



News

CANADIAN NAVAL TECHNICAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

CANDIB Update: An Interview with Vice-Admiral Robert Stephens

CNTHA News

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The Canadian Naval Defence Industrial Base (CANDIB) project continues to add papers and interview transcripts to DND's Directorate of History and Heritage archive for use by historians, students and researchers. The CANDIB project, which is being conducted on behalf of the Canadian Naval Technical History Association, is an important endeavour as many aspects of Canada's naval industrial story were not adequately documented back in the day. Curiously, historical record-keeping seems to be becoming increasingly problematic in today's connected workplace.

In April we completed our 16th oral interview in our series focusing on people who have been involved with the industrial aspects of naval procurement. CANDIB interviewed Vice Admiral Bob Stephens about his involvement with several ship and submarine projects during his career. The full interview is available through the Directorate of History and Heritage, but here is what VAdm Stephens had to say about design investigation and testing of the *St. Laurent* (205) class destroyers:

"In the 1951-1954 period we put together NEDIT [Naval Engineering Design Investigation Team] and NETE [Naval Engineering Test Establishment]. We knew that the Yar-

rows Admiralty Research Department [Y-ARD] had done a lot of good work in the British navy, particularly as we were moving to much higher steam pressures and steam temperatures. These were new things and we recognized that we needed something similar. We were very fortunate. George Raper was very much involved with Y-ARD and he was one of their brightest engineers. We managed to talk the British Admiralty into lending us Raper, and he came over and put together NEDIT. NEDIT was headed up by RN officers originally, and Canadians later on as we got more experienced. That was the idea of NEDIT — we didn't think we had the design capabilities in naval headquarters. It was better to leave this to a separate establishment. NEDIT weren't only doing new designs, they were looking at problems in designs, particularly to deal with noise and vibration, sound and propellers, which developed into a fine art...and we probably knew more than the UK.

NETE was established at the same time as NEDIT since we needed somewhere to do testing. We didn't know how to do shock testing, so we had to have shock machines. We wanted to make sure that the performance of the feed pumps was up to scratch and although the contractors had to do this, when they had problems



HMCS St. Laurent

we would do tests at NETE. We did every kind of testing imaginable. Similar to NEDIT we had a naval officer in charge of NETE, but all the other staff were civilians from Peacock Brothers Ltd., Montreal. We purposely put it in that location because NEDIT was there and we thought NEDIT and NETE could work together in a nice, tidy package.”

A nice little window on the NEDIT/NETE story for sure. VAdm Stephens also recounted this anecdote:

“John Chauvin was the naval overseer in Montreal and he discovered what we were doing on the auxiliary boilers. The auxiliary boilers in the 205-class destroyers were like a miniature Y-100 boiler, with drums and everything. He thought this was crazy and he found this boiler in some big laundry in Montreal which was a straight-through coil boiler where you put water in one end and it came out hot the other. So we decided on that. We often went to the manufacturer in Chicago to do the tests and often found that it didn’t meet the specs. They got so fed up with us that they used to call them ‘boilers for the frigging frigates.’”

CANDIB continues to reach out to new members to help record Canada’s naval industrial history. Investigate our website (www.cntha.ca) and feel free to attend our meetings or contact one of our members. We’d love to hear from you.

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The CNTHA Collection at Directorate of History and Heritage, Ottawa

Thanks in part to the contributions from the Canadian Naval History Association and in particular, the Canadian Naval Defence Industrial Base (CANDIB) committee, the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) has organized and catalogued a growing collection of material related to our navy’s technical history. This collection is titled the Canadian Naval Technical History Association Collection (93/110) and contains material on various system development projects and procurement programs. Of particular note is the CANDIB oral history project that con-

sists of transcripts of interviews with those involved in some of the navy’s most significant shipbuilding projects, including the DDH-280 and Canadian Patrol Frigate projects. The collection is available to CF/DND personnel as well as the general public through the reference room at DHH at Holly Lane in Ottawa. For hours of operation and to consult this collection, please contact Mr. Warren Sinclair at (613) 998-7060.

— **Lt(N) Jason Delaney, Naval Historian, DHH 2-2-7.**

