John William Mason
Captain
Royal Canadian Navy (Retd.)

1 hour

This interview is whith Captain John William Mason who joined the Royal Canadian Navy on the fourth of February 1943 and retired in December 1978.

Thank you for coming, John. We have decided that you will tell first about your High School years and how they might have led into the Service.

Yes, well, during High School I was in the High School Cadet Corps, not as one of the cadets, I'll have you know, I was in the band. I played trumpet. I had a hell of a good time doing that. I had been in the Boy Scouts, in fact, I was about five years in the Boy Scouts both in Montreal adn, subsequently, in Toronto. When the war came along, of course, I was at first amazed that it could occur, then, as time went by, my friends were joining up I was a little concerned that it might pass me by, and I wouldn't get a chance. I guess I wanted to join the Air Force, really, because my father had been in the Royal Flying Corps but that period, towards the end of 1942, the air force weren't taking people on. They put you on a waiting list. So I went to the navy.

Excuse me, did you not say something about they were releasing some?

They were releasing some at that time, exposing them to the Draft, to the army, by doing so. I didn't really jnow anything about the navy. I guess perhaps the appeal of the navy was that I had never seen the ocean, in fact, I had never seen salt water. I had seen the Great Lakes.

We're in Toronto now?

Yes, I had been born in Winnipeg and lived in Montreal and Toronto and I had seen great ships, the water front, ocean-going ships, and had done a bit of yachting and boating, I was crew. I guess the appeal of the navy was that I knew so little about it. In fact, to

skip ahead, I remember my first thrill of actually seeing salt water when we came around Bedford Basin, tide water! But at that time (I'm talking around about December of 1942) I had gone to University at my parents insistance, but I was rather lackadasical about it.

What were you taking?

I was taking Mechanical Engineering - not doing very well. So, came the Christmas Exams, my marks weren't what they should have been. It was apparent that I wasn't going to make it anyway. So I went down to the navy and they said I tell you what, we're forming up a group of people to take an ERA training course and I didn't know what an ERA was. In fact, I couldn't pronounce artificer for awhile. So, see us in January, when we're a little more organized. So I did that and what evolved was that a group of us were enlisted as second-class stokers and we came from all over Canada, as part of a scheme to train ERA's for the navy, a rapidly expanding navy, or to replace those ('ships) who had gone down. Most of us had little machine training, some had been in technical schools, some had started apprenticeship training in some of the big industries but I guess the vast majority of us were kids out of high school. My group was to be number Seven Division to go to Galt, which means six had gone before us, although Five and Six were still there when we arrived. Each Division had about fifty boys in it. The training in Galt lasted about seven months. It was February to September which was, how long, seven months?

Yes, about that. You were down in Galt but I think you had been sworn in in Toronto, were you not?

Yes, that's right. I had been sworn in on the fourth of February, 1943, in HMCS York which was then and still is the automotive building. It was taken over as was most of the Canadian National Exhibition, for armed forces, and I remember arriving in this place in civilian clothes and was quickly examined and injected and was given an armful of strange and weird looking clothing which I was told to put on. It must have taken me a long time and I thought I had done pretty well but I was instructed how dreadful I looked on a number of occasions. The next thing I can recall is putting my name on everything. They gave me a stencil, black and white paint to put our names on virtually everything. We even had to use stamps to put our names on the heels of our boots. Sleeping in what must have been the world's largest dormitory which was about half of the exhib-

ition floor of the automotive building, double-decker bunks.

About how many men were in there?

Several hundred I expect. To me it was enormous. Most of the time we seemed to spedn in physical training, scrubbing and cleaning, or in changing in and out of one uniform to another. I was there for about a week. I seemed to be endless. We weren't allowed out for a week if I remember. We weren't to be exposed to the general public. Then finally I was allowed to go home, carrying my civilian clothes, wearing my uniform. Was I proud!

And your reception at home?

Oh, my mother was delighted to see me. She thought that I had been sent to sea although I guess I had phoned home and if I recall during the war we very seldom wore civilian clothes unless we were on long leave. We had no right to wear them, we wore uniform all the time. Very shotly after that, as I say, we arrived in Galt and met the other fellows who were to form number Seven Division. I think only about half a dozen were from Toronto and I don't think I had seen all of those before; a couple I had seen at York. A great vast mass of people there and in Galt the atmosphere suddenly changed completely because we were virtually civilians. We were all billeted out in the houses of the good people of that town. We didn't wear a uniform at all, except we wore a rather strange uniform. We wore white coveralls, which were changed weekly, which were provided by the system, and a white hat with no cap ribbon. Either this was done to keep us identifiable or prevent us from running away - I don't know. The whole town would be full of these strange looking creatures running around with this "uniform".

Now, we wore a uniform once a week at divisions. Every Saturday morning there was divisions. In fair weather and even foul weather, it was held in what was then I guess the sports park in Galt and we paraded up and down for awhile doing manoeuvres being shouted at - if I recall - only one poor lone leading-hand, sort of a permanent force three stripe leading-hand ex RN, George, who we thought was the meanest most ferocious man in the world. He probably was. We would get doubled around and after divisions we would go to church on Saturday morning, in one of the downtown churches, together with all the guys in the air force training school. We would fill a church or two. The idea being that after you had been to church you were then free to com-

mit any sins you wished for the weekend, I guess.

Those of us who lived in Toronto of course could nip home, but the guys who were mostly from the Lakehead or the west or east coast, they couldn't do it. So I got home most weekends that I wanted to.

So there you were until September, wasn't it?

Yes, if I could continue about the training facilities, it was rather interesting. They had taken over parts of a number of the industries there to provide us with work-shop space and most of our training was done in the machine shop of the High School, I guess the civilian children just weren't getting any training because we were there in two shifts. A day shift and a night shift, five days a week and we were given machine shop training plus theory and machine shop work and hand fitting and we were required to do a number of projects and I must say that most of us got pretty fair at it, pretty good and we had to pass a test, both a practical and written test before leaving it all. I think most managed to do that. Actually we had a heck of a good time, it was summer and the weather was lovely with many local girls around, lots of dances and so on. We were always told "Wait until you get to the coast, you'll find out what the navy is really like." How little did we know that they were absolutely right. We went to Hamilton to the Westdale Technical School where we were given thirteen weeks of internal-combustion engines which was marvellous. We went to school after the school day so we went in at four o'clock and out at one o'clock in the morning in the automotive shop, again billeted out with civilians, walking to and fro this time in uniform with our coveralls bundled under our arms and a brown bag lunch. There were now about seventy-five because half of number Six had gone to the west coast and after that, in December, we hit the real navy.

The thirteenth of December we arrived in Halifax and it was snowing. We came down by train that had run out just about everything, heat, water, food, toilet paper, etc. There were no bunks. You always had to sit. It was dirty and grubby. To be met by a mean old petty officer. Tide water at last! I remember coming around Bedford Basin how thrilled I was to see not only all these ships in the Basin gathering for a convoy but tide water and what was obviously a change of water level. One thing I remember about Halifax is that I rode in one of the first four wheeled street cars I had ever seen. We

bumped along to the main gate on Gottingen Street and we dressed up smartly, by golly, as soon as we got inside that gate. There were people shouting from us from every direction, and eventually we were assigned to the glorious second deck of A Block. It had to be seen to be believed and it was December and the wind howled through that building carrying snow with it, down the corridors, and the toilets would freeze. We were jammed into dormitories designed for ten and I guess there would be twenty of us in double-decker bunks with one little square locker each. We lived in a slum. The food was crummy. We had to march down to the cafeteria, down where D Block is. Those were new at that time. But most of us managed to survive in the canteen which was up near the main gate. There was also a D and E club which was in the same building where we were, for very little we could get eggs and bacon. Anyway this was the real navy. They were lining up for liberty boats to go ashore. Having your station card snatched away for the least infraction or imagined infraction.

What about time ashore there?

Actually it wasn't too bad. I remember meeting some wonderful people who treated me like their own son. Their name was Carton and I could go there anytime I wanted. They always had a bed for me, without them I guess life would have been pretty miserable. Actually, there were a lot of clubs around. There was the Sally ann, the Y and there was the Tweedsmuir Room for ex-boy scouts. I used to go there a lot. It was on Barrington Street near the corner of Buckingham Street, there was a liquor store there. I was by then twenty so I was old enough to have a liquor permit, which you had to have. Of course the summers there were delightful. I remember Point Pleasant Park, walks on Citadel Hill and we used to hitch-hike to Hubbards, the dance-hall, sunning on the beach. There were lots of girls down there. We used to skating on Chocolate Lake in the winter.

Do you remember anything about the command then? I suppose the Admiral would be someone you didn't even know.

I always avoided officers as the lower deck did. I don't remember who the Captain of Stadacona was at the time. I remember who the officer in charge of the MTE where we did most of our training was. A Commander on loan from the Royal Navy called Boiston and we saw very little of him. One officer I do fondly remember and we really liked him was a thin-striper, RCN, called Knowles and he was

one of our instructors I recall now he was a good teacher and yet he ruled the class well. He was interested in us and again we did machine ship training, diesel, damage-control, fire-fighting, all those things for another eight months, yes, July.

During this training in Stadacona before you left in September 1944, you got some sea-training?

Yes, we were all delighted, we got two weeks in Niagara. They were delighted to see us as they were short handed and "second class" by then. We were not regarded as ERA Apprentices but as Stokers; that's what we wore on our arm and that is what we did. Mainly boiler and bilge cleaning. We sailed down to Shelburn where she was due for her annual refit. Then we were alongside for a week which, while not sea-time, was useful because we got the machinary out I remember flashing up from cold, the first time I'd ever done that, no electrics or diesel auxiliaries in those days. These four stackers would roll alongside if a harbour craft passed. They had a cable running down the main deck for steering, quite exposed, and this thing could ice up and all the rags and the garbage got caught up in it too and it was part of our job to keep that cleaned and greased. My first actual was when I was drafted to stand by Ship-Building as crew. They wouldn't tell you where you were going or even the name of the ship - I was Frigate #29, wherever or whatever it was.

I arrived in Montreal and went to HMCS Hochelaga II, a manning pool across the river from Montreal. I met my other shipmates who were to form Frigate 29 and we were a motley group. Most of us had never met before. There were a few petty officers but most of us were just leading hands and below, mostly below. I gathered that senior hands and the officers were at the ship wherever she was. The security was that good that we had lots of rumours but we never really knew where we were going and we spent most of our days just cleaning and polishing that place that we almost wore it out. I was a permanent Captain of the Heads and took great pride in polishing the brass in the urinals. I didn't want anyone using my urinals, mind you, and occasionally put up out of order signs. We picked up butts, garbage, rubbish, they made us white-wash all the stones, then white-wash them again. My greatest problem there was a homo-sexual who took a great liking to me and I had to avoid this brute without offending him.

Was there much of that around?

I never encountered it before or after. No, it was strange.

What was the discipline like in all those years, in Galt and Toronto? It was pretty free and easy? There wasn't much naval discipline, was there?

There was in the beginning in HMCS York in Toronto. Galt was fairly lax except for this once a week parade bashing we did. In Stadacona we did divisions once a week and we were falling in all the time for one reason or another but as we were under training and fairly rigourous training and working shift work we didn't have much time for that. We were coming and going, but we had to clean our own quarters and stand by for inspection.

But I get the impression there weren't many defaulters?

I guess there were, I used to see them. I don't mean me but some of us were defaulters from time to time.

What sort of offences?

I think probably drunkeness, failing to muster on time, sleeping in and that sort of thing, occasional being absent over leave. I don't think there were any serious offences.

What was the whole spirit of the barracks? The war was just coming to a successful climax wasn't it?

I guess the spirit was pretty good. We were appalled to see survivors coming ashore, fascinated by their stories but at the same time concerned that the war was going to be over before we got at it. That concern, but, yes, we knew we were going to win it - particularly after we got to sea.

We were in Montreal in Frigate 29, in this place there were about six or eight ships' companies waiting for their ships and beside polishing, scrubbing and painting, we did marching, route marching, callisthenics and of course divisions every day and I can recall to this moment "Tell off by ships' companies". You'd hear these voices saying "Corvette 32, Corvett 34, Frigate 26, Frigate 27, Frigate 28, Frigate 29" then this voice in the back "Diesel Tug" - about six hands. Then we were told that we were going to Quebec city - still didn't know the name of the ship. We piled into a train and at the other end threw all our gear into trucks. There were a number of ships building there. The rumour was that we were going to "Inch Aron" but we didn't go there at all; we went to HMCS Fort Erie. She was just finished and she was actually "steaming" alongside the wall.

We went forward and were dressed off by a Chief Stoker called Bunny Loukes - RCNVR before the war. Told off into watches and I recall that I had one of the first. With Joe Shorthouse. Then we did steaming trials in the river. During this time Valleyfield came in with her stern blown off. She hadn't got any further than Quebec to Father Point (ha ha). That was disconcerting. Anyway we did sail without event to Halifax, but it was rough and, oh boy, were we sea-sick! I was not vomiting but I was not well, I didn't know the real navy was like this once we rounded Cape Breton and got into the ocean. It was October and then, by George, we went to Bermuda. We were all anxious to catch sight of Bermuda, which we did. And that's all we did do, catch sight of it. We got ashore once in the week we were there. We were carefully shepherded past all the dens of iniquity and were taken to the Crystal Caves and the Aquarium by the chaplain and escorted back on board. The work-ups were about two weeks; damage control, everything else. Oh yes, I remember how we distinguished ourselves. We were doing a towing drill and we managed to St. Catherines aground.

Without going aground yourself?

I think we bumped the corner of it. I think there was a Court of Inquiry but they didn't ask me anything although I was in the Engine Room at the time. I think they asked the Chief of the Watch.

You've been in this frigate about a month by this time. What was the discipline like?

Fairly stiff. The Captain, it was rumoured was an ex-China-Seas skipper, an RCNR called Ford, so remote and so distant that I never knew the man. But his discipline was strict and instantaneous, I'm told, lots of #11 and the occasional bout of cells. My world, of course was the engine room, boiler room, messdeck, scrubbing out part-ship, that sort of thing. I can't recall being in serious difficulty myself except being admonished by the Chief Stoker on a number of occasions. On one occasion I was so darned tired. We had been up, it seemed like days, and we came to anchor. You couldn't sleep in the messdeck in those days. You couldn't sling your hammocks, you couldn't get space in a locker and I was dead tired and I had found a place in the fan flats which I thought a pretty good place to go, so I got a couple of duffle coats and curled up beside this nice warm fan and went to sleep almost immediately. Well it appears that I was missing and

they didn't know whether I was overboard or dead or what. The Chief Stoker was really angry. I had done nothing wrong and I wasn't out of bounds.

We've left Bermuda and were heading north?

Yes. Then we had to go to work after all those good times and fooling around and I'm a little vague here because one day seems to have folded into the next and not being topside where they knew where they were and what they were doing I can't remember the ports with watch-keeping in between. I had to serve six months as a first-class stoker and acquire my auxiliary watch-keeping certificate, as we all did, before I could become an ERA fourth-class, after examinations. So I was determined to do that as soon as possible. We were based alternately in Halifax and St. Johns, Newfoundland and I saw a great deal of those two ports. We never did get across to Londonderry. We got half-way a couple of times. It seems to me that we spent months patrolling Flemmish Cape which is off the Grand Bank somewhere. Apparently it is a navigational point, submarines were lurking in this area. We got almost in sight of New York, you could see the loom of New York on several occasions. We were a local escort for the longest period. We were somewhere at sea when the war was over, somewhere off Halifax. I had a very unexciting war really, never saw a submarine, never even close to being sunk, fortunately. We spliced the main brace and then expected to go into Halifax, or womewhere. No way. We were kept at sea for twenty-four hours and when we put into Halifax we saw why. The riots had devasted that town. It was just incredible. We came into Halifax with our lights on which was really exciting. I was a little frightened by it. But, lights on at sea! Good God! We had our running lights on and we could see the devastation. It was just unbelievable. I guess in a way we were a little disappointed because we weren't in on it (Ha Ha) but in that respect, I'm glad I wasn't.

Do you remember the spirit of the troops at that time?

We were glad the war was over and most of us wanted to go home. The spirit of the troops? Hard to say because my Halifax wasn't a bad Halifax. I had these people ashore to visit, I had my connections in the Tweedsmuir Room and girls there I used to take out and be invited to their houses and we'd go on picnics and dances, skating at Chocolate Lake, Hubbards, Point Pleasant Park - it wasn't bad.

I had no grudge against the good people of Halifax as some must have had. It was very sad that it occurred.

Before VE Day you must have escorted about what, ten, twenty convoys?

Yes. I never saw a sinking.

Not surprising, our sinking of the U-boats was very high by that time. There very few left in the western ocean. Let's talk about traditions and customs for awhile.

We were proud to be sailors. We were proud that our uniform was distinctive and different. They are not easy to wear properly. We were proud that we could do it. We tried to get away with as much as possible mind you, like turn our cap-tally around until the bow was in front, depending on how far we were from the disciplinarian. The longer your tapes, the better. Zippers were not allowed but you could probably sneak one on the side, never in the front as they did latterly. Collars had their own distinctive flair. You could always do a lot of things to your collar to make it look pretty salty beside the bleaching with Javex. Some people put wedges in their trousers but they had to be very careful of that, not too large. You might get away with it. Your hat you wanted to look salty of course, broken down on the sides. There was a point beyond which you could not break them down or you would be required to get a new hat. We didn't want to have to do that because even in those days we got kit-upkeep allowance and anything you didn't have to spend on clothing you could put in your pocket.

What was your pay at this time?

As a second-class stoker I got a dollar thirty-five a day, as a first-class stoker I think I got another ten cents. Then came the magic day when I became a fourth-class ERA and I got three dollars and five cents a day. My God I was a millionaire. I had never seen so much money in my life. It was marvellous.

What about mess-deck discipline as opposed to formal discipline?

I guess there were dominant people. I don't say bullies. But let's face it, the biggest guys got the best place in the lockers because there were no hammocks during the day. He probably sat where he liked, got the biggest piece of pie. He wasn't necessarily the leading-hand although he might defer to the leading-hand. He hung his hammock in a preferred place. You didn't jostle him around.

Let's face it, life in the mess-deck was crowded and generally unpleasant, no matter how you look at it. A kind of dog eat dog atmosphere and you got away with as much as you could. Very seldom would anybody rat on anybody else. The chief or the PO would say ask who did it? We were all a bunch of zipper mouths, nobody would say anything. All right you're all in the rattle so we were made into a unified force that way because we were battling the system.

So nobody broke the code?

What is the code? It is hard to define. Did anybody get hammered do you mean? I've seen people who wouldn't wash and were forcibly scrubbed. I don't think it did them much good. They would just fall back on their ways again. I guess the chiefs knew what was going on and shut an eye. Theft was not a great thing although we didn't have much to steal anyway. We didn't have much money but we kept that carefully. The lockers weren't lockable. There was no privacy. All of our gear was marked and that was all you had, your kit and your names were painted on it. We were always short of mess-deck utensils. Those who would do the washing-up were a little careless, knives and forks went into the gash bucket. So were forever stealing them from other messes. This went on continuously and we were allocated a certain number each month. We never had enough of them so many times it was a case of waiting for someone to finish so you could wipe off his knife and fork and use them. The food was by and large awful but if you were hungry enough you ate it, that is all there was to it. We had broadside messing, it was cooks to the galley. The cook went up with the mess-fanny and brought the food down and dished it out and served it up. In the mess-kit were always loaves of bread, fresh or rancid, butter, jam and peanut butter. A lot of guys lived on that so no one went hungry. I can remember the thick Ki. The discipline was strict but not harsh. We got away with a lot.

So the most influential guys in the mess-deck were the killick and the largest?

In those days the killick was somebody. The petty officers a little more remote and we feared the chief. Officers I seldom saw. The first captain of Fort Erie was Ford and then a wonderful man named Piper. I think Ford was relieved shortly after towing St. Catherines aground. Piper was a different man completely, I remember

he even mustered us and said "Well I'm the new captain, I want to see you and I guess you want to see me." Gee this is great he's going to talk to us (ha, ha). Then he told us what his rules were, how he saw things.

He was RCNR?

No. RCNVR. He was a lieutenant-commander.

So you're an ERA fourth-class. It's VE Day 1945 and you went on leave wearing a petty-officer's uniform?

Yes. I went on quite an extended leave, as I recall. Besides annual leave there was end-of-war leave, and those who volunteered for the Pacific got leave on top of that. We all had to sign that we would serve in the war against Japan and would serve in the Pacific theatre, or any other theatre for the duration of hostilities. I didn't know what ship I was going to but I knew I wouldn't be going back to Fort Erie: it wouldn't be right after you had served so long in a ship to go back to the same ship as a Petty Officer.

When I was on leave I was sent a telegram that I was to report to HMCS Antigonish which was refitting in Pictou, Nova Scotia. I joined her in August 1945 just before they dropped the Bomb. There was an enormous picnic put on by the good people of Pictou County - much beer consumed. But we still kept refitting and at the end did a couple of trooping runs to take off the Garrison at Bermuda. There were a lot of Canadian soldiers in Bermuda. That must have been jammy. We took two loads - 58 each time - back to Halifax. Then I was drafted ashore to Perigrine for "release". I was actually released, back in York on 11 December 1945.

I took my DVA credits and went to university and got a degree in mechanical engineering in the spring of 1949. I was not a member of the UNTD or anything like that. I did my summer training in the factories or in a mine. But the best job offer I could get was in Beloeil as assistant Plant Engineer at $210.00 a month - there were hundreds of us on the beach now. About the same time I got a letter from the Army offering me a job in REME for which the pay was $235.00 a month, all found, plus uniform allowance. I wasn't very interested in joining the army so I called the Navy at York and who should be there but Ward Palmer...a lieutenant RCNR. He took my particulars and after what seemed the longest time I got a call from him asking

if I could go to Ottawa. He and I found ourselves in the same train because he was going up for an interview to join the RCN. I met a bunch of people with gold sleeves with stripes who asked me all sorts of questions which I must have answered to their satisfaction, one of them was the Engineer-in-Chief who asked me what I knew about the distillation of petroleum. I think he finally had to shut me up because I had just done a paper on it at university and there wasn't much I didn't know about it. They asked me why I wanted to join the Navy and I said the pay sounded good compared to what I had (Ha Ha). And I thought it would be interesting too. Before long I found myself trying to buy a naval officer's uniform and in Toronto, believe it or not, there was difficulty in 1949. The best I could find was a green striper's uniform - RCNVR. I asked Simpsons to give it one straight stripe with a purple edging on it. But it was mauve and when I got to Halifax I had it changed by a proper tailor.

I took a Divisional Course which taught us our manners and our morals and our knife and fork drill and that sort of thing. I remember one instructor was Bill Kidd. You remember "FogHorn" Bill? "Don't do what I do, do what I say". A lot of parade training which I rather liked. I was pretty good at it. We went for a flight in a "Hazard" (Harvard) and to sea for a day. A lot of administrative stuff - Manuals and so forth. Lots of sailing. Another officer was a man we really liked - Craig Campbell - there were about thirty-five of us. He was then a Lieutenant Commander - we thought he was the greatest. He was Course Officer. We had a couple of CPOs who were always shouting at us "You sir are a sausage sir". We liked them too. At the final parade we called up the Chief GI and said "now Chief it's our turn to give you a bottle" and we gave him the biggest bottle of rye you ever saw - a half gallon. I thought he was going to cry. We did appreciate what he taught us. Then we got our postings and in those days they sent nearly all Sub-Lieutenants to the Royal Navy.

Before you left Canada, what was the spirit like in the Navy in 1949?

Completely different. It was a serious war-time navy then.

In 1949?

Yes. I don't know if the good people of Halifax had forgiven them for the riots.

There was nothing in particular about the spirit and moral which struck you?

I think it was pretty good, all right. It was a fair size, even then. It was before Korea but the Navy was alive and well. We Subs lived in a wing of the Hospital. The old A Block was torn down by then, B Mess was crowded and there was no Wardroom. Very few people were living in Admiralty House. Most of us went to serve in ships of the RN. Some went to Naval Air. We who were Engineers went to the RN Engineering College, HMS Thunderer. I went over in Aquitania - a marvellous ship - luxury. I spent from September to January 1950 in Keeyham, Plymouth. Manadon was just being built. We were given basic marine theory and then they decided to send some of us off to shipyards. I went to John Brown's on the Clyde. I was a dockyard matey for about six months, punching in, my God, we started at seven o'clock! In the winter it was still dark. I had to get up at four-thirty to be there by seven, on the four wheel tram. Ken Meikle and I were there together, come to think of it. Filing, fitting, refitting engines, building diesels, and so on. I,m not sure what it achieved but we sure got our fingernails dirty.

When it became time to appoint us to ships I was sent to the Far East on a troopship named Diwara. Six weeks of luxury, really. There was a lot of trooping at that time; that's when the Empire was still fairly great. All troops, with families, going to various posts abroad. We didn't stop at Gib or Malta; we stopped at Port Said. The inevitable galliy-galliy man came on board and made things disappear and reappear, including people's money. We went through the Red Sea which lived up to its reputation - hot as hell! Stopped at Aden, went ashore there, stopped at Colombo, Ceylon where I was introduced to surfing, had a day in Singapore, and then Hong Kong - about six weeks total. By then HMS Kenya - my ship - was in Japan. The Korean war had broken out on the 25 June. I had to wait in the Barracks in Hong Kong in HMS Tamar for passage. I spent about two weeks there with several false starts. I was sent to a British frigate, Bigbury Bay, which didn't get away at all - condenseritis. Then I went to HMCS Athabaskan, which had come in. So I went to Japan in her. I think the Captain was Paul Taylor. I do remember a remarkable fellow called Pierre Simard. I remember we hit a hell of a typhoon in the China Sea, I remember watching the indicator on

the peloris go over to 45°. There were a lot of smashed boats and bent stanchions. This was in August I believe. We went to Sasebo, Japan, the home port for our ships in Korea, and there was my enormous British cruiser Kenya! At last! I was taken over in Athabaskan's boat with my kit and my trunk and I knew the first thing I should say when I went on board, from Bill Kidd. I had written my letter of course "I have the honour etc.". I walked up that great ladder, I saluted smartly to the officer of the watch and said "Sub-Lieutenant mason Sir, I've come on board to join."

He said, "really, whatever for?"

(Ha ha) I knew my line all right but that reply wasn't expected. His name was Adam Burton.

We've agreed now to leave your Kenya and Korean time for another tape and you served in Keyham and Manadon, what did you think of the influence of the Royal Navy on Canadian officers?

I enjoyed it tremendously. No doubt about it, it had an indelible effect on me. It's a period of my life I'll never forget. I guess I came back with an English accent, not only the accent but expressions. I certainly learned how to be an Naval officer, an awful lot of things that aren't in books. I gained self-confidence and self-respect and an ability to handle men.