

## **SPEAKING NOTES**

**THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA  
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF AN “UP SPIRITS” BREAK FOLLOWING THE  
PRESENTATION OF THE NAVAL CENTENNIAL BELL**

**OTTAWA  
MAY 4, 2010**

Mr. Speaker,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,  
Vice-Admiral McFadden,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here in the historic rooms of the Speaker of the Senate to celebrate in a historic manner, through a “venerable” naval tradition. Always a welcome call among sailors, Up Spirits summoned naval personnel for their daily ration of rum or other fortified spirits. As with many traditions, “Up Spirits” underwent a number of significant changes. It is now but a distant memory on the high seas, but one that left its mark.

In 1743 the Royal Navy issued beer, wine and rum in place of tea, coffee and cocoa. Beginning in 1745 beer and spirits were issued on alternate days – some would say that this was the start of parsimony; others would say that it was the return of common sense. In 1831 only rum began to be issued. By 1850 it was reduced from half a pint to two- and-a-half ounces, otherwise known as a “tot” of rum at noon. This was the tradition followed by the Royal Canadian Navy beginning in 1910 and continuing until 1972.

The unwelcome termination came to be known as “Black Tot Day” on the lower decks. Naval authorities had determined that rum at midday was not the

best way of ensuring the safety of modern warships, which had become “floating electronic complexes.”

In 1739 when Admiral Edward Vernon had ordered the dilution of the daily ration of half a pint of pure rum with water, he came to be referred to as Old Grog. This derisive term was applied due to his habit of wearing a cloak of coarse material known as grogram when he was pacing the deck. Hence the term GROG, by which diluted rum came to be known.

He had also ordered that the rum be mixed in a “scuttle butt.” The term “scuttle butt” became a lower deck euphemism for rumour. In addition, his earlier efforts to allay the effects of consumption by mixing rum with lime juice led to British ships becoming known as “Lime Juicers” and British sailors as “Limeys.”

Old Grog’s punishments for drunkenness while at sea were severe. The first offence called for 24 lashes, the second 48 lashes and finally keelhauling; this third infraction was usually fatal.

Needless to say, life aboard the ships of today’s Canadian Navy is somewhat more accommodating than in years past. The Up Spirits tradition at sea is no longer with us, but it has given us terms which have become part of the English lexicon, and so it lives on.

Happily, the ship of state does not necessarily run aground when rum is distributed early in the day. May all our ships and crew find their way safely home.