



Oral History Interview Transcript

Interview Control Number: 5-C3

Interviewee: Roger E. Chiasson

Interviewer: J.D. Hearnshaw

Date of Interview: 21 August 2005

Location of Interview: Ottawa, ON

Transcribed by: S. Johnston and L. Stimson

Transcription of Interview Number 5-C3**Roger E. Chiasson****Interviewed 22 August 2005****By J.D. Hearnshaw**

INTERVIEWER: This is a CANDIB Oral History Project Interview with Captain Roger Chiasson that was recorded in Ottawa on Monday, August 22, 2005. Captain Chiasson was interviewed by Douglas Hearnshaw. Both participants have signed the copyright release form. Tape one side one.

The subject of this interview is the Multi-ship Refit Program that the Canadian Navy undertook between the mid-seventies and the mid-eighties. It was a significant program within the Navy's Ship Maintenance Program and was designed to address particular issues relating to the fleet of ancient ships. The three participant groups in the refit program were the Navy, the Department of Supply and Services as the contracting agent for the government and the contractor Canadian Vickers Limited of Montreal. Today's interview will present this interesting story from a naval perspective and covers the period from 1979 to 1982. I would ask Captain Chiasson to first introduce himself and then describe his naval career up to the time of his involvement in the refit program..

CHIASSON: My name is Roger Chiasson. I was born in October of 1943 and joined the Navy through the Venture program in 1960. The Venture Program was a short service commission school in Esquimalt, British Columbia intended to fill a gap in the number of naval officers for the Navy. From HMCS VENTURE I proceeded to Royal Roads Military College for two years then to the Royal Military College in Kingston. Graduated in 1965 with a degree in Civil Engineering. I was then sent to the fleet and to shore training establishments. I acquired a Bridge Watch Keeping certificate in HMCS COLUMBIA and then was transferred to her HMCS Restigouche for my engineering training and stayed in the engineering branch from that time on.

I have held two engineering jobs at sea but my career has been heavily slanted towards ship repair and ship construction. In the early '70s I spent a short time in Halifax shipyards overseeing the refits of submarines in Dartmouth slips and small vessel refits in and around Halifax. I was then transferred to Navy Ship building in Lauzon, Quebec on the staff of the overseer for the DDH 280 construction project. I then proceeded as engineer officer of HMCS SKEENA. I did a stint in the Naval Officer Training Centre in Esquimalt. Then proceeded to 201 Canadian Forces Technical Services Detachment in Canadian Vickers Incorporated in Montreal where this story takes place.

INTERVIEWER: That was an excellent beginning and is just the sort of ground work for the sort of work we are going to be talking about today. I would like you now, if you will, to explain why the refit program came about?

CHIASSON: What the Multi-ship Refit Program came about as a result of a number of problems associated with single ship refits. Up until this multi-ship approach, generally speaking ship refits were done one at a time. This presented a number of problems and I will deal with them from the perspective of the ship or ships, the shipyard and from perhaps a headquarters management perspective.

First of all dealing with the ship. The single ship approach was on again off again. There was a great deal of uncertainty, in fact there are stories, perhaps partly true, about ships having to sail out of Halifax and being told whether to turn left or right because the refit location had not been announced. So it was a period of immense turmoil. In those days single ship refits were manned. That is to say part of the ship's company would remain behind in the shipyard. Primarily the technical people, since the work being conducted within the yard was primarily of a technical nature. This approach severely impacted on what we termed the "sea shore ratio". In other words the amount of time a sailor spends ashore versus the time he spends at sea. Here we found sailors ashore and yet having to spend their time away from their families, as far away as 800 miles, to look after the ship during a refit. Their function during a refit would be to provide security. Fire watches for welding and generally doing a lot of the overseeing work as well.

In addition the refits competed for leave for the sailors and also training that ships would try and conduct during their period of refit. Finally there was a need for the ships to play catch-up after the refits, primarily on the husbandry side. The ships would come out of refit in a pretty sad state because they had been ripped apart and rebuilt. There was never enough in the refit specification to ensure that ships were in good condition as far as painting and preservation and tidiness went. Ships would spend a great deal of the following several months or years trying to catch up in this aspect.

From a shipyard perspective the single ship refit approach made for a very, very steep learning curve. Most shipyards in Canada had very little in experience even though some of them may have built some of these ships; it was quite some time ago. Generally speaking there was a (posity?) of skilled trades within the shipyards. By the time the shipyard had acquired those skills, the ship would leave. They may not get another contract for several years. So it was a bit of a feast or famine situation. To put it bluntly there was no opportunity by the shipyards to apply the lessons that had been learned.

There were also, dealing again with single ship refits, serious material support issues. For instance special tools would have to be transferred to the yards, sometimes on short notice. Some of the long lead items could only be ordered once the refit contract had been awarded. There was a plethora of similar problems related to this on again off again approach to ship refits.

Now dealing with the management issues. Again going back to personnel the Technical Services Detachments that looked after the overseeing or the inspection aspect of ship refits during the single refit era or for any single ship refits had to form on very, very short notice and disbanded just as quickly. And not only did the ship not know which way to turn leaving Halifax Harbour but in many cases some of these technical personnel who were expected to oversee these refits didn't have a clue until the very last minute as to where they would be spending, again their precious shore time. So there was very little stability just from a personnel point of view but there is also the question of stability with respect to the management of the whole refit or maintenance process or program. It was always in a turmoil. It was done ship by ship so the wheel had to be literally reinvented almost every time a ship went into refit. The Material, Maintenance, Repair and Specification List which is the specification that told the shipyard what was required was a very unwieldy document prepared primarily by the ship using some guidance from ashore. It was an extremely difficult document to get right, by a ship's company that was very, very busy up until the end of their operationally period leading up to refit to spend any time on it.

As I eluded to earlier the refits were a logistics nightmare. Things were always done virtually at the last minute and finally there was a perception at least that refits were taking an exceedingly long time. I don't have any statistics, but I think its fair to say that many of them were delayed for reasons not entirely and in fact not usually attributable to the contractor and there was a perception that they were very costly. The multi-ship process was devised as a solution to all these problems.

INTERVIEWER: Well you've certainly set the scene for the Multi-ship program we are going to be talking about. Perhaps we should now address the contractual development process and how the DSS, who were the agents for the government, and the Navy personnel, and the shipyard personnel were set up to interact throughout the working of the Multi-ship Program contract.

CHIASSON: Well certainly the Multi-ship approach was designed to overcome all those issues I had previously mentioned. The contracts were awarded for several ships. I believe the number was four but it could have been as many as six. The refits lasted roughly six months each and there was a two or three week overlap between ship refits.

The normal contractual process was used, that is a specification was developed by DND and passed to the Department of Supply and Services and a Request for Proposal was issued to all shipyards that wanted to bid on this particular project. The bids were evaluated of course the winning contractor was selected. I think I am correct in saying that Vickers won all of the Multi-ship contracts.

These contracts were designed to address the improved St. Laurent class of ships, of which there were six at the time. Other classes of ships for different reasons were dealt with differently but this multi-ship approach was considered suitable for a group of like ships that were reaching a fairly tender age and were suffering from a great deal of, I wouldn't say abuse, but were showing the signs of aging and severe corrosion from operating in the North Atlantic.

I mentioned that DND prepared the specification and I mentioned earlier that the Material Repair Specification list was a very unwieldy document. The Navy tried to address this by coming up with a Standard Ship Repair Work Catalogue or SSRWC. The SSRWC was intended to be just that, a catalogue. In other words all the maintenance routines that were due at the time, all of the maintenance that would normally have been done in a refit were put in this catalogue. The catalogue was delivered to the ship, I believe about six months perhaps three but a number of weeks or months prior to the commencement of the refit. The ship was then expected to go through the catalogue and particularize the catalogue into a Particularized Specification List or PSL. This was supplemented by a number of pre refit surveys that were done either by the ships company or by a Naval Engineering unit staff ashore. The SSRWC, or Standard Ship Repair Work Catalogue was used as a basis for pricing the Multi-ship contract. That formed the basis for the Request for Proposal that was issued to all of the competing contenders for the Multi-ship contract and the Particularized Specification List would apply to each of the ships as they entered the refit. It became a matter of adding and subtracting. In other words if the ship had for some reason deleted an item from the catalogue that became a credit to the Crown but if the ship wanted a 1000 square feet deck of space to be cleaned to bare metal and repainted instead of the catalogue amount of 500 then there would be a plus or a debit. That's generally the way it worked.

In addition to all of that there was some pluses to the approach that I will just run through which addressed some of the issues I talked about earlier. First of these was the provision of a kit of special tools and test equipment. These were pooled 90 days prior to the start of the contract in a supply depot, in this case 25 Canadian Forces Supply Depot in Montreal because Vickers was just next door. Thirty days prior to the start of the contract these special tools and test equipment were transferred to the contractor for the duration of the multi-ship contract. A much better approach than on again off again approach we had used prior to that.

In addition to that there were a number of material orders, GSM, in other words Government Supplied Material, that were unique to the Navy and that only the Navy could supply. These were also marshalled and pre-delivered to the yard. These would include items which in the past had perhaps been ordered specifically for a single ship refit once a ship had entered the refit.

There was also insurance items that were (pre-positioned?) in the selected yard. By insurance items I mean perhaps plates of steel because we had anticipated a great deal of ship's hull shell steel replacement and therefore it was prudent to order some of this stuff ahead of time. It was not to say that those initiatives couldn't have been taken in single ship refits but I think the whole approach to multi-ship refits caused the staff to focus on how to do business better. The insurance items were just one of those.

I mentioned the problem with sailors. The ships were zero manned and we'll talk about the process a bit later perhaps but basically once the ship was delivered the sailors were free to go back to their home port of Halifax and undertake the leave and training they were intended to. This also had a great effect on the stability of the technical services personnel who were in a Static Technical Services detachment for the duration of the multi-ship contract. Since Vickers won all three or four I believe, of these it meant that obviously there was a turnover but we had a Static Technical Services detachment in Vickers for quite a number of years.

There was an initiative within the logistics branch called Operation Maintop which was basically to ... the one that occurs to me was the purchase of number steam auxiliaries that were put into repair and overhaul chain through Peacock Brothers in Montreal again fortuitous that were so close by. We used Operation Maintop in such instances as steam auxiliaries to ease the process and to lessen the scheduled impact of some of the logistics issues. We hoped for a better a quality assurance approach by the shipyard but I will deal with in greater detail later. We probably were not as successful as we would have liked from the quality assurance and management prospective but I don't think there is any question that we got good quality. But again, we'll talk about that a bit later.

Finally, there was an integration of the Destroyer Life Extension Project, that is DELEX, into the Multi-ship Program. The DELEX had two components. One was capital, that is to buy new equipment to replace old equipment that had gotten a little tired. It also had Operations and Maintenance or an O&M component which was meant to basically, do such things as, repair shell plating that had rusted out. The Operations and Maintenance portion of DELEX happened to coincide with the timeframe when we were multi-shipping, if I can use that verb. So it was a good juxtaposition.

Canadian Vickers was successful in winning all of the contracts and this was most opportune for a number of reasons. I'll run through them briefly. Vickers had access to a trained and capable workforce. Montreal, after all, is on the seaway [with] lots of traffic going by. They were primarily, at this stage of the game, a refit yard but they had a fairly steady and capable

workforce. They also ready access to several subcontractors. Things like, electric motors, valves, communications and radar equipment, tank cleaning, husbandry were virtually all contracted out. Except for the overhaul of (insitu?) equipment, for instance boilers, turbo alternators or electrically generators, most of the work was done offsite by a number of subcontractors. There were lots of them so that Vickers could get a very, very competitive price by pitting one subcontractor against another. Therefore, we the Navy, were the winners.

Vickers was also adjacent to 202 Workshop Depot which was a second and third line Army repair facility. It also had a naval repair capability which they acquired, I believe, in 1970 when a naval repair facility existed in Montreal but was closed down and integrated with 202 Workshop for economy reasons. 202 Workshop would negotiate with the dockyard prior to each ship refit as to how the weapons and operations equipment, i.e. the fairly high tech stuff would be apportioned. I believe the 202 Workshop component comprised less than 10 percent of the work but it was fairly significant in that they were close at hand whereas the dockyard was several hundred miles away.

And finally, Vickers was very close to 25 Canadian Forces Supply Depot and therefore not only did this marshalling and transfer of logistics take place, basically a few miles down the road. But also it was highly probable that when we had a logistics problem the spare was in fact in 25 Navy Forces Supply Depot because they were the supply depot for the East Coast Navy amongst a number of other clients.

The Technical Support Detachment comprised of about 35 personnel, six of whom were officers and the others were technical non-commissioned officers and one Department of Supply and Services officer, believe it or not. Who ... and we'll talk more about this later I believe...who negotiated over 1000 1379s or Work Arisings per ship.

INTERVIEWER: Well that got us through an explanation of how the contractual development process went. Now perhaps the next question that arises is what happened when these ships began to arrive at Vickers plant?

CHASSON: Well the ships arrived with a skeleton crew, obviously not everyone was required since the ship was not operational. So there was enough crew members for the transit. The ships company left within two or three days. Approximately seven days were taken the first week or 10 days or so were taken to (destore?) the ship and there was a compartment turnover process which, which was quite interesting. A member of the ship's company and a member of the Technical Services Detachment and a contractor person or more would go around the ship with [a] camera and take an average of five or six photographs per compartment and list on a separate sheet the general condition of the compartment. This was used as a baseline for returning the ship back to the Navy. If there was anything missing the photograph normally ended the argument. It wasn't there to begin with, perhaps.

This was quite a departure because for a captain of a ship to leave his ship to a contractor's custody, let alone another Navy person's custody, was quite unheard of up until this point. In fact, although it was still a commissioned ship, Vickers actually, for the sake of argument, owned our ships for about six months a time. I think the process, once again the learning curve, maybe took one or two ships to conquer but it became a fairly smooth process.

During the latter stages of the compartment turnover and for the next week or so there was a massive stripping out of the ship. I mentioned all those subcontractors that would look after valves and electric motors. This was the opportunity to get absolutely everything that needed to get off the ship into subcontractors hands so that they could get on with the work.

INTERVIEWER: Well that was particularly interesting what you said about the picture taking because, nowadays in 2005, the digital camera features in most activities but to use it [for] tracking in the 70s and 80s for this purpose of recording events was a departure that certainly must have been very useful.

We now have the ships arrived in the yard and have been handed over to the contractors. It must have been a wrench for the personnel to see another group in charge of the vessels. However, how did the ... what sort of relationships developed as the work proceeded in the shipyard with regards to the players in the program that was underway.

CHIASSON: I'll deal with the relationships in perhaps two or three sort of segments. The first one dealing with the relationship between the contractor's personnel and the Technical Services Detachment personnel, in other words, the Navy technicians. I think its fair to that we had fertile ground for disagreement. The biggest issue was quality assurance. If I could dwell on that for a minute. The contractor was expected to have, what was termed in those days, a DND 1016, or equivalent Quality Assurance Management System. Without going into a great deal of detail there were at the time three levels of DND quality assurance specifications and this was the middle one. Where he wasn't expected to have a design capability but was expected to have an inspection plan and a quality management system.

Vickers, I think it's fair to say, generally paid lip service to this Quality Assurance Management System requirement. The reason for this was it was strictly driven by economics. What Vickers continuously told us when we pressured them for a better quality assurance management system was, "If you tell us how many people we need, if you tell us exactly how you.... what your vision of a quality management system is we can price it. But as long as your DND 1016 and the associated wordage is as vague as it is we will ... I guess we'll price it in accordance with our standard operating procedures." What wasn't said at the time but was understood was, "Besides you also have three dozen technical people of your own to keep us honest." Honesty is a bad choice of words, that's not for debate. Basically they said, "We're not going to bid what you think meant you said by the words and risk losing a contract that we're fully capable of performing." I am not sure if I'm making it clear but Vickers was ... we were all caught in bit of a vice. If they complied with what we considered to be the spirit of the quality assurance specification they ran the risk of losing the refit because they would be expected to have 20 or 30 people when in fact they had only maybe three or four and run the risk of losing the refit which to them was pretty important then. If I think I was a business person I think I would consider as well. So, that's what I mean by fertile ground for disagreement.

Now over time there was a great deal of improvement over what was a contractor inspection requirement [and] what was a DND inspection requirement. These things got sorted out over time and everybody pretty well understood. I think its fair to say that the bottom line for Vickers was, "Whatever the Navy will buy." We have to understand here that this was a commercial shipyard and commercial specifications and practices are generally different from naval standards. Naval standards tend to be more stringent and therefore without the navy technical people overseeing, there might have been a tendency for some of these standards to not have been met not through dishonesty but perhaps through misunderstanding of what the requirement was.

I think its fair to say that generally speaking the Marine industry was behind the times when it came to quality assurance in those days. I think the reason for that is that in a feast or famine environment, which is what government contracting was in those days and still is. It's very

difficult for a shipyard to have an all singing all dancing DND 1016 or any other type of quality management system without the revenue coming in the door to support it.

Again, going back to the relationship. Having said all of the above I think the relationship was generally pretty good. The Technical Services Detachment people were known as River Rats, somewhat affectionately I think. At least we thought so. It was [an] excellent experience. For any junior officer or even senior officer, like myself, I always thought overseeing refits in the river was probably worth two years' experience for every year put in. Simply because we saw ships being ripped open, we saw a lot of technical specifications implemented. Some disagreements with the contractor but in the end it all came out right. So to conclude that relationship discussion in spite of the natural friction that the conditions presented there was, what I would consider to be, a grudging admiration between the Technical Services Detachment people and the Vickers workers.

Now I'll deal with DND and DSS, Department of Supply and Services, relationship. Again, I think the conditions were generally good. I mentioned earlier that we had 35 or so people and DSS had one individual. Who I might add, was there, I believe, for the duration of most if not all of the multi-ship refits. An extremely long in the tooth and knowledgeable individual, negotiator, who, and this was another advantage in the multi-ship approach ... After the first ship you could rest assure that a good percentage of what he was seeing in the form of Work Arisings he already seen. He already negotiated and had a good record of what it cost him the last time.

Having said that the DSS individual was in a difficult negotiating position. Since the shipyard applied, what I think have been subsequently called, marginally accounting practices where they would bid on the refit and then expect, and rightly so, expect to probably make their money on Work Arisings. In other words the known work was priced at a standard charge out rate for labor and when it came to Work Arisings it was a question of how many hours and not how many dollars because the hours translated to dollars.

One (stickingly?) point with DND and DSS and the contractor was a rule that existed in a memorandum of understanding between DND and DSS that work could not start on Arisings, that is they were called 1379s after the DSS form, ... were signed and this created extreme difficulty at times when we were waiting for a negotiated settlement on an Arising and we were anxious that the work should get started in order for it not to impact on the refit schedule.

I should perhaps expand on this term, Work Arisings. I mentioned earlier that the ship arrived with a Particularized Specification List which was a composite of the pluses and minuses from the Standard Ship Repair Work Catalogue. A lot of these specifications required the contractor to open and examine for instance, and lets take for example a fresh water tank ... He would bid on the cost of opening and examining a fresh water tank but the cost of the job after the recoating had been completed could be a factor of almost an order of magnitude greater than the original bid price. So Work Arisings tended to be a very, very significant part of the total cost of the refit.

As I mentioned earlier there were well over 1000 of these that had to be negotiated for every refit. Having said that, I guess its fair to say that, when you got a machine open or a tank open and you've got to negotiate a price you really don't have much choice then pay whatever price is being asked. Having said that DSS was present to ensure that the contractor was being reasonable based perhaps on historical evidence and that sort of thing. The purpose of my staff with respect to all of that was to approve progress payments to the contractor based on the

progress of the refit. The headquarters that managed ship refits would give us an authority to expend, I believe, up to 25 000 dollars on each Work Arisings but they were monitoring the cost of the refit as a whole. I wouldn't say that we in the TSD didn't have our eye on the big picture but we were kind of micro managing it one 1379 at a time in order to get the work completed and advance to the schedule. We would base the progress payments or approval of the progress payments on how much of the work had been done. That work would grow in accordance with the number of 1379s that had been approved.

As far as the relationship between Department of National Defense, DND, and the contractor it was quite formal. There were monthly progress meetings where the headquarters staff would come down from Ottawa. The headquarters staff would consist of DMEM, the Director of Maritime Engineering and Maintenance Section 5, DPSupM, the Director of Procurement and Supply Maritime and the DSS would of course also come down from Ottawa because the individual at the (goal face?) had a boss in the DSS headquarters in Ottawa and of Vickers was represented. There was a standard agenda which basically focused on the progress to date, any impact on schedule, and quite a bit of this discussion would center on government supplied material issues. The contractor was very prone to have the supply of material coming out of Work Arisings as government supplied material to basically minimize his risk and in most cases he was probably correct in doing so since we were dealing with fairly unique material.

Generally relations were good. I have to say the usually contractor had the upper hand and I think that bothered us quite a bit. But given that we were more often than not on the hook for late delivery of material and for large Arisings which could have an impact on the schedule they were pretty well in the drivers seat. Having said that it wasn't in their best interest to keep the ship there one minute longer and it required them to finish the work. I would like to quote the Vice President of the Marine Division at Vickers, Bill Rhodes, who said at one point in time, "With our government money and their expertise we could accomplish miracles."

INTERVIEWER: Well you've explained the relationships that developed extremely well. I think we understand better now how these players interacted. You also mentioned in passing a couple area of contentions; the QA particularly and the Work Arisings situation that were ripe for all sorts of problems to arise in those relationships. Perhaps you might want to tell us any other problems that arose in the refit program.

CHIASSE: Well, in fact some of what I already mentioned perhaps needs a bit of revisiting because for instance I believe the largest issue was the extent of Arisings. This was due in many respects to, there was a number of factors. The first of which was, at the time the Navy, even though we preached configuration management, I don't think we were very good practitioners of it. The ships did not always resemble the drawings because for various reasons we had deviated from the drawings. The specifications very often left a lot to be desired. I have already touched on the example of opening and examining presented an opportunity for defects to be found which were not covered in the original specification and therefore the scope of the work vastly increase.

A lot of the problems with respect to Arisings were also due to poor surveys. I don't think anyone is particularly to blame here. Its all explainable. For instance, in a course of a refit, we would replace or reverse the treads on ladders and there is no excuse for someone missing the fact a ladder has very worn treads but for some reason they would crop up. So I think it was a question of the ships staff had competing priorities. They had an operational schedule to maintain up until the minute virtually they had to go to refit. Shore authorities were not necessarily available and the ship wasn't necessarily available so perhaps some of the pre refit

surveys had to be rushed. Also because the pre refit surveys, in some instances were conducted, in the case of hull surveys in particular, perhaps six months prior to start of the refit and therefore there was some degradation passed the pre refit survey point. So those are some of the reasons why the Arisings were as large as they were. From a management perspective there were attempts made to learn the lessons from Multi-ship Refits which is beyond the scope of this interview. Just suffice to say there ways and means that were used to address this particular problem.

The other problem was schedule and I eluded to this to some extent already but I will just go through it again. The contractor was expected to produce a refit schedule and generally speaking this was very sketchy. The schedule, even though it was fuzzy at the beginning, it got even fuzzier as we got into the refit because of the impact, particularly of large Arisings. For instance if one third the way through the refit we suddenly discovered that we needed to lift main engine covers, the main turbines, which was a five or six week job, that literally stopped every other work in the engine room. That was almost guarantee to delay the refit. I don't recall it happening if it did. I recall it happening in other refits but I am only using this to illustrate that particularly large Arisings or an accumulation of a number of small Arisings in a particular area could severely impact on the schedule. The contractor was not always, I wouldn't say willing, but perhaps not always able to fully address the impact because he was waiting on material that we were pressed to supply. So it was a bit of a give and take situation. I guess the Navy and the ships captain was always trying to get a definitive refit completion date and it wasn't always available. Having said that, generally speaking, although I don't have the data to support it, I think the refits generally ended on time. If they didn't it was probably due to (force measure?) i.e ice in the river or a strike in a shipyard. That sort of occurrence. Generally speaking, refits ended on time and if they didn't it was, I would say, 100% of the time probably due to the lack of material or large Work Arisings which weren't the contractor fault.

The other issue was cost overruns. As I mentioned earlier we really didn't have that much visibility. We were concerned with addressing the Work Arisings and it was somebody else's problem, that is the Navy as a whole, and the management directorate in Ottawa to worry about the big picture. Having said that I don't recall a single situation where the money wasn't made available to get the important work done. It was just an expected part of refitting old ships that the known work would grow by a considerable margin.

In conclusion, I think in spite of cost these overruns, where the total cost of the refit was considerable more than the bid price I really think we got our money's worth. I think it would be difficult if not impossible exercise because of the lack of data to prove that. I think we got quality for pretty good money at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Captain Roger Chiasson. End of tape one side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

INTERVIEWER: Interview with Captain Roger Chiasson. Tape one side two.

We talked about the cost overruns and we talked about other problems that occurred during the refit program. Perhaps now we should just refer to the test and trial process and the subsequent commission and the departure of the ships.

CHIASSON: At the end of any refit whether its multi-ship or otherwise there is a pretty significant reactivation period involved. I neglected to mention earlier that the high tech and

classified combat systems and weapons systems would have been offloaded and repaired either in the dockyard, the ship repair unit Atlantic, or 202 Workshop during the course of the refit. These by in large would be set to work and test and trailed after the ship regained its operational, not operational period but would go through a period of test and trials specifically devoted to that. We're talking here about sonars and guns and high tech radars.

What was conducted during the refit was of course in Montreal would be tested and trialed by the contractor. This came in two components. One was the communications and navigation equipment which I mentioned earlier that Vickers had a plethora of subcontractors that dealt with a variety of equipment. There was one subcontractor in particular called (Valcom?) that very capably dealt with the communications and navigation equipment. [(Valcom?)] was involved with, to some extent, with 202 Workshop Depot, the contractors personnel and the Technical Services Detachment in making sure that the ship was safe to sail with its communications and navigation suite.

The other, perhaps more difficult aspect of getting the ship back to life was the main propulsion and auxiliary machinery. For this the contractor was expected to provide, what we called a set to work team. These were all ex-Navy personnel we outlined in the specification in the contract. The qualifications that this set to work team had to have, and obviously these were verbatim, basically trade requirements and it pointed to the requirement for ex-Navy personnel. There were always a good number of retired Navy personnel who were willing to take up this task which was very sporadic. It would occur over a period of about three weeks at the end of a refit so for most of these people it only occurred every six months.

As I eluded to, the process would take about three weeks from the first diesel generator be flashed up so that the ship could have its own electrical power, which was required for some of these communications and navigation test and trials that I mentioned earlier. To the accumulation of the process in what we called a basin trial. A basin trial consists of having all main propulsion machinery and its related auxiliaries or (anciliaires?) flashed up and short of leaving the jetty and going to sea everything was tested out. The period took about two days. Then that process was followed by about a month alongside. In a six month refit we would have the ship be reactivated and a contractors basin trail at the end of month five roughly.

For the last month of the refit the contractor went through a very extensive husbandry process of cleaning the machinery space bilges, degreasing, painting machinery as well as accommodations spaces. Basically reversing the process to return the ship back to the ships company and the commanding officer. Of course all of the machinery that had been shipped out to subcontractors would have come back by the end of that month five as well.

Here we have a process whereby hands off the contractor reactivates the ship. At the end of which this ship's company arrives for a period of, I would say less than a week, there is a formal transfer of custody to the commanding officer. Some of the contentious issues regarding compartment turnover are resolved and there is a two day sea trial where the contractor takes the ship to sea and confirms what was done. There is a confirmation basin trial followed by a two day sea trial. Once all the loose ends have been tied the actual last act prior to the ship leaving is the admiral's inspection. The admiral I think in virtually in every case perhaps once or twice sent a representative but was considered to be a fairly significant milestone. The admiral's presence kept everybody on their toes and made sure that that ship left, not only in a technical good state, but from a painting and preservation and habitable perspective in as good as shape as it could be. I have to say ships left quite pleased with the results.

INTERVIEWER: I'm glad you mentioned the admirals inspection because that was something I wasn't aware but obviously an important aspect of ship reacceptance by the Navy. I wonder at this point whether you would care to give us your overall impression of the refit process. Refer if you will to the lessons that might have been learned from this process and the relationships that developed between the three participants.

CHIASSON: Well, I think the multi-ship refit process was, in just a few words, the right solution at the right time for the kinds of problems that we were experiencing with a fleet of aging ships. I've mentioned them all: personnel disruption problems, planning problems with respect to the management of the whole process, logistics problems, [and] to some extent funding visibility. These all plagued the Navy in general but in particular these ships that were in there 25 to 30 year timeframe. In my opinion the staff work that was done in Maritime Command and in Naval Headquarters in Ottawa was, in my estimation, nothing short of brilliant. I think it just speaks of the Navy's flexibility. Which is in my mind, has always been there, to implement the right solution.

I think that the fuse was fairly short. I recall in the early 70's having a Hull Chief Petty Officer, Hull Technician. Who was an excellent Hull Technician but he also could write. He was hived off the ship, much to my displeasure, to help write this catalogue that I was talking about earlier. He and a number of other technicians that had similar skills were hauled ashore very quickly and in a very short period of time came up with this catalogue. The whole process, I think, was fast tracked. It was meant to address a great number of problems.

From a Canadian Defense Industrial Base perspective Vickers no longer exists. Vickers had a history going back to the war of military procurement and quite a proud one. By the time multi-ship refits were being implemented their Marine division had been reduced to, as I mentioned earlier, basically a yard of opportunity to catch late freighters going back and forth, some winterization did take place there.

At the same time there was an Industrial Division in Vickers which overtime had manufactured rolling stock for the Montreal subway system. I'm not sure how all of that was gobbled up by Bombardier but I don't think too many people recall the fact that Vickers did manufacture a great deal of rolling stock. They were, as we were in the process of managing multi-ship refits ... I had one or two individuals on my staff who were responsible for overseeing the work that was being done in the Vickers Industrial Division. That work consisted of two main items. One was, torpedo tubes for the United States Naval submarines and the other was high tensile steel hull sections for nuclear submarines. Again, very, very little known fact, I think, in the Canadian public awareness.

What is interesting is that we had a Quality Assurance Management System in the Industrial Division that could be managed by the Crown with one or two individuals. I'm not sure what the man hour value or cost value was but it was very significant. Whereas in the Industrial Division of Vickers we had a very, very lean organization with a vice president, a production officer, and three superintendents. I don't even recall secretaries and clerks. It was an extremely lean organization. In the same company that basically saw opportunity and provided a service that the Navy needed at the time. It was physically located where no one could have picked a better spot. I'm not saying other shipyards couldn't have done it but through the juxtaposition of all those things I had mentioned earlier it really was an opportunity that the Marine Division of Vickers took. I think it took a lot of daring do on the part of the Marine Division to seize that opportunity and to be as successful as they were. I think in the history of the Canadian Naval Industrial Base this was a blip in history that saw a very, very industrial

contractor take an opportunity to provide the right solution at the right price for a Naval need that had been identified. So it was rather interesting how it all came together. I think we accomplished most, if not all of the aims of the multi-ship refit process. Perhaps with the exception of that Quality Assurance Management approach, which I mentioned earlier. Having said that nobody can question that we got good quality out of the whole process. I think all in all it was a small blip in time but a success story.

INTERVIEWER: Well I am so glad you brought in those points about the Canadian Industrial Base. In particular the action of Canadian Vickers of which you spoke very highly. Unfortunately there are few people left to tell the story of Vickers but you've done a contribution on their behalf which I think will be appreciated.

Just in summing up I wonder if you have any additional comments to make about the refit process?

CHIASSON: I have no additional comments. I found this a very pleasant exercise.

INTERVIEWER: Well thank you Captain Chiasson for sharing your refit experiences with us and with the CANDIB group. In fact also to Don Wilson, Colin Brown and Pat Barnhouse for their assistance in preplanning this interview. Also to Tony Thatcher and the (SNC ?) who provided the boardroom facilities for this interview.

Interview with Captain Roger Chiasson. Interview ends.

TRANSCRIPTION ENDS