Report of Interview

with

Commodore A. Graham Bridgeman

Royal Canadian Navy (retired)

in

Victoria, British Columbia

on

11 May 1989

Graham, thank you very much for coming today.

It's nice to be here.

You started off in the Army, at the University of Saskatchewan, the COTC, I guess.

No, I was with the 64th Field Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery, Yorkton, in Saskatchewan. Yorkton was a small town of about five thousand at that time and we lived about fifty miles away. I hadn't bothered to join the COTC when I went to University but the summer of 1940 everybody seemed to be joining the Army or the COTC or something. rather than joining the COTC, I joined the Army and went to summer camp with the Camp Dundern??? Yes I spent the summer in camp and went back to university in the fall, then I joined what was called the Auxiliary Squadron of the COTC. We didn't have uniforms but we did drill the same as everybody else. That was my graduating year. I graduated 1st of May 1941. But around Christmas the recruiting officer from Naval Headquarters in Ottawa did a cross-country tour looking for engineers with a view of manning the new-construction ships that were being laid down; frigates, corvettes, minesweepers and that sort of thing. Forty-two of us were all taken on the same train to Halifax and we spent two or three weeks at Admiralty

House and some small buildings, known as the "Mouse Traps". Then we moved to King's College. We were the first class to arrive at King's College.

Can you tell me about your interview boards?

Yes. Board is using a strong word, I think I had about the shortest interview than anybody ever had on joining the Navy. A friend of mine had expressed some interest in the Navy and had been down to the local division and left our names, and one day the Dean of Engineering came into our class and said that all those who expressed interest in the Navy were to come into his office after the class. There was an officer from Naval Headquarters there to do the interviews. I was duly ushered in, I don't know whether I was first, second or third, anyway, I was ushered in. There was a great big prize-fighter type of officer with brass up to the elbows, as far as I could see. It was Commander Porteous (later Rear-Admiral and Chief of Technical Services). But at that point he was Director of Engineering Personnel. Being the gruff sort of guy that he was and a man of few words, he looked at me and said, "Do you want to join the Navy." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay, sign him up." He said this to the CO of the local division who was sitting at the table taking notes. Those are all the words that were ever exchanged between us.

It's interesting, when you compare it to the psychological tests they go through today and the endless boards.

Yes, well this was to join the RCNVR. Later on, in 1946, after the war I applied to transfer to the RCN and I went through a more formal board, as you can probably remember.

Yes. But, no, that board was the same way, when you went in front of that board. I realized after I went before them, they sent me out and said, "Come back this afternoon". I spent a terrible noon hour. They weren't going to turn me down. They wouldn't have sent for me if they were going to turn me down. I wouldn't have

got there. So when you went for your RCN board they knew they were going to accept you.

We'll probably come to that later.

How old were you in your graduating year?

I was twenty-three.

You're a bit early through college, weren't you?

No, that's long. My classmates were all twenty-one, twenty-two. I was just about the oldest. The reason for that was that I was eight years old before I started school. I was a First World War baby and the little town I lived in had too many children (after the war) for the school to accomodate so that passed a resolution than nobody could start school unless they had passed their seventh birthday by September 1st. I was born in November so I was damn near eight by September 1st.

I never thought of you as a Baby Boomer. That's what you were. A First World War Baby Boomer. <chuckles>

Well, I was born in 1917 and I guess it was about 1925 when I started school. That twelve years make me nineteen when I finished grade twelve and four more years after that made me twenty-tree when I finished.

What kind of engineering were you doing.

Mechanical engineering.

He was only taking mechanical engineers I guess, eh?

Yes, he was, at that stage. Later on they took a few electrical engineers and another board went around recruiting physicists, people who majored in maths and physics and they became radar officers. There were two or three from our university.

What's the difference from them and the electrical engineers?

Well, electrical engineering in 1941 consisted of power plants and things like that. Radar was something that hadn't been invented.

Not electronics.

No, not electronics. The most sophisticated piece of electronics in those days was the ordinary radio. It really was.

I guess so, yes.

So the electrical engineers were power plant engineers, more or less. And the physicists were the people who studied all the things that lead to radar and sonar and things like that.

Well, the build up to the Navy is important to the Historian who is now started writing the history of the Canadian Navy from '39 to '45. Because we did very well in building ships. One hundred and twenty corvettes and a few score frigates and towards the end destroyers. We did very well increasing our man power. We took in ten thousand, I think, the first year. There was never any time for training. Jimmy Hibbard was always howling about this. We sent our ships to sea in the upper deck, often the captain was the only one who had been to sea before. The point I'm getting at is this couldn't happen in the engine room, you'd wreck everything.

~~Yes, but~~ We came awfully close. <laughter from both> I should be back a little bit and say that I joined as an Acting Probationary Temporary Sub-Lieutenant (E) RCNVR. I'm not sure why we had all the actings and probationaries and so on but there it was. It was part of the rules.

And you went to Kings. We're in '41.

May '41 when we all graduated from various across Canada and we boarded a CNR train that started in Vancouver and ended up in Halifax. By the time we got to Halifax there were forty-two of us, all green as grass. We spent three months in Kings and the fellow known as "Long Robbie" was the CO. It's an interesting story as to how he furnished this place. The building was absolutely empty the day we arrived there; but about an hour after ~~was~~ we all arrived trucks with furniture began arriving. There was a

sort of parade square or soccer field in front of King's College and there was a road down at the other end. All the furniture was taken off the trucks and put on the road and Big Robbie at the precise moment, blew a whistle and said, "Okay. Furnish your flats." <laughter from Lawrence> That's how we furnished our rooms. There were four sub-lieutenants to a suite, so that we could manage a chesterfield upstairs. Within half-an-hour the place was furnished. Some people had three chesterfields and no chairs, things of that nature. <laughter from Lawrence> But it eventually got sorted out.

That's very good. Robbie was a great improviser. I've got his tape on starting Kings. He was just told, "Go and start a naval college. We want to release Royal Roads for the permanent force."

Most of the officers there were executive officers, maybe three or four divisions of executive officers, one division of paymasters and one division of engineers. The engineers were instructed by Lieutenant Harry Winnett.

What were your subjects then?

We were really just taking the naval application of the subjects we had already taken. When we cleared up thermodynamics we were all going to steam different ships with ship-boilers and turbines and so on. We'd studied about boilers and turbines; but we hadn't had boilers and turbines with propellers on the end of them. And all the other auxiliary machinery like evaporators for making drinking water and all this. We were taught about that type of thing. We spent three months of intensive study there.

Plus a bit of parade ground, yes.

Plus a bit of parade ground and exercised in the morning, running, a little bit of commications trying to read the lamp and semaphore.

You had the run of the Waegwaltic Club on the North West Arm.

The run of the Waegwaltic Club which was just down the hill. Anyway, after about three months Lieutenant Winnett and Willie Porteous had arranged that we would all go big ships, cruisers or bigger; primarily Royal Navy. But about six or eight went to the Prince Robert, Prince Henry and Prince David which were Canadian merchant ships converted to Armed Merchant cruisers. All the rest of us went to the Royal Navy. I went to a cruiser called HMS Despatch which was an old World War I D class cruiser with a trawler bow. It was a delightful ship but had no heating system or anything of that nature.

No heating in the messdecks?

No. But we never really went to cold weather, the coldest we ever encountered was in England. <chuckle> I joined the ship in Bermuda and spent the next year in the South Atlantic, except a brief sortie into the Pacific right after Pearl Harbour: when we were the only ship sent to protect the Panama Canal against the Japanese if they'd ever got there.

Any action in the South Atlantic?

Not really.

There were a lot of German merchant raiders out.

There were but we never actually got involved. But we were sent post haste one night from Trinidad to go over to West Africa because a sister ship was dispatched, Danae. I think she was the one that had been sunk. We were tied to a buoy in Trinidad Harbour. There were no gates or anything in those days and within an hour or two of our leaving, a merchant ship came in and tied up to the same buoy and it was sunk almost the moment it tied up.

You were lucky.

We were lucky. That was after Pearl Harbour and after we'd been in the Pacific and back.

You went through the Canal, how far into the Pacific?

Specifically we went to try to find the Japanese fishing fleet that had been based in Central America. They had all sailed from port two or three days before Pearl Harbour and our job was to find them. Well, the Pacific Ocean is a pretty big ocean to find the fishing boats, particularly with no radar or helicopters and the best view was the man's in the crow's nest and he could see just as far as you see. We patrolled around and spent Christmas Day in the Galapagos Islands. And about the middle of January we went into Talara, Peru. The Imperial Oil Company had a refinery there. Peru was neutral and we were allowed in for twenty-four hours and then we had to ago again. That was the only piece of land we saw. We never did find the Japanese fishing fleet. We went back to Panama and the next day the Japanese fishing fleet arrived in behind us. They came back. They hadn't sailed for Japan after all, they had just gone fishing.

I was wondering if they had been given a warning.

It seemed to me it was all coincidence. Literally, there was HMS Despatch and one American gun-boat called the Erie and that was it.

I suppose the Japanese fishing fleet got interned then, eh?

Yes. It did. We didn't have any part of that. The American sloop took care of that.

Or the Peruvians.

No. No, they went back to several Central American countries. Some of them might have been from Panama but others were from Costa Rica, etc.

Do you remembe you Engineer Officer in Despatch, particularly?

Yes, I do. He was a very kindly French gentleman. He was Commander Boosey and he was a Cunard Steamship Engineer who in peacetime had been in the RNR with the interlocking wavy stripes. He was called in the Navy when war started

and he spent the war in the Navy. The Senior Engineer was a Lieutenant Bloomer who had been a classmate of Harry Winnett and Rear-Admiral Jack Caldwell. I shared a cabin with an Engineer from Jamaica. I think he was part Jamaican and part English. His mother was English and his father was Jamaican. An awfully nice fellow. He had been a Rhodes Scholar and got his engineering degree at Cambridge. So when we were in the West Indies he was a big help to us.

Yes, of course, he would be.

He knew his way around quite well.

Did you get good training with the RN then?

Yes, I did, excellent training. I got a Watch-Keeping ticket and I was put on watch with another engineer, in fact, it was this Jamaican fellow, who was the one I was understudying, John Milner was his name. He'd been in the Navy a couple of years at that time and had had some experience. Bloomer, the Senior Engineer, was very experienced so I got very good training. They were all permanent force ERAs and Chief Stokers and Stoker Petty Officers, etc. Some of the more junior ratings were Hostilities Only but that ship had been based in Bermuda before the war started and had not been back to England. So she had a pre-war crew on board except for the odd replacement who had been sent out.

So, you got your WK.

Yes. I got my WK in four months which was about the minimum you could do it in. I think you were supposed to do at least four months. I got it just about four months to the day. After we'd left Trinidad and the Caribbean we went over to West Africa. We'd had a minor accident on board, a piece of machinery blew up and fell apart. So we were told to go back to England, to Chatham Dockyard for some repairs. We went back to England. We went right around through the North Sea. We didn't go through the Channel, stopped overnight and anchored at Greenock, in the Clyde and

then the next day we went to Chatham. We did a full refit there. I guess we were there two or three months. I enjoyed every minute of that ship, unfortunately I made the mistake of going up to London to make my number at the Naval Mission in London and the Captain's Secretary took one look at me and said, "We've been wondering where you were". And about a week later I got a signal saying I was to return to Canada.

Is it true that some ship's evaporators are more efficient than others? I was wondering about Despatch. Am I right in saying it takes about a ton of fuel to make a ton of water.

Yes. I think it's something like that. Mind you they have more efficient evaporators now, they have all along. But the evaporators we had in that ship and all the ships I served in during the war were very crude. They were just inch-an-a-half tubes coiled around inside a big drum. You put steam through the coils and salt water on the outside and you boil the salt water and the steam went out the top and was taken away and condensed and was fresh water. But the salt water caked up the tubes and they got coated thicker and thicker and thicker with scale till the point you couldn't make any water with them. Then you'd have to take the coils out and descale them.

Is that condenseritis?

Well, you don't have to further my education at the expense of the Historian's time.

That's when you get a leaky ....

Ah, you're getting salt water in with fresh water, that's right.

Hmn, hmn.

So you've returned to Canada.

Yes. I did get a week's leave and went home to Saskatchewan. I guess it

was two week's leave, but by the time I got there a week of it was already gone. Then, I think it was at that stage I got engaged to my wife.

Claire, who's sitting home waiting for you now.

Yes. But now I remember that that was a little later. I was sent to HMCS Quinte, a minesweeper, and my job there was really (there is only one engineer in a minesweeper), but there was a warrant engineer and my job was to understudy him and eventually replace him and he would go on somewhere else. I did that. I think I was understudy for about a month. He was sent off to greater things somewhere.

Are you still a Sub-Lieutenant?

I was still Sub-Lieutenant, yes. You had to be a Sub-Lieutenant for two years, unless you were age twenty-six, or better. Then it was only one year. It seemed unfair to us, at the time. Anyway, that was the way it was. I came back to Canada in the spring of '42 with one year's seniority as Sub-Lieutenant. I spent another year as a Sub-Lieutenant.

In Quinte.

No. While I was in the Quinte I got involved in an automobile accident down in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, and I had to be sent away for a week or two convalscent leave. I was on crutches. When I came back I found that Quinte had met with an accident and she had gone to the bottom, somewhere along the straight of Canso. She ran aground and sank.

Oh, did she?

I think they eventually refloated her.

You were lucky, you know. You leave an anchorage where the following ship gets torpedoed and you leave another ship and she goes aground.

Yes. She was gone. Anyway, there was another minesweeper that needed an engineer officer called the Clayoquot. So I was the Engineer Officer of Clayoquot for

five or six months and then ...

What year are we into now?

1943.

Where was Clayoquot working?

On the triangle run from Halifax to New York and Boston and then Newfoundland.

Any action?

We dropped lots of depth charges but we never saw the results. We seemed to be in fog most of the time. Our biggest job was trying to keep the stragglers back in the convoy. We used to go and drop a few depth charges beside them and that would make them scurry back.

Who was your Captain?

First of all the Captain of the Quinte was Lieutenant Nicol and the Captain of the Clayoquot in <Lieutenant HE Lade, RCNR left her in April> Lieutenant C.L. Campbell RCNVR took over from him.> I was not there that long. I became a kind of expert in refits of these Bangor minesweepers and as fast as I got one them they'd take me off that ship and put me in another one. So the next one I went to was the Red Deer. I left the Red Deer and at that stage Willie Porteous decided (he was still Director of Engineering Personnel) and he decided he needed a representative in Halifax and so I was taken off the ship and appointed as the Engineer Officer of Stadacona; which was quite a different job than being Willie Porteous' representative. But I did two jobs. I handled the appointments of junior engineer officers to ships, by this time there were ~~fifty or~~ about a hundred ships around Halifax and every~~one~~ time three or four of them would come in, one of them would have someone who had got sick or had to leave in short notice. I would range for appointments.

That was one job, what was the other one?

The other job was being the so-called boss of all the engineering personnel in Stadacona; and they were thousands, as you can imagine. We were a Manning Depot. I wasn't responsible for the drafting, in or out, but I was responsibe for them while they were there. My biggest job in that capacity was providing boiler-cleaning parties. All the ships of the Royal Navy, the Canadian Navy and American Navy, any that came in and out of Halifax, had to have boilers cleaned about every five hundred hours of operation. It doesn't take very long. So you need masses of people to go on board the ~~wear???~~wire brushes and chipping hammers and so on and descale the boilers. I remember one time a large converted passenger ship with forty-two boilers came in. I think we had to send about nine hundred men aboard on short notice to clean the boilers.

Who'd be in charge of that?

Of the boiler cleaning?

A bunch of ERAs?

No, there were ...

Stoker POs?

Yes, they would be divided up into working parties and each party would have a Petty Officer or somebody in charge and then there was a regulating office with a Chief Stoker in charge. I had an overall regulating office with a Warrant Engineer and the Chief Stoker to look after. I had that job for just a year. By this time the River class frigates were starting come into commission.

Before we get to the frigates. It doesn't take much to be an ordinary seaman or an able seaman. They sort of learn as they go along. But were you getting trained people in the engine rooms as stokers and motor mechanics. See, a motor mechanic would have a ticket, otherwise he wouldn't come in as a motor mechanic.

Well, he'd have a ticket of sorts. You know, he'd have been working in a

garage or something. Actually, the prairie boys, the farmers' sons who knew how to fix tractors, were as good people as any you could get. Whenever a group of stokers was recruited, they were sent to training camp somewhere for disciplinary training and parade-ground stuff for a few weeks. Then they were sent to what was known as a Mechanical Training Establishment, either Halifax or Esquimalt.

Yes. I had forgotten MTE. That's where they did their first technical training.

Yes. They learned the equivalent of what we learned at Kings at MTE. Except they had more tools and things to play with. Ours was blackboard stuff and theirs was on the job training.

Well, that's interesting. Dan Lang, I must tell you (this is an extraordinary thing) - I don't know what his social connections were then, I know what they are now - but when he was an Acting Temporary Probationary Sub-Lieutenant was sent to the Hamilton area to recruit electricians and motor mechanics and he recruited about eight hundred. These guys didn't have to join the Navy and the Hamilton people didn't have to let them go. I don't know how Dan Lang ever did it but he did. They all went off to these training establishments that you've just mentioned.

Hmn hmn, hmn hmn. Just an interesting aside, while I was Engineer Officer if Stadacona I discovered filing cabinets full of stokers' history sheets which should travel with the stoker whenever he went from one ship to another; but they never had the people to do the paper work so they would arrive in Halifax with their history sheet and there it stayed. I managed to get those things filled out and brought up to date and I signed them for everybody else and sent them on to catch up with people. But the point I was going to lead to was, a year or two before that, a whole lot of stokers had been sent over to the Royal Navy for training and they got completely lost. Nobody knew where they were. The Admiralty with their rather loose

appointment and drafting system had sent a bunch of them off to the Mediterranean to join ships there and so more to the South Atlantic. Then when we asked the Admiralty to send these people back - "Well we don't know where they are." I remember one officer was sent over to the Royal Navy for about six months just to go around from ship to ship to see if he could find these guys and get them to come home.

Is that the way we found them?

Yes.

Who was sent over? Do you know?

Yes. I think it was Commander Simpson who I believe is still alive and living on Vancouver Island. I'm not sure, he may have died by now.

<chuckle> I've heard that, about the missing stokers.

You heard that.

I heard that they disappeared but I didn't know how we got them back.

Anyway, that was my one year of shore time during the war and I was then sent to Montreal to be the Engineer Officer of the frigate, the Stonetown which is a terrible name for a sea-going vessel. It was name after the town of St. Mary's in Ontario. For some reason it couldn't be called St. Mary's and so Stonetown meant something to people in that area and so we were called Stonetown. We duly commissioned and you asked the question earlier about training. I found that my crew, except for a Chief Stoker and a Chief ERA and a couple of others joined the ship the night before we commissioned. And I sat in the little engineer's office interviewing these fellows from about six o'clock until midnight the night before we were to accept the ship. I found there were just enough who had been to sea before to form one watch. I put them all on the one watch for the first, because we had to go out and do a full power trial and acceptance trial and so on, in the St. Lawrence River. I

reckoned I didn't want to take any chances at that point. So we went out and did the acceptance trial, came back in, tied up and had a bit of rest. Then we divided them up in three watches with two green men and one experienced man on each watch. Somehow or other we blundered along and did all right. I stayed in that ship until the war ended, in fact, beyond that. I'll go back in a minute and tell you what we did. But when the war ended she was one of the ships that was selected to go to the Pacific. I wanted to go to the Pacific, but I discovered if you volunteered to go to the Pacific, the first thing they did was take you off the ship and send you on leave because you were supposed have leave before you went. And you never got back to ship where you'd been. I wanted to stay with the ship I was in and go to the Pacific, so the only way I could get there was to not volunteer. The idea being that on the eve of departure I would then volunteer and I would go when it was too late to take me off. However, the war ended before we got the refit finished. We were in Lunenburg refitting the Stonetown when the war ended. We celebratled VJ-Day with some sort of a dance on the government wharf in Lunenburg.

I know Lunenburg. I took my ships to refit down there.

Just to go back - after we left Montreal we went to Bermuda and did some workups.

Was Dyer there, Ken Adams?

Ken Dyer was the Training Commander and Captain Adams was the CO.

Was the working up any good.

Not really. Well, I guess it was from a seaman's point of view. It was no good from my point of view.

Did they have anything for engineers down there?

No, no. Nothing at all. We just made the ship go wherever these guys wanted it to go to do the whatever drills they wanted to do. But it was mainly

seamanship type of working up, gunnery and that sort of thing.

Yes.

We had a strange fellow as a Training Officer, Tuffy Macknight. You probably heard of him.

Oh, yes. Very argumentative type.

Yes. Not much personality.

He's got a lot of personality and it's all unpleasant.

<chuckle> Yes. Okay. Anyway, he was Training Officer. Instead of going back to Halifax as we were supposed to do to get properly stored up and everything. We were needed right away to form a new escort group called C 8 and we were to be the senior ship.

Who was your Captain?

The Captain of the Stonetown was Bill Moffat, a Montrealer and a peacetime RCNVR officer.

A quiet-spoken chap, bald.

A nice fellow, rather a bit on the nervous side, but a nice fellow. Anyway, we were sent straight from Bermuda to Londonderry and we encountered the worse storm I've ever seen. It was just awful. We were travelling full-speed the whole time because we had a deadline to meet. It did a fair amount of damage to the ship on the way across.

Rivets?

Yes, rivets and frames, boats stove in and that sort of thing. We got to Moville??? where they had a tanker at which you oiled at. The procedure was, you took on oil on the way into the harbour so that you were ready for anything while you were there. But we never got beyond the tanker. They decided that we were to go back to the convoy the next day. We'd been away from home base for three or

four months at this stage; to make matters worse one of the crew memebers, one of my Stoker Petty Officers went beserk and attacked the First Lieutenant with a broken bottle and made an awful mess of things. We had to cope with that crisis while we were taking on fuel and getting ready to go back, so little ambulance boats were coming and going, other boats manned with Wrens were bringing mail and others were bringing us a few fresh provisions.

An eventful night.

This was an eventful night. But we sailed during the night and joined up with the convoy with four or five others ships that had formed C 8 and we went back to St. John, Newfoundland.

We're in 1945 now, are we.

Wait a minute, I joined the Stonetown in the summer of '44. This would be the fall of '44 when we went into Moville. And we did convoys for the rest of the war. We did several, back and forth from Londonderry to St. John's, Newfoundland.

C 8.

C 8 flotilla. The Senior Officer was an ex-merchant service man, Charlie Copeland, who had been the Marine Superintendent for the Mersey Paper Company down in Liverpool, Nova Scotia.

What ship was he in?

He was in the Stonetown too. We had the CO in the senior ship.

Do you remember the names of the other ships in the group?

Yes, Poundmaker was the other frigate and the Leaside and Humberstone were two Castle class corvettes and two other corvettes whose names escape me at the moment, but you can find that out.

That's enough information for the Historian to go on if he wants.

Skinny Hayes was the Captain of the Guelph, one of the other corvettes.

Don Holder was Captain of the Leaside.

I know Don, yes.

From Saint John, New Brunswick.

You were an escort group. Were you doing hunter/killer duties or were you with a convoy?

No, we stuck with the convoy. When we'd get the convoy within so many miles of the Irish coast we were met by another group who took them the rest of the way. Usually to Liverpool. And the same coming out. We'd pick up a convoy off the coast of Ireland.

I don't think there was much submarine activity at that time.

Oh, yes there was. It wasn't as bad.

It wasn't as bad as '43.

No. I think there were lots of submarines but they weren't having the success that they had earlier on.

Did you lose many ships?

Yes, we lost quite a few. Again, we dropped depth charges all over the place on contact but we never really say the results. So whether we sank any submarines or not we don't know. But certainly they were there and we did lose some.

Did you notice a change in the engine-room crews of '45 to '42? You know it wasn't until 1943 or 1944 that the RCN really got expert. Would you agree with that?

I'm not sure. What do you mean? Do you mean we were better trained in '45?

Well, we weren't trained at all from '39 to '42. Everybody was learning their trade.

Yes. But, on the other hand, although we had more trained people, we had

a lot more ships too and I don't think the training ever caught up to the number of ships we were manning.

Well now, that's a good point.

Yes, and the crews were just about as green, I think, in '45 as in '42.

That's a very interesting point. The dilution in the RCN was fifty reserves to one permanent force. The RAN was twenty to one. The RN was only ten to one. ~~That's why~~ the RN was only ten to one. That's why the RN really did turn in a better performance than the RCN.)

In none of these frigates and the three minesweepers I've been telling you about, never did anyone see a permanent force officer. We were all RCNVR or RNVR and as far as the men were concerned there was the occasional Petty Officer who was permanent force sprinkled in through the crowd.

Got there by mistake. <chuckles by both>

Almost. They had to a certain amount of seatime the same as everybody else, so they were there. The permanent force, and I don't criticize the Navy for this, tended to regard the destroyers as requiring the permanent force people.

Well, they were more complex machines.

They were much more complex and ships like the Haida, Huron, Athabaskan and Iroquois were put to a test every night.

Yes. Particularly in the Channel in those years. They sank dozens of ships in six months.

I later on served as Chief Engineer in Haida for the best part of a year.

Is your war just about over?

When VE-Day came we were in Londonderry having just delivered a convoy. We took a convoy back. I don't know why we did but we did anyway. On the way back a submarine surrendered to us and was told where to go ~~and given instructions????~~It

was a rather humorous little incident. It took us quite by surprise, a submarine on the surface. There was a frantic call went throughout the ship for anybody who could speak German to come to the bridge right away. The ship and the submarine were eventually steaming along side by side and we were communicating by bull horn. The only fellow who could speak any German was a young man from Kitchener, Ontario, who couldn't speak very much. He was being fed the questions by the Captain that he was to ask the submarine. The first question was to find out what her pennant number was. The voice was going through over the air saying, "Voss is your number"? Or something like that and after a bit a voice came back in very clear English and said, "In the interests of speeding up this process, I suggest that all future communications be in English." That was a real put down. He was closer to the UK than he was to Newfoundland, so he was given instructions as to where to go to depot. We went back to Newfoundland and the war in the Pacific was still going on. So we spent about three or four months, from VE-Day, up until the end of July carrying troops from St. John's, Newfoundland to Quebec City, as they were being demobilized we were taking them back. They weren't being demobilized fast enough to keep us very busy so it was rather pleasant. We'd spend two or three days at sea and then we'd have a week in Quebec City. I was married by then and my wife came to Quebec City and stayed there for the summer. We then went to Halifax to get ready for refit to go to the Pacific and we were sent to Bedford Basin to put our ammunition on the jetty. We did so and got back to Halifax Dockyard and started pulling some machinery apart for repairs and boom! The ~~thing~~ ammunition dump went up. Our ammunition, I guess, was the first to go because we'd just put it there. All ships were told to raise steam and get the hell out of there. We did and got everything back together and went around into the North West Arm and just played around there for awhile. The next day we went back into Halifax Harbour.

I was the First Lieutenant of Sioux when that happened and we were on the

slips and couldn't get anywhere.

We got out because we'd been mobile. We were then sent to Lunenburg for refit and were still refitting when VJ-Day came along and then I left the ship there and had a little leave.

That's the summer of '45. When did you do your board to transfer to RCN?

About February '46. After I left the Stonetown I was sent to Ottawa to Naval Headquarters and I spent about eighteen months there. I stayed in Ottawa until January '47. In the meantime I transferred to the RCN in February '46. My job, while I was in Ottawa, I was nominally attached to the Personnel Department; but I was doing an engineering job. The Commanding Officer Naval Divisions who had run an independent empire during the war, was suddenly put under the Chief of Personnel in Ottawa. He had acquired all sorts of vessels in one form or another, including the Oriole, which is here in Victoria right now. So somebody had to be responsible for getting these ships, yachts and boats, into the hands of the rightful owners.

Oh, yes, yes.

This was quite a big job. I spent, I guess a year at it. At this stage, bear in in mind, all these lovely yachts with mahogany panels that had been painted grey, inside and out. They looked no more like when we got them than she could fly. The agreement between the owner of the yacht and the Navy was a one-page thing which said simply that the owner agreed to lend his vessel to the Navy for the duration of the war and the Navy, in turn, agreed that after the war she would be returned to him in the same good condition that she was received. My job was to make good on that latter point, with no manpower of any kind. Everybody was being demobilized all over the place. I had the unenviable job of going cap in hand to see people like John David Eaton who had owned one of these yachts, and Gordon Leach who had been the owner of the Oriole, (he was Upper Canada Steamship Company). He's dead but his son

still runs ... I guess Paul Martin, Jr. now owns those ships, I'm not sure. Anyhow, I devised the tactic of recognizing, on the one hand, that we couldn't make good on our promise because we didn't have the manpower. All we had was money and not too much of that. On the other hand, these yachts were pretty old when we got them and were getting out of date; and most of the owners either didn't want them anymore or wanted to get a better one. So they were rather susceptible to money instead of their boats being returned. So I went and in every case struck a deal with them.

Did you?

Yes. I reckon that we could put this yacht for eighteen thousand dollars or twenty-five thousands dollars, or whatever the figure was; which were big sums in those days.

That's right.

How be we just give you a check for that amount and you take her away for what she is. And everyone of them bought. If they had called our bluff and said, "No, you fix it and deliver it to my door." We would have been in a terrible state, because remeneber the Navy was cut from ninety thousand down to seventy-five hundred, or something. <chuckles from both> That was my war wind up, really.

So your war lasted until 1947.

Yes. It did. Then I went back to sea as Chief of Haida.

Who was driving Haida then?

Frank Caldwell. She had been in Reserve from the end of '45 until the beginning of '47 and she was the first of the destroyers to be brought back out of Reserve. We had the MicMac which had been built in Halifax and commissioned towards the end of the war and Haida was the third one of the destroyer squadron which we formed under Captain Pullen, who was Captain D.

That was a real engine room there, eh?

Yes, it was.

You must really have enjoyed that engine room.

Yes, I did. In fact, I had the pleasure of going through it just about a month ago. The ship is in Toronto and I asked if I could go on board with my wife and we were shown around. I hardly knew my way around the ship.

Forty thousand horsepower, was it?

Forty-four, I believe so, three boilers. Anyway, that was the end of the war and the beginning of peacetime Navy as far as I was concerned. I didn't do too long in Haida when same Willie Porteous got me again. He dragged me into the dockyard to be in charge of the design section, the section that did the modernizations. I remember one of the things we had to do was turn the St. Stephen into a weather ship from a frigate. So we turned her into a weather ship with tall masts, sails to help make her steady in the wind when she was hove to. Skinny Hayes was the first Captain.

Was he? Chadwick had her after.

Sorry, it was Chadwick. You're quite right, Chad with a beard. I did that job from 1948-49 and in the summer of '50 I was transferred to the west coast and I was Senior Engineer of the Ontario.

You're a two-and-a-half now.

Yes. I got promoted to Lieutenant-Commander in February '48.

And you're Senior of Ontario.

Yes, and I was there for two years.

Your Captain started out as Brock.

No, it was Pullen again. I had been with him in Ottawa when he was Director of Naval Reserve. I was with him when he was Captain D in Halifax and by this time he was Captain of the Ontario. He was the Captain my first year there and the second year ...

Oh yes, of course, he led the destroyers out that were going to Korea.

That's right and in fact, he was very annoyed that he Admiral in charge of the Pacific Fleet in Victoria wouldn't allow him to have all the guns put back on Ontario. They had been taken off, the turrets. He wanted to go to Korea with the guns blazing. When we got to Pearl Harbour (we were on our way at this time, to Australia) to escort the Pearl Harbour and give them a bit of fuel on the way and then carry on to Australia. But Captain Pullen didn't like taking no for an answer so he went up to see Admiral Halsey, who was C-in-C Pacific Fleet. He tried to persuade him that he needed a cruiser to go to Korea with these destroyers. Halsey said, "No, your Navy doesn't want you to go there, they want you to go to Australia. Get going." It was a long trip. The first time the Canadian RCN had sent a ship to Australia. It certainly was the first time after the war and I don't think they sent one before the war.

What did you do in Australia? I never knew about this.

We did joint exercises with the Australian Fleet, the New Zealand Fleet, the Indians and Pakistans.

Did you?

Yes. An anchorage in Jervis Bay was our sort of base for operations. We would go out and come back in and anchor there. I really got my first taste of strong curry. Boy it was hot!

Curry.

On the Indian and Pakistanian ships. They were speaking to each other. They weren't later on. ~~They weren't later on.~~

There never has been much bad feeling between Navies.

No. There wasn't, that's true.

The brotherhood of the sea is a very real thing.

Hmn, hmn. We went to Brisbane for a few days, to Sydney for a few days, Melbourne for a few day, Hobart, Tasmania for a few days. Then back to Falkland and and Wellington.

This is a great trip.

We stopped in Pago Pago, Samoa on the way down. In those days a ship arrived about every six months. There was no airstrip there. The only time they ever saw any non-residents was when a ship came through. We were the first one they'd seen in three or four months. We took mail and provisions and things to them, that we'd been asked to take from Honolulu, I think.

Just a short while ago they were that isolated, weren't they?

Oh, they were delightful people. Then we went to Fiji which was much the same thing. Although Fiji was on the shipping lane, virtually between Australia and North America and so ships were accustomed to shop in Fiji but not in Pago Pago. American Samoa was really an island that belonged to the US Navy. The Governor of the island was a Captain, USN. The reason for that was it was a coaling station in the early days. That was its main purpose to provide coal for navy ships. So they put the whole island under the Navy. I'm not saying the ~~owned the~~ island belonged to the Navy but the Governor was appointed by Congress or by the President, or something, but he was always a Naval Captain. He was a Naval Captain then, 1951. He was just changing over to the first civilian. I think the change-over occurred while we were there.

<other side of tape>

You were Commander (E) in 1952?

July 1st, 1952 and I was sent straight off to Ottawa to Naval Headquarters again. That really began my serious engineering career where I got mixed up in the ship design. I did that almost for the rest of my career with the exception of about

two-and-a-half years when we were building the Bonneventure in Northern Ireland. I stood by her when she was building and became her first Chief Engineer.

Ken Roy was ...

Ken was the Supply Officer.

He was married to Alma's sister.

The Captain was Harold Groos and the Senior Officer was Jeff Brock and later on we had Captain Landymore, after Groos. Big Art McPhee was XO. McPhee and Landymore were there together, I think the tallest officer and the shortest officer were there together.

Landymore's a bad little bugger, you know, sometimes. He didn't like McPhee, mostly because he was a ~~heaven~~-singing, ~~cigar~~-strumming man; and also because he was so tall, I think.

I don't know. Landymore didn't take a back seat to anybody because they were bigger.

That's right.

No. I didn't think there was any real ...

He was always putting McPhee down. I remember one story about him. He came over the side (this was when he was Admiral, McPhee wasn't) and he said, "How are things going?"

This is on tape.

That's all right. They don't know these stories in Ottawa and it tells them something about the Admiral. And McPhee said, "Oh, fine." He said, "How many kids have you now?" And McPhee named one more than he'd told him the last time. And ~~he~~ said, "Still fucking, eh?" <chuckles> And that would shock Art, of course.

I stood by the ship while she was building and then served as the Engineer Officer from the commissioning in early '57 until the summer of '58, I guess. I went

over to Ireland in '55 and came back to Ottawa in '58. So here I am, back in Ottawa again and back in the same engineering Chief's Department where I had been before I went to Bonaventure.

Porteous was a Rear-Admiral by now.

Yes, but he was still in Halifax. Admiral Knowlton was the boss man. But my boss, the first time I went to Ottawa was Commodore Davie, Cecil Davie, and later on when I came back it was Commodore Jack Caldwell. Harry Winnett and I were sort of equals at that stage.

What about the Engineering Branch under Knowlton and Porteous and Jack Caldwell? How was it? I know you're not going to say it was dreadful.

No, no. First of all Cecil Davie was the first encounter I had with the permanent force engineering people in the ship-design area. Remember by this time, we had started to build the DEs. They were started in about '51 and I got into the program in '52. It was while the Korean War was on that these were started. My boss was Commodore Davie and his boss was Admiral Knowlton. I think the professionalism was pretty good. But we owed all of our success in building those ships, not really to the Navy but to C.D. Howe. He was the guy who made it all possible. He was Minister of everything, as you remember. One of his jobs (during the war they called it Minister of War Time Preparation, or something) but after the war the was the First Minister of Defence Production Department which was responsible for all the contracting. Well, we had nowhere near enough trained draughtsman and technicians and so on to build ships. It was just ludicrous to think of it. We hadn't designed any ships during the war. We had built them; but they were all built to Royal Navy drawings. The St. Laurent class destroyers were the first group that were really built to Canadian design. We had Rolly Baker who was a Constructor Commodore from England, who was the Naval Architect. We had a few engineers on loan to the RCN,

but basically, we were running with the likes of me and people like me. But to make the drawing, there wasn't a shipyard in Canada who had any draughtsman to speak of, perhaps three or four. We decided to form a thing called the Naval Drawing Office in Montreal, which had at its peak about two hundred and fifty draughtsmen, I guess. These people were all from Liverpool and Newcastle, Belfast, etc. The point was, through C.D. Howe we awarded all these contracts and the contractors were to build them the ships but the Navy was to hand them the drawings. Of course, the Navy was going to have the drawings which were going to be made in this Naval Drawing Office. And all the shipyards were going to send their draughtsman to us. Well, they didn't have any to spare so we never got any. We went along to complain to C.D. Howe about this at least the ship builders did and said, "Look we can't build the ships on time if we can't get the drawings on time." "Well, why aren't you getting the drawings on time?" "The Navy hasn't any draughtsman." He banged his bloody hand on his desk and said, "Well, go away and hire them and lend them to the Navy." So they all sent recruiting officers over to all the shipyards in England and hired draughtsman which they then lent to Canadian Vickers who then formed a Drawing Office which was supervised by the Navy. That's how we got our ships built, through UK technicians, there is no question about this.

The Royal Corps of Constructors. Is that what Baker was in?

Yes.

Was that the name of it?

Royal Corps of Naval Constructors, RCNC, I guess it was. They were all members of the ??????????They were all constructors. They were civilians but they all had equivalent naval rank.

Fergie was one. Did you know Fergie?

Yes, yes.

He had a ship of his own that he designed. I don't know what it was. He was so proud of that ship. He started off with nothing.

He was from Scotland, wasn't he?

Yes, he was and he ended up with a ship that he designed.

Anyway, up until 1970 I was still in the Engineering field and ended up as Commodore in Charge of all the Technical Services. I had the whole kaboodle of constructors, engineers, electrical.

What was your title then?

I was called Director General of Maritime Systems. It had been called just DT Ships. That wasn't good enough for the Army. They had to have it more complicated, by that time Integration came along.

That's when you changed your title.

1964 I was promoted Commodore and became the Director General Maritime Systems.

Didn't you have a run-in with the Chief of the Defence Staff, a soldier, who didn't really understand the money we were spending on ships and wanted to cut back.

<chuckle> Run-in may not be the right term but General John Allard was the Chief of Defence Staff while we were designing and building the destroyers.

The St. Laurent class.

No. The DDH 280s.

The one after that, the next class.

The last class we built, still the most modern ships we have in commission, twenty-odd years later. Somehow or other the Army had been asleep at the switch and 1964 when the naval estimates were being put together they couldn't agree among themselves on what they wanted. They were all absorbed in Integration but they were

so absorbed in the organization of the Army they had no idea of what they wanted in the way of equipment. So they went to the Naval Estimates Review Board without any demands. I went ~~with~~ asking for money for the four destroyers and modernization of the older destroyers, the 257 class. We converted them. Two supply ships which we built, Preserver and Provider. We built those in Saint John, New Brunswick. Three Oberon submarines which we built in Chatham. We got money for the whole bloody lot. I couldn't believe my ears. The Army got nothing. I think they got a bit of money for a truck. Anyway, when General Allard became the Chief of Defence Staff and watched all this going on, year after year. It takes quite a few years to design a class of ships and design them. He became more and more frustrated and the Germans sent a team over to sell us the Leopard tank (I think in German its Leppert).

We call them the Leopard, like the animal.

Yes, but the Germans spelled it differently. General Allard became absolutely carried away with Leopard tanks and he wanted a whole fistfull of these things. I remember one night being phoned up at home (there were two or three other Army Generals between me and Allard. I reported to a Major-General, who reported to a Lieutenant-General, who reported to a full General. There was an Army heirarchy before you got down to me as far as the ship-building. Harry Porter was on the Executive side and he was under the same sort of thing. So Harry Porter and I, if we were famous for anything, it was for saving those ship-building programs. Not for actually getting them done; but for saving them from getting scrapped. We were fighting a rear-guard action all the way. Anyway, I got a phone call late one night (this would be about 1968, all four of the ships were laid down and were all partly constructed) and he said, "Bridgeman, wouldn't it be quite easy just to cancel one of those ships and build three instead of four and take the money and spend it on Leopard tanks?" I had to explain to him, with a little bit of stretching the truth, I

suppose, that the cancellation charges would come up to just about the same amount of money as he was trying to save. That if you bought three of something the price was three-quarters of what it would be if you bought four. You still had to buy the same number of spares and so on. Then you'd have to pay for all cancellation charges because these ships were half-built. I finally made the point stick and he'd drop the subject, but only for awhile and he'd come back again. Couldn't we just not have those three submarines or couldn't we not have the 257 class conversion next year? It never got me promoted beyond Commodore but it got the ships built anyway.

You sacrificed another stripe, Graham, you did. Harry Porter didn't lose out.

No. But he got taken out of it though, earlier than I did.

Harry could always say, "I agree with you General, but it's that damn engineer. <chuckles from both>

No, but Harry and I had a good relationship.

Oh yes. Harry's a great fellow.

But he left the job before I did. I didn't finish my naval career in that job. When I took it over I replaced five Commodores because (this is not funny, it's the truth).

I know it is.

Because each of disciplines, the Constructors, the Electricals, the Ordnance, the Engineers had a Commodore in charge and they reduced us to one to look after everything, to look after everything to do with weapons and ships. And that one was me. That meant there were three other branches who weren't going to get a chance at my job as long as I was around. Whereas it had been the practice if you were a Commodore and head of a branch you could stay there for eight years. You weren't keeping some other branch back. I was holding back the Ordnance,

Constructors and Electrical people as well as any other Engingeers. So I wrote a letter after I had the job for one years saying I felt I shouldn't have the job for more than two years. It should rotate and go to some of these other people. Five years later they agreed with me and let me go and I was seconded to the Defence Research Board for two years in the Operations Research Department which I ran for one year because the Chief of the establishment was sent off to become bilingual. I was his Deputy and as his Deputy I took over for one year. That was Doctor George Lindsay?? who was a tremendous guy to work for.

You know it's too bad for the other people who wanted to be commodores but it was probably best for the program that you stayed there for five years, though. You really knew how to run it by year two.

It was because by that time I had all the answers as to why you couldn't cancel the program afloat.

Why you couldn't buy tanks. <chuckles>

Who followed him as CDS?

General Sharp, Airforce.

Then it was Army again, Dextrace.

This has been all most interesting. What was your best job in the Navy?

Well, the one that I really enjoyed the most was being Senior Engineer of the Ontario, I think. We had some very interesting cruises, including we had the now Queen but then Princess and her husband on board for three days in 1951.

That's from Sydney to Newfoundland.

No, we went from Montreal to Charlottetown, then Charlottetown to Sydney, Sydney to Bay Bulls when she transferred to a passenger liner and went home.

Was Pullen still Captain?

No, Tisdall was Captain.

Pullen would go ape with Royalty on board. <chuckle>

Tisdall was the boss.

Well, Larry Dzioba, whom I interviewed the other day was a Midshipman on board.

Yes, he would be. The one story that never reached the press to any extent. I think it got one line in some obscure newspaper. You can imagine when you've got the Queen or Princess on board, you've got newspapermen coming out of your ears. We had, I suppose, twenty or thirty of these guys. They filled a whole messdeck. And the sort of leader was Captain Teddy Briggs, who by this time was head of the CBC. We were steaming from Quebec to Charlottetown at about twenty-eight knots, which was a good rate of speed. But it was a nice clear, bright night, flat time and we were scooting along, certainly no sign of rain or anything. We'd had a mess dinner for the Princess and her husband and it had been an absolutely smashing event. Anyway, we were steaming along at twenty-eight knots and I was in my cabin writing a letter home to my wife to get it all down on paper, when I hear a gushing sound like rain pouring out of a downspout and my cabin was on the upper deck. It seemed to be going right by my side scuttle. So I stuck my hand out to see what this water was like and it turned out to be black oil. It was just pouring down into the ship, out of a breather??pipe. I had a telephone in my cabin, so I phoned the engine room immediately and whoever answered the phone I said, "I don't know what you're pumping, where you're pumping, but stop the pump right now." Then I went down to the engine room to see what has happened. Well, the long and short of it is that the stoker who was doing the pumping started the pumps going and then went off to make coffee and overflowed the tanks while he was doing it. In the cruiser the boilers are fed from a ready-use tank, not directly from the ship's bunkers and you transfer oil from the double-bottom tanks into the ready-use tank.

That's what overflowed.

As a precaution I had written in my night-order book, "This tank is not allowed to go below seventy-five percent. Just keep it topped up." We had a blackout once before where it had lost suction. These kids forgot that it doesn't take very long to fill it up twenty-five percent, instead of sixty or seventy percent. So they started the pumps going and went off to make coffee and overflowed the tank. It went up through the breathing pipe and down the gooseneck??? and onto the upper deck. At twenty-seven knots with black oil running on you know what you're going to look like when you arrive in harbour with the Princess on board. So, all these newspaper men on board but they were sound asleep. I had to go tip-toeing around the ship to find all the stokers that I could. I got everybody up and dressed in running shoes and we got all the brushes we could find and attached them to long handles and buckets and buckets of diesel oil and we scubbed that damn ship down, while she was travelling at twenty-eight knots, from stem to gudgeon. There was just one black patch on the side of the ship that we couldn't really get at in the morning. Anyway, the press didn't get wind of it until after we'd left Sydney Harbour. We been to Sydney and were at sea again. The only way they could get newspaper stories out of the ship was to send them by our Communications Department and the Engineer Officer, Harry Winnett, was the officer who had been designated to clear all messages that the press wanted to send out. Anything that related to this spill, it got lost. <chuckle> It never went anywhere. But the real thing was it was warm weather and the Princess was in the Captain's cabin which was aft and I knew damn well her side scuttle would be wide open because it was such a nice night and I could just visualize oil going down and being carried into this cabin. I was just wondering if I should hold up my hands for handcuffs now or later on. Literally, if she found out about it we never heard of it. And the press found out about it too late. By the time the newspaper men got home

they'd forgotten or heard something else. The story never got out. But I was almost famous for the one who drowned the Princess in fuel oil.

That might have been your best job in your career but it was also potentially the most dangerous, wasn't it. <Laughter>

Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

No. I don't think so. But you did ask the jobs I liked. I liked that sea-going job the best, in Ontario. I also my first job in Headquarters when we were building the St. Laurent class destroyers, because it was biggest challenge.

Its creative work.

Yes. It was the biggest challenge. We were starting with nothing. We were creating a design.

This is the first time I've had this on record and what I'm going to lead to is Bob Stephens talking about his father, ERA to ERA Stephens.

Hmn hmn, hmn hmn.

Along the same lines. That's why I want to build up this body of knowledge. And Bob Stephen, himself, is going to talk about his father in one presentation and then he's going to talk about his own career in another.

Yes. Bob worked for me off and on in Ottawa and it was very interesting. I was a Commander while he was still a Lieutenant-Commander and so on. He became a Rear-Admiral after I retired and then Vice-Admiral. A very good man too and his father was too.

He wasn't an Engineer Vice-Admiral either. He had his own Training Command.

Yes. Integration came along and opened up jobs like that.

Thank you very much, Graham. I enjoyed this.

It's a pleasure. The only problem is that seventeen years after you retire

it's hard to remember dates and places and names.

The Historian had three full-time researchers if you want to find out anything. You've given him enough clues.

Would you mind giving me your address, Graham?

A. Graham Bridgman

1302 Rockland Ave.

Victoria, B.C.

V8S 1V5

tel: 382-2248

Thank you, Graham.

It's a pleasure.

.....

H. Lawrence

.....

A. Graham Bridgman