

OUR MOUNTAIN NAVAL WOMEN OF DISTINCTION
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Seldom do we have the opportunity to present a story about the Hamilton Mountain that embraces significant National status. However, that is the basis for this submission to the Hamilton Mountain News. The theme, drawn from the Centennial Anniversary of the Canadian Naval Reserve 1923 - 2023 and the 113th Anniversary of International Women's Day 1910 - 2023, is related to the month of March this year.

Awesomely, two Hamilton Mountain women fill the requirement for this outstanding story. They were both raised and educated on the Hamilton Mountain and achieved the rare status for women in command of a Canadian Naval Reserve Division. One actually attained the highest status of a woman in the Canadian Armed forces (CAF) as Rear-Admiral and was appointed to Chief of all Canadian Reserves and Cadets.

Jennifer Bennett, born in 1958 was raised in the Southam and Westcliffe mountain neighborhoods by her navy family. Her father served in Hamilton's Naval Reserve and retired as a commodore. Jennifer graduated from McMaster University with a Bachelor of Physical Education degree in 1981 and received a Bachelor of Education from Queen's University the following year. She was employed in several schools in Ontario and British Columbia as a teacher and administrator from 1983 to 2008.

Her Naval Reserve career began in 1975 when she enrolled as an Ordinary Wren in Hamilton's Naval Reserve Division (NRD), HMCS Star. Dedicated to her naval career, promotions followed quickly; 1982 lieutenant and 1987 lieutenant commander. Having moved to British Columbia, she was appointed to Commanding Officer of HMCS Malahat, 1995-1998, the NRD in Esquimalt. Further promotions followed : Captain (Navy) 2000 as Director of Reserves in Ottawa; Commodore 2007 as Commander of Naval Reserves; and Rear-Admiral in 2011 as Chief of Reserves becoming the first woman to achieve that rank in the Royal Canadian Navy and the most senior reserve officer in the Canadian Armed Forces.



(Photo courtesy Jennifer Bennett.)

Until her retirement from the CAF in 2019, Bennett served in several significant strategic leadership positions in National Defence Headquarters and was a champion for Women in Defence, most creditably as a leader of a NATO Gender Seminar at the Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations in Sweden.

Having served across Canada and Internationally, Bennett now lives quietly in Burlington but volunteers on Advisory Boards and as a patron of the Juno Beach Centre in Normandy.

Glenna Swing was born in 1956, and like Jennifer Bennett, was also raised on the west mountain , graduating from Sir Allan MacNab High School. Her Naval Reserve career began in 1973 when she also enrolled as an Ordinary Wren in the Summer Youth Employment Program at HMCS Star where her father was also employed. Curiously, Glenna is remembered as one of Jennifer Bennett's summer instructors. Although she swore it was only a summer job it became part of her life for the next forty years.

Glenna rose through the ranks quickly to reach the highest level of non commissioned officer, Petty Officer 1st Class and Coxswain of the ship. In 1986 she was recognized as the first woman to be selected "Man Of The Year", an award title that obviously had to be redressed. Her talent and leadership contributed to HMCS STAR being awarded "The Most Improved Naval Division in Canada" in 1987.

In 1998 Glenna graduated from the Joint Reserve Command Staff College in Toronto. As a commissioned officer she was appointed Executive Officer of HMCS Star. Promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander she became the 31st Commanding officer of Hamilton's NRD 2005 - 2008.

That being said, Glenna qualifies as the first woman to hold all three command positions at HMCS Star : Coxswain, (Photo Courtesy Glenna Swing) Executive Officer and Commanding Officer.



Also during her command period, Glenna played an administrative role in the annual International Military Tattoo at Copp's Coliseum and continues to serve the military even after retiring from the Naval Reserve. She is currently the Chair of Hamilton's Corps of Commissionaires and in 2019 was made an Honorary Lieutenant Colonel with the Royal Hamilton Light infantry. She and her husband, Steve, reside in Ancaster where she continues to serve the Hamilton Community in various volunteer boards.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Mountain Heritage