



Oral History Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Harold G. Gillis

Interviewer: C.R. Brown

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Transcribed by: S. Johnston

Harold G. Gillis

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By C.R. Brown

INTERVIEWER: This is a CANDIB Oral History Interview with Commander Hal Gillis that was recorded in Ottawa on Thursday November 3rd, 2005. Commander Gillis was interviewed by Colin Brown. Both participants have signed the copyright release form which is in my possession. The subject of this interview is the quality assurance procedures of the Canadian Navy in the early 1950s and most of the 1960s. In 1969, the regime changed when the Canadian Forces Technical Services Agency assumed the responsibilities for the ship and equipment acceptance from suppliers. The participants in this program were the service and civilian personnel of the Royal Canadian Navy, the then Department and Supply and Services (DSS) and various ship yards and suppliers. Today's interview will present Commander Gillis' story from a naval perspective. I will ask Commander Gillis to first introduce himself and describe his naval career up to the time of this project.

GILLIS: This is Hal Gillis a former naval colleague of Colin's who has served in the Canadian Navy from 1944 to 1973. I joined the RCNVR through the UNTD route in May 1944. Then went to the UK for HMS KENORA, a Bangor minesweeper to obtain my engineer officer's watch keeping ticket. Then was appointed to SNOWBERRY, a corvette, as the EO. It wasn't long before I returned to Canada because the threat in the Atlantic had lessened and Headquarters were starting to pay off ships. We ended up, by the way, putting SNOWBERRY on the sands of Rosyth where we left it. I then took a ship back to Canada called the SWIFT CURRENT as EO. As soon as we arrived in Canada, we were sent for a minor refit in Liverpool, Nova Scotia which was my first experience of ship repair. I went to the NEW LISKEARD as EO and following that, to MAGNIFICENT in Belfast, Northern Ireland on the staff of the Naval Overseer for a year or more. On commissioning, I served as the flight deck engineer officer. After a year in MAGNIFICENT, I then went as commanding officer of the Damage Control and Fire Fighting School in Halifax.

In 1950, I was appointed to London, England on the Canadian Joint Staff for the purpose of liaising with the Royal Navy in matters of design and procurement related to the equipment and design of the first vessel of the new 205 Class Ship Program. This transfer of information and the supply of main and auxiliary machinery for the ST. LAURENT i.e. the first of the class, allowed the RCN time to change the design, if required, of subsequent ships and the establishment of a manufacturing capability at numerous plants in Canada. I was then appointed to PNO staff Montreal for overseeing duties related to the building of 205 and as engineer officer on commissioning.

Other appointments included Deputy CTO, Maritime Command – Esquimalt, Planning Officer of the Naval Dockyard – Esquimalt, Staff Officer Refits and Repairs – Ottawa. I was sent to a course at the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario – an MBA course. Following that, as Assistant Director General for Maintenance in the newly-formed Material Command. My final appointment in the Navy was as Commanding Officer of 1 CFTSA in Halifax.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks, Hal. That seems to take me right across the original quality assurance methods to the new ones when you were CFTSA. I was just wondering what the procedures and responsibilities of the old system were in the shipyards and equipment manufacturers, particularly for the 205 class. You are familiar with them as you stood by during the building of St. Laurent. It seems to me that the new regime of the CFTSA came in just after the last steam destroyer was finished. After that we seem to be moving into the 280 program which must have had the full quality assurance. I wonder if you would mind just explaining the sort of procedures and responsibilities were for the old system and the new system.

GILLIS: Fine, I'll give it a try Colin. I believe you are referring to what is now understood on a broader front in today's terms as Quality Assurance. In the pre integration days, the term was usually confined to the quality control aspects of the products produced in various manufacturing plants where DSS and DND inspectors plied their trade. In 1969, the program of integration included the combining of the technical services and supply branches of the three services under Material Command at Rockcliff, Ottawa. As a result of this, it was decided to group all quality assurance overseer and inspection functions under a new entity called the Director General of Quality Assurance and the formation of several Canadian Forces Technical Service Agencies across Canada. I served as Assistant Director General Maintenance with Air Commodore Goss during this period and later as CO of 1 CFSTA in Halifax. The various agencies then formed detachments based on the nature of the work carried out.

In Halifax we had four, 101 TSD for aircraft repair, 102 TSD for shipyard ship repair, 103 for shipyard repair and electronic components in Saint John, New Brunswick, 104 TSD for electronic parts in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Few changes were made and the relation between DSS and DND and the personnel involved all remained in their previous locations.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks Hal, I wonder whether you have any ideas about the difference between quality assurance and quality control. To me, there was always quality control but do you have a feel for the difference between the two?

GILLIS: I believe, Colin, that the quality assurance term is a much broader term and includes quality control. In other words quality control contains an indication that you are going to do something where quality assurance is a noun. Do you follow me?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

GILLIS: One is a verb and one is a noun to a degree. So that is about all I can say at the moment.

INTERVIEWER: That's good – it seems that we moved into a broader aspect of quality. Did this change produce any difficulties for you?

GILLIS: Not really Colin, because at that time in its early phases and the actual introduction of quality assurance, if you like, to the degree that we know it today takes a considerable amount of time. In those days, in the 1950s at that time there was really no change in the role of naval overseers and inspectors whether the inspectors were service or civilian. I must say at this point too that the role of the overseers and inspectors is not always an easy one. And were usually the result of conflict between the Navy's insistence on getting a high quality product and the shipyard's interest in making a reasonable profit. Such conflict appeared to be less noticeable at the manufacturing level where the specifications are much more specific and not as general as those in the ship repair field. I am not aware of any problems caused by the formation of DGQA other than those associated with the adoption of new procedures, forms etc.... I should mention that it was not until the early '60s that the requirement for quality control appeared in naval specifications. In other words we retained the same inspection groups as before and closely with the personnel of the Department of Supply and Services on the contractual issues.

INTERVIEWER: That's great. Can you tell me how your relationship went with DSS - or DND's relationship with DSS -in the sort of out posts that were producing equipment or doing ship repairs?

GILLIS: Colin, DSS was and remains the contractual agent for all work undertaken by private firms at DND's request and specifications provided. Should there be any change in the original work causing increased costs, then DSS would negotiate an increase, if warranted. This close relationship

has been in place for many years.

INTERVIEWER: Apart from the contractual side of DSS, Hal, I believe the DSS people did have inspectors but were they ever concerned with naval ships?

GILLIS: As I recall Colin, no such inspectors were to my knowledge employed on DND ship repairs or construction. I do believe they are used on similar work for other departments such as the Department of Transport and the Department of Fisheries etc....

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Are there any amusing or otherwise anecdotal experiences that you can recall during your time as CFTSA or as a naval overseer?

GILLIS: Colin, I have difficulty recalling any amusing ones; you do remember the confrontational ones. I have forgotten those by now and it is probably a good thing. But no, I can't recall any specific incident I'd like to relate at this time.

INTERVIEWER: What about the general attitude you found of ship owners or shipyards to the inspection staff. Did they cooperate basically?

GILLIS: Colin, over the years I have spent a large part of my naval career involved in ship repair and new construction. I always found the work was challenging despite confrontational issues which were about the specifications not being met. Each owner has a different perspective on expectations. Each takes a different personal approach to the overseer involved. Some of them are confrontational in nature. However, the majority fortunately are those who understood and respected the overseers' function.

INTERVIEWER: That is interesting Hal. I would think - I may be guessing here- that many of the overseers were technically well qualified, even in many cases, better qualified than the shipyards they were dealing with and this must have helped.

GILLIS: It certainly did. It was always disappointing to me to find that many of the employees who I felt should have known about engineering problems and so on just didn't exist in the yards at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks Hal, for your time. That will be a useful addition to our collection. That now ends the interview with Commander Hal Gillis. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS

I think I'll just list the Canadian companies that were suppliers for the 205 class in the early 1950s it will be useful to have this record especially as many of the companies names have changed. So there was:

Anaconda American Brass in Toronto
The Aluminum Company of Canada, Montreal
Atlas Webster, Montreal
Atlas Asbestos, Montreal
Atlas Steel of Welland, Ontario
Bedard-Girard Ltd., Montreal
Babcock-Wilcox & Goldie McCulloch, Galt, Ontario
Canada Metal Col. Ltd., Montreal
Canadian Liquid Air Co. Ltd
Canadian Marconi Co. Ltd. Montreal

Canadian Asbestos Company Ltd.
Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Co. Ltd
Canadian General Electric Company, Toronto
Canadian John Mansville Co. Ltd., Montreal
Dominion Engineering Co. Ltd, Montreal who were very much concerned with gearing.
The design and first unit came from Maag in Switzerland but Dominion eventually produced the
follow on sets of gearings for the rest of 205, then for 257, 261, 265 classes.
Dominion Oxygen Col. Ltd Montreal
Dominion Metalware Co. Port Credit
Eastern Power Devices, Toronto
T. Eaton Toronto
Engineering Products of Canada Montreal
Fiberglass Canada Ltd.
Grinell Co. Ltd. Montreal
Keuffel & Esser Montreal
Hall Engineering Co. Montreal
John Inglis, Toronto - the turbine manufacturers
Canadian Ingersoll Rand Co. Ltd., Montreal
Wm. Kennedy & Sons, Owen Sound, Ontario
Montreal Bronze Co. Ltd., Montreal
C. O. Monat & Co. Ltd., Montreal
The Jones Marsh and Brass Manufacturing. Co., Toronto
T. McAvity & Sons Ltd., Saint John, New Brunswick
Noranda Copper & Brass Co. Ltd., Montreal
Northern Electric Co. Ltd., Montreal
Peacock Bros. Ltd., Montreal (part of the UK Weirs Group)
Canadian Car & Foundry Co. Ltd., Montreal
Parmenter & Bullock Mfg., Co. Ltd., Ganonoque, Ontario
Project Sales Ltd., Montreal
Sharples Corp., New York
Canadian Westinghouse Co. Ltd., Hamilton, Ontario
Canadian Tap & Die, Galt, Ontario
International Paint Co. Ltd., Montreal
Imperial Oil, Montreal
Shell Oil Co., Montreal
Dominion Steel & Coal, Montreal
Canadian Foundry and Forgings, Welland, Ontario
The Steel Co. of Canada, Hamilton, Ontario
Firth Brown Steel, Montreal
Drummond McCall & Co. Ltd., Montreal
US Steel Co., Montreal

This may be of use. It was taken from the Canadian Shipping Magazine, issue of November 1955.
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