members speak the language of the RCN, participate in the ceremonies and rituals, and keep the customs and traditions of RCN culture alive.

## **Implications for future studies in RCN culture**

A number of interesting questions arose from my observations and interviews of the members of HMCS Donnacona. I believe there is much more fascinating research that can be done with the following aspects pertaining to RCN culture:

**Gender Issues.** While all the participants in my interviews believed in gender equality in the RCN, my observations revealed a significant difference between the number of males and

females serving in the RCN. Females make up only thirty percent of the members of HMCS Donnacona. The discrepancy between genders is even more obvious when looking at the individual trades. The only trade at HMCS Donnacona that has more females than males is the trade of RMS clerk, which is the equivalent job profile as a civilian administrative assistant. For most of the difficult sea trades (the trades that go out to sea), the females at HMCS Donnacona make up less than a third of the population.

What's more, there is an inverse relationship to the number of females and the positions of power and leadership at HMCS Donnacona. The majority of females at HMCS Donnacona are of rank LS and lower. There are only a handful of MS ranked females, only two females who had a senior rank, and just three female officers. It would be interesting to find out if other Canadian naval reserve units have similar numbers to HMCS Donnacona. I would also be interested in learning what female members think of their minority status at HMCS Donnacona and if they feel they are being restricted in advancing to positions of authority and power.

**Alcoholism.** The reason why I asked the participants if they thought alcohol was a key feature to RCN culture had to do with my years of observing the behaviors of my fellow sailors. Whenever I sailed it seemed that the moment we docked and left the ship someone had a bottle of beer in hand. Whenever I was staying at a military base and the weekend arrived it became a regular occurrence to see my roommates and many others stumble into the barracks intoxicated. There were many times that things got out of hand, and it has become regular practice that on the first day of any contract at a base or on ship that the superiors warn the members of the dangers

of alcohol and the need to drink moderately. There exist programs in the RCN to help those suffering from alcoholism.

When I asked the participants the question of whether they thought alcohol was a key aspect of RCN culture all but PO Niro said it was. I would be interested in asking that same question to other members of senior staff (PO and above). I wonder if the consumption of alcohol as a key aspect of RCN culture applies only to its younger members. I would also like to know if the consumption of alcohol is higher with members of hard sea trades. Perhaps the absence of alcohol while at sea causes its members to get carried away when they arrive to port.

**Recognition.** It was interesting that out of all the participants only PO Niro felt that his sense of recognition was due largely to the rank hierarchy. I wonder if the sense of recognition one feels in the RCN is directly correlated to advancement in the rank hierarchy. In that respect it would be interesting to find out if officers feel a greater sense of recognition than NCMs. After all, when an NCM walks past an officer they must stop what they doing and salute him or her. It is meant as a sign of respect, but it is an obligation on the part of the NCM.

If officers feel a greater sense of recognition then I wonder if NCMs resent them for it. I remember on many occasions myself and other NCMs being stopped by an officer who wanted to receive his salute despite the fact that he was out of our line of sight at the time we passed



him. This of course is not to say that all officers behave in this way, as I have met many who have been inspiring leaders, but I would be curious to find out what NCMs felt in this regard.

**Belonging.** After interviewing my participants I could see that the reasons for feeling a sense of belonging in the RCN can vary greatly. For PO Niro it had to do with the people he works with in his trade. For Slt Wong it was the RCN uniform that enabled the sense of belonging. I would be curious to know if members who leave the RCN do so because they do not feel a sense of belonging. PO Niro indicated that if it wasn't for his trade, and the friendships formed within his trade, that he might not stay in the RCN. PO Niro has been in the RCN for over twenty four years. This made me think of all the recruits that initially joined HMCS Donnacona and quit the RCN within a few years. Did they leave primarily due to the lack of a sense of belonging? If so, then the retention rate of members would be significantly higher if the RCN could increase that aspect of their culture. I would very much like to find out more about why members leave the RCN and if these releases can be prevented by providing the members with a greater sense of belonging.

**Naval reservist vs. regular force.** This inquiry into RCN culture was done in the context of the naval reserve. While at times reservists and regular forces members work alongside each other, they are largely seen as separate entities. The reservist and regular force members do not generally sail on the same types of ships. For instance, reservists have sailed traditionally on Kingston class vessels, which are smaller than the regular force Halifax class frigates. However, it should be noted that recently there has been a push by naval command to merge much of the

reservist and regular force naval exercises together. This means that in the future more reservists and regular force members will become familiar with each other's ships, and as a result will become more familiar with each other's way of life. It is beneficial for the study into RCN culture to determine if the regular force members perceive RCN culture differently than their reservist counterparts. It will be interesting to see whether one culture will dominate over the other when RCN cultures converge.

**Other branches of the military.** It is my hope that all three branches of the CF can be explored to observe how the cultures are distinguishable from each other. I had the opportunity to visit an army unit during the course of my research into RCN culture. I went in with the misconception that army units did not place a great importance on their history, or that they did not have deep cultural aspects. Needless to say I was gravely mistaken. The CO of the unit gave me a tour and I was immediately taken aback from the vast amount of history integrated throughout the unit.

There was a sense of pride running through the walls and halls of that unit. The CO mentioned that the camaraderie felt amongst soldiers is very strong due largely to the dangerous and combative culture of the army. The soldiers must trust and rely on each other. Numerous relics made up the decor inside the respective messes I visited during my excursion. Each member gave me an account of the history of their respective mess with ease and enthusiasm. The unit also has its own museum where they keep their most precious artifacts. I found that

tradition, camaraderie, and pride ran deep in this unit perhaps more so than at HMCS Donnacona.

Knowing what I know now I would like to find out what other army reserve units are like in the Montreal region, as I was told by the CO that many army units have a unique history. I have also never visited an air force unit and would like to visit one and see which aspects of their culture differ from the army and navy.

**Quebec education.** I hope my autoethnography raises some questions on the effectiveness of Quebec's integration of immigrants, Allophones and Anglophones into Quebec culture. I doubt the trials and tribulations during my adolescence in regards to identity were unique to myself. How many youths today under Quebec's educational system will develop a fractured identity should their first language not be French? Perhaps there needs to be a better system in place to gather members into Quebec culture in lieu of bill 101. With the Parti Québécois' recent proposal of Quebec's new charter of values, which would ban public workers from conspicuous religious garb, one must wonder if such an action is conducive to establishing successful integration into Quebec culture and identity.

I found there to be considerable parallels between my RCN experience and classroom applications. For one thing my RCN experience made me more meticulous in the details of my planning and also my evaluation of student work. Punctuality is a virtue I developed in great

part from my RCN experiences and one that I convey its importance daily to my students. I have also come to value good posture and order, which in turn has perhaps aided me with classroom management. I was once told by a PO that teachers become good soldiers and vice-versa. It would be interesting to see in a future study the effectiveness of classroom management skills of educators with a military background.

At the conclusion of this inquiry, I wonder whether this thesis will prove helpful in providing the readers knowledge on RCN culture. I joined the RCN due to conflicts with my identity and the RCN not only provided me with an identity, but also with a sense of recognition and belonging. I hope that my autoethnography offers insight into cultural aspects of the RCN and how they shape the members. I believe that RCN and other branches of the CF are cultures that are rarely academically explored and more research needs to be done on them. As I write these final words I mark the conclusion of my military career and membership to RCN culture. I hope I have instilled upon the reader the importance it had in making me the person I am today.

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## Appendix A

### Sample of Research consent form



#### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I am a Masters of Arts graduate student at McGill University in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. I am examining the aspects that identify the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) as a culture for my M.A. thesis. I would like to invite you to participate in my study to explore what you think about RCN culture and its impact on your identity formation, sense of belonging, your feeling of recognition and the way you connect and communicate with others.

**Title of Research:** Navigating through the Navy: A qualitative research inquiry into Royal Canadian Navy culture

**Researcher:** Stephan Lucu, M.A. candidate      **Supervisor:** Dr. Mary Maguire; tel: 514-398-2123

**Contact Information:** Tel: 438-832-8287 ;      email: stephan.lucu@mail.mcgill.ca

**Purpose of the research:** To describe and explore the culture of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). In particular, the study investigates the key features that define Royal Canadian Navy culture (RCN). This research seeks to outline what the interviewees, who are member of the RCN, perceive to be the defining points of RCN culture.

**What is involved in participating:** I will ask you a series of questions relating to your experiences and thoughts of RCN culture. The method, time, location and length of the interview will be at your own convenience. I intend to audio-record the interviews and transcribe them. The audio-recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. If you decline to the audio-recording of the interview then I will be taking notes during the course of the interview. You will have the option to remain anonymous for the study and review the transcript of your interview to add or delete content. You will be provided with a copy of the final reviewed interview transcript as well as a copy of this consent form.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose to decline to answer any question or even to withdraw at any point from the inquiry without consequence. Your name will not be used unless you agree. If confidentiality is chosen, the data will be reported in such a way that it cannot be linked back to you. My pledge to confidentiality also means that no other person or organization will have access to your interview other than my supervisor and they will be analyzed thematically. Your interview transcript will be stored on my computer in a password protected file. I wish to keep the data for future-related studies. Your interview will be used to examine if there exists any correlation between Donnacona members and their perceptions of RCN culture. Results will be disseminated through my M.A. thesis, however, I may use the data in subsequent research.

**Research Ethics Board Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831      email: lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

**Consent:** I agree to be identified in the report \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
I agree to the audio-recording of the interview \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO  
I agree to have my interview used for any future-related studies \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

I have read the information presented about this inquiry and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that what my participation involves.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Stephan Lucu  
187 1ere Boulevard  
Terrasse-Vaudreuil, Québec  
J9V 5T8

**Appendix B**  
**List of abbreviations**

<b>OS</b>	<b>Ordinary Seaman</b>
<b>AB</b>	<b>Able Seaman</b>
<b>LS</b>	<b>Leading Seaman</b>
<b>MS</b>	<b>Master Seaman</b>
<b>PO</b>	<b>Petty Officer</b>
<b>CPO</b>	<b>Chief Petty Officer</b>
<b>XO</b>	<b>Executive Officer</b>
<b>CO</b>	<b>Commanding Officer</b>
<b>CF</b>	<b>Canadian Forces</b>
<b>CA</b>	<b>Canadian Army</b>
<b>CAF</b>	<b>Canadian Air Force</b>
<b>CFB</b>	<b>Canadian Forces Base</b>
<b>CDS</b>	<b>Chief of Defence Staff</b>
<b>RCN</b>	<b>Royal Canadian Navy</b>
<b>MESO</b>	<b>Marine Engineering Systems Operator</b>
<b>NCM</b>	<b>Non Commissioned Member</b>
<b>NETP</b>	<b>Naval Environmental Training Program</b>
<b>NSHQ</b>	<b>National Service Headquarters</b>
<b>HMCS</b>	<b>Her Majesty's Canadian Ship</b>