

IN MEMORIUM - Cdr. Donald S. Bethune, CD, RCNVR, RCN, RCNR (Ret'd) 1923 - 2002



Don Bethune as he appeared in 1946 as the Training Officer of McMaster University's UNTD and fifty-six years later attending a NOAC luncheon shortly before his death.

Photos courtesy HMCS STAR Archives & Eileen Williamson

IN MEMORIAM DONALD S. BETHUNE 1923 - 2002 On Saturday May 11, 2002, an Honour Guard composed of members of the UNTD Association and NOAC lined the sidewalk entrance to historic St. John's Anglican Church in the picturesque village of Ancaster. At 3:00 pm the casket bearing Cdr. Don Bethune CD, RCNVR, RCN, RCNR (Ret'd), passed from the church to the hearse through this column of old friends wearing navy blue blazers and berets. Each member saluted as the casket passed, followed by Don's widow, Margot, and their four children. She nodded and tearfully acknowledged with pride this last mark of respect to a man who had devoted his life to the naval community. Don would have been one of the original members of the first division of UNTDs formed at HMCS STAR in 1943 if he had started university a year later. As it was, he entered Pre-Medicine at McMaster and joined the RCNVR in 1942 as a Probationary Acting Sub Lieutenant (Temporary). He was Officer of the Day in the late autumn of 1942 when Professor Jack Baker of the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph attended a conference with LCdr. John McFetrick (Commanding Officer), Lt. William Newbigging (Supply Officer) and LCdr. John Dresser (Recruiting Officer) in the STAR wardroom. The purpose of this meeting was to lay the foundation for a Canadian University Naval Training Service, later called the UNTD. Don's account of this historic meeting appears in "UNTiDy Tales". Shortly after this prophetic event, Don was sent to Halifax where he graduated from the 90-Day Officers Training Course in HMCS Kings. After a year at sea in the Bangor Class Minesweeper HMCS UNGAVA, he was sent to the Communications and Radar Courses at ST. HYACINTHE. At the end of the war, he returned to McMaster University and became the Training Officer and Executive Officer of the McMaster UNTD. Thus he began a lifelong interest in education and the training of junior officers. After graduating from McMaster in 1948, he joined the RCN. In a twenty-year career, he spent over ten years at sea including periods as Training Officer in HMCS BEACON HILL, and Executive

Officer of HMC Ships LA HULLOISE and SWANSEA where he again came in close contact with UNTD cadets. He commanded 4 ships, HMCS WALLACEBURG, FORT ERIE, HURON, and NOOTKA. After retirement from the RCN at the height of the Hellyer debacle, Don spent twenty years with the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities where he was again involved with the educational development of young people. He also maintained a connection with the Naval Reserve, serving as Naval Control of Shipping Officer at HMCS STAR from 1975 to 79 before reaching Compulsory Retirement Age. Don was always a good judge of human potential and had a habit of making things happen. It was at this time that he played a role in encouraging a former UNTD, who is now this Newsletter's Editor, to work towards command of HMCS STAR. When that was accomplished, the ship won the national award for the Most Improved Naval Division in Canada. His involvement with the Toronto Branch NOAC is legendary, having attended the founding meeting of the Toronto Naval Officer's Club and serving in the role of President and National Director for Southern Ontario. Several UNTD Association members formed his funeral Honour Guard. They were: NOAC notable Gil Hutton, Reverend Canon Bill Thomas, former Alderman Bill McCulloch, Hal Wilkinson, Bob Morris and Commanders - Fred Lee, Bob Bowman and Bob Williamson, all former Commanding Officers of HMCS STAR. Of his UNTD associations Don wrote, "Many of the cadets that I had the privilege to have served with, laughed at, and despaired of, became successful naval officers and all round worthy Canadian citizens. I claim no credit, but garner a great deal of satisfaction from having been there at the beginning. I cherish the good fortune to have known so many fine young men in their formative years." Bob Williamson & Gil Hutton