TWO STEPS AHEAD:
There’s no question that Commodore Watson has a vision for CFMWS — you just need to keep up with him in order to see it

by Jason McNaught

Commodore Mark Watson stands with Ottawa Police Sergeant Bernier at a recent “Support our Troops” event. As Director General of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, Watson leads an organization larger than the Canadian Coast Guard. (cno)
"A week into the job he had a list of over 60 changes he wanted to make to the organization."

His desk, a large and tidy l-shaped structure in the opposite corner, houses not two monitors, but two separate computers — a testament to the many hats he wears as Director General of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

Watson is both welcoming and friendly, but you can tell that he can pull off a ‘Tommy Lee Jones’ over-the-reading-glasses’ look when he needs to. After the introductions are made and the small talk dies down, something rather remarkable comes over Watson. His mind clicks into a sixth-gear, the synapses start firing, and with the tire marks still burning on the asphalt, he’s probably playing Sudoku under the table and thinking about his dinner plans while giving us his 411 on his organization. “Stop me if I am going to fast,” he interjects, as the pages of his presentation flip over and over onto the table. One thing is definitely clear about Watson: he knows Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) like Evangelist Billy Graham knows the Holy Bible, and if you’re going to keep pace, you better hope your morning coffee came with a shot of jet fuel.

In the few short years since Watson took the helm at CFMWS, he’s worked extremely hard at transforming the organization into “one of the strongest military Morale and Welfare organizations in the Western world.” It’s a lofty goal for someone who originally didn’t even want the job. Two weeks before being deployed to Israel, Watson was called into then-Vice Chief of Defence Staff VAdm Bruce Donaldson’s office and informed that he had been selected to head what was then known as Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services (CFPFSS). Watson protested, but then quickly warmed to the idea. It was something he wanted to do, but he was packing for Israel, and that’s where his head was.

Nevertheless, he hit the ground running. A week into the job he had a list of just over 60 changes he wanted to make to the organization — one of the first being its name. ‘Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services’ wasn’t a brand people could easily recognize, nor did it sum up the organization in quite the same all-encompassing way that ‘Morale and Welfare Services’ does.

Watson relays this information matter-of-factly as he rolls in and out of the content on the PowerPoint in front of him. He seems to have things firmly in hand, as if he’s standing on a line with a map in his hand, and can see his objectives laid out before him. There’s no denying he’s focused, but that doesn’t mean he’s all business. Unlike some officers in the upper-echelons of the military, Watson is forthcoming with the fact that he is an actual human being. Without skipping a beat, he mentions he isn’t very good at coming up with really good ideas. His strategy for taking CFMWS to the pinnacle of moral and welfare services is, he admits, based on copying other organizations’ successful initiatives.

When asked how he became a Logistics Officer in the Navy, Watson doesn’t shy away from blunt truths. He had a hell of a time as a young man at the Royal Military College in Kingston, reclassifying twice, jumping from a short stint as prospective marine engineer to the MARS officer program, and then finally to logistics. But you know what they say, third time’s the charm. Watson found his niche there, and went from rudderless to rising star from then on.

Watson talks about his career fondly and readily admits that he’s never “had a bad day in the Navy or the Canadian Armed Forces.” His first posting as an assistant supply officer on board HMCS Huron in ‘89 took him around the Pacific, the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Red and Arab Seas, and that only took two years. Since then, he’s had two more ship tours, two land tours, and went to school four times.

**CMDRE MARK WATSON:**
**BENEATH THE GOLD BRAID**

- **First Car:** Mustang (he admits it was a 4-cylinder)
- **Favourite Food:** Ribs
- **Favourite NHL Team:** Toronto Maple Leafs
- **Favourite Book:** *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (Watson was assigned to read this book three times through grade school and university).
- **If you weren’t in the military, what would you be doing?** Working for an NGO such as Médecins Sans Frontières.
- **What’s one thing on your Bucket List:** Travel the world with my children and future wife
- **What do you wish you were better at?** I wish I wouldn’t talk as fast
When asked about his current posting at CF Morale and Welfare Services, Watson believes that the wealth of business experience he’s gained from being a sea logistics officer is a key factor in his success. Watson came to know that role so well he actually wrote the book on it: *Sea Logistics - Keeping the Fleet Ready Aye Ready* (no joke, the book is real).

Watson jokes about that publication, mentioning something about it not becoming a bestseller, but one has to wonder where he finds all the time. CF Morale and Welfare Services is, in terms of numbers, larger than the entire Canadian Coast Guard — and its diversity is mind-boggling. At any given time, Watson could be discussing physical education standards for soldiers, making real estate transactions, listening to a briefing on the Joint Personnel Support Unit (JPSU), assisting in the preparation of a charity event for military families or discussing the finer points of retail sales with a CANEX executive.

And where others would struggle to ward off a mental breakdown in the face of a myriad of deadlines and a burgeoning inbox, Watson seems energized by all the responsibilities stacking up in front of him. In fact, he seems quite proud of the fact that there’s an intricate spider’s web of corporate hierarchy beneath him. And he should be. To a seasoned Logistics Officer — it’s paradise.

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**The CFOne Card: One Community – One Million Strong**

**WHEN COMMODORE MARK** Watson was made Director General of Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) for the Canadian Armed Forces a little more than two and a half years ago, he said he “was determined to make this one of the strongest morale and welfare systems in the Western world.”

One of his main priorities has been creating a program that recognizes the entire community of serving members, veterans, and families of Canadian Armed Forces personnel — a group totalling more than one million people — and keeping them connected.

Up until October 13, those with ties to the military had several different cards that provided them access to various resources and services, including the CANEX card for the military store, a CF appreciation card, and a card for the Military Family Resource Centre. Commodore Watson led the initiative that saw these various cards merged into one — and the CFOne Card was born.

According to the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services organization, “We have envisioned the creation of one card to identify ourselves as being part of **One Community — One Million Strong.**”

While the CFMWS has now issued more than 115,000 cards, the ultimate goal is to have one million Canadians in the database, with a quarter of that number being current members.

The CFOne Card program is partnering up with major businesses and services globally, to give discounts and special offers to those who have served.

Among the benefits are: reduced prices for trade shows, hotels, ski hills, resorts, movie showings, concerts, and sporting events (whether it’s registration for Canada Army Run or tickets to an Ottawa Senators hockey game).

In an attempt to build up the community using the card, the CFMWS is looking to encourage currently serving members and their families to use the card when they swipe into sports facilities and gyms, as well as messes and various services at bases and wings all across the country.

The organization is also looking for ways to reach out to veterans, which can be one of the largest challenges, as many have been disconnected from their military roots for quite some time, may not realize the programs they’re eligible to receive, and tend to shy away from some of the technology the CFMWS is using to spread the message, such as social media and various websites.

Commodore Watson’s team told *Esprit de Corps* that strategic partnerships with the Ottawa Senators and Canadian Tire have been particularly successful. As a result, military personnel and veterans are receiving scores of free tickets for them and their families to attend NHL games in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, as well as “on the road” passes for them to travel with the Ottawa Senators to away games in Detroit and St. Louis.

For more information, or to register for the CFOne Card, visit: [www.cfappreciation.ca](http://www.cfappreciation.ca).

~ by Ally Foster, with files from Jason McNaught