



Oral History Interview Transcript

Interview Control Number: 6 C5 Allan

Interviewee: John (Jock) Allan

Interviewer: Gordon Smith

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Transcribed by: S. Johnston

Transcription of Interview Number 6 C5 ALLAN

Interviewee:

Vice Admiral (Ret'd) John (Jock) Allan

Interviewed 1 February 2006

By Gordon Smith

INTERVIEWER: Tape One side one. The date is February 1st, 2006 and Vice Admiral Jock Allan is being interviewed by the Canadian Naval Defence Industrial Base Project Leader of the DDH 280 Destroyer Program Gordon Smith, assisted by Doug Hearnshaw. The Canadian Naval Defence Industrial Base known as CANDIB Project's mission is to gather documents and historical information on naval construction programs and the effects they have had on Canadian industry. We hope to identify how Canadian industry has responded to the challenges of the naval requirements over the years and how the national industrial base has been affected by these naval programs, identifying any direct spin off benefits that arose. We also hope to trace the legacy of this development activity, calling on the experience and recollection of as many people as possible who were involved in anyway in these important events in Canadian history.

Both the interviewer and interviewee have signed the copyright release form. This interview will cover the start up procedures and the management processes involved in the administration of the DDH 280 Destroyer Program and is presented from the naval prospective. I would like to begin by asking Vice Admiral Allan to introduce himself and outline his naval career up to the start of this program.

Admiral Allan would you now give me your career up to the DDH 280 program?

ALLAN: Well I thank you very much for the invitation to do this. My memory may not be as good as it once was. But to start at the beginning, I joined the Navy after the War in 1946 as an ordinary seaman. I took training in Naden. I went there after to HMCS STADACONA. In HMCS STADACONA I was waiting for a course in UK at HMS AERIAL where I was going to become an electronic technician. Finally in August of 1947 I departed with a group of about 21 young seamen. We were all taken to the UK and we travelled down to HMS AERIAL where we started our courses. The course was 8 or 9 months as I recall, then we returned to Canada. By the way, we travelled in HMCS WARRIOR to get to the UK. Then we travelled in a normal ship transporting live cows and people and everything else. Our trip home wasn't as adventurous as our trip to the UK.

I completed the course with my fellow attendees in May or June of 1948. I joined HMCS SHEARWATER which was the new Fleet Air Arm unit to be part of the Navy. Thereafter I was employed as a mechanic in 208 Squadron. After two years of that I was elected to go to Queen's University. I spent five years at Queen's University where [HMCS] CATARIQUI was my home base. After Queen's I went down to HMCS STADACONA and took a long electrical course. It was a year long. On completion of that long electrical course I was made a teacher in the school. I taught for two years. Then I was appointed to HMCS NOOTKA where I served for two years. A very happy ship.

ANNE ALLAN: Ray Creeri was the Captain of HMCS NOOTKA

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go after that?

ANNE ALLAN: After HMCS NOOTKA we were posted to Ottawa in 1964. We stayed in Ottawa until '68.

ALLAN: I worked at DMCSAI. [Directorate Maritime Combat Systems Action Information]

INTERVIEWER: That is where I first met you. We were doing the preliminary design of the DDH 280. I came to ask you for your requirements for electrical power for your guns, missiles, sonar and you

gave me all the figures that I put into the preliminary design of the ship. That is the first time we met.

ALLAN: Because I hadn't been there before.

INTERVIEWER: Now what companies were you dealing with when you were in Combat Systems?

ALLAN: Every company in Canada that had an active role in our ship design and there were several of them. They were in Hamilton and [other places].

INTERVIEWER: Can you name the companies?

ALLAN: Westinghouse, Litton

INTERVIEWER: What about the sonar?

ALLAN: The sonar was a separate thing. It was being designed at the time..... you see we are not yet at the 280s. We are still in the development phase of a classic sonar. But we weren't there yet.

INTERVIEWER: I guess you didn't get involved with the gun which was going to be put on board at this point?

ALLAN: The five inch 54. It was in the hands of the agency down in Dartmouth.

HEARNSHAW: DREA?

ALLAN: Yes was in the hands of DREA. [Defence Research Establishment Atlantic]

INTERVIEWER: Now when you left Combat, DMCS, [Directorate Maritime Combat Systems] where did you go then?

ALLAN: When I departed HMCS QUAPELLE we came back to Ottawa to be program manager of the 280's.

INTERVIEWER: What rank were you at that time Jock?

ALLAN: I was a commander.

INTERVIEWER: Commander. You were the project manager or leader?

ALLAN: Project Manager. The interesting thing is that I can't think of two things at the same time. The construction had been partly done in MIL and the guy's name who I relieved was

ANNE ALLAN: Stan somebody.

ALLAN: Stan....he just died. I was reading in the paper.

INTERVIEWER: Not Derry Dawson?

ALLAN: Derry Dawson.

INTERVIEWER: You relieved him?

ALLAN: I relieved Derry Dawson. He went back out to the west coast.

INTERVIEWER: Well the contracts with MIL and Lauzon were already in place?

ALLAN: Yes they were.

INTERVIEWER: They were going ahead and Alec Arnott was in MIL.

ALLAN: Alec Arnott was MIL, yes. He was a good guy. He was a good supervisor. A good shake 'em up guy.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any trouble with MIL, Lauzon or Davie at that time?

ALLAN: Well we had differences like we always do but we resolved them all one way or the other.

They weren't large differences. They knew their job. They had started before I came, by at least a year or year and a half. But the ship was in the stages that you will see in book one over there.

INTERVIEWER: Those books are fantastic. We will borrow them or you can have those [back]. They contain so much past history on the DDH construction up through to the commissioning they are very, very good.

ALLAN: So far as I was concerned it was...***

INTERVIEWER: Was there any point where you really had to sit down in a real fist fight type of thing with the MIL or Davie?

ALLAN: Arnott was my key guy. He and I would talk about the problem and we would develop what we considered to be a scenario that MIL could stomach even though they didn't like it, some of the time. Other times they had a problem that was just unbeatable here or there and we had to recognize that we couldn't do that that way. We had to do it some other way.

INTERVIEWER: What about United Aircraft, their contract for the propulsion system?

ALLAN: The propulsion system was a dream as far as I was concerned. There were problems in the propulsion system but we took her out on trials and we ran down the river far enough so we wouldn't get into any trouble. We ran past Quebec as I recall it then we put the power to her and she reacted pretty good.

INTERVIEWER: The captain was Michel Goulet, who was a captain of the Branch Line. He was the civilian captain and we had Commander Doc McGillivray.

ALLAN: Yes he was there.

INTERVIEWER: Then we had Dick Hitesman was the HMCS HURON.

ALLAN: But Doc was early on the project, he was shortly after I was, and that's good.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get involved with the land base test site down in Philadelphia?

ALLAN: Yes we went to visit those establishments and we saw [a lot]. We went all over the US where there was a ship construction program alive. West coast, east coast and we learned a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Was the Spruance Class in Pascagoula, was that going [on]?

ALLAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That was just starting?

ALLAN: I think it was ahead of us but it was in construction.

INTERVIEWER: You know that the HMCS IROQUOIS was the first gas turbine ship that went to sea? We were six months ahead of the Brits.

ALLAN: Yes. I didn't remember that. But I knew we were ahead of them because we did something as Canadians that was pretty significant.

INTERVIEWER: Yes the first gas turbine. Now when the HMCS IROQUOIS was on trials I think it was Mr. White who was the senior MIL [representative].

ALLAN: Yes. Bill White.

INTERVIEWER:Vice President. And do you remember the time you came down into the machinery control room and you saw the manuals that were piles of paper and they were not approved. And you said "Are we operating the ship with unapproved manuals?" I said "Yes we were." The next thing I knew somebody came to get me up to the Captain's cabin and there you were face to face with Bill White. You asked me if these were the manuals we were using, which were not approved by

headquarters? I said “Yes we are operating this ship with unapproved manuals”. You shook hands with Bill White and said you accepted the ship. Then it was [a] navy ship.

ALLAN: I can’t remember all of the details but I think you’ve got it pretty clear.

INTERVIEWER: What happened then when you went back to headquarters?

ALLAN: Nothing happened.

INTERVIEWER: Wasn’t Larry Wilkins [at] all concerned....?

ALLAN: All the guys were all upset because of, you know.... but we had run the ship by this time. We knew the ship. There were some problems with getting the right position, I think it was, of one of the engines or two of the engines or something like that. But I don’t remember exactly what it was at this time.

INTERVIEWER: I think I can remind you there-it was when we had trouble with the cruise engine. The FT12 engine. We were on the cruise engine and the temperature was starting to go up the representative from United Aircraft says “Oh I don’t like that too well.” So I shut it down. We found out that the build up of the carbon in the combustion chamber was getting so bad that it was going to burn out the combustion chamber. So the shipyard and United Aircraft changed out that engine in one day from the spare that came in from Montreal. And there we were on our way again.

ALLAN: We didn’t have too much trouble after that as I recall.

INTERVIEWER: Not that you knew about Jock. We had a lot of problems with going astern but anyways.....

ALLAN: That’s right, the stern problem was [big]. I recall that.

INTERVIEWER: So then the HMCS IROQUOIS and the HMCS HURON and then I guess you went to Lauzon for the HMCS ATHABASCAN and the HMCS ALGONQUIN.

ALLAN: Yes we did.

INTERVIEWER: How were they at trials? Similar?

ALLAN: I think they learned much because we were transferring people up to Lauzon for advice and so on. Takis Veliotis was there and he didn’t miss a chance to take advantage of information.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get along with Takis?

ALLAN: I got along with him. He and I would sit down and have our talk together. Sometimes he came out mad and sometimes I came out mad. But we got along.

INTERVIEWER: If you compare the shipyards which one would you say did the better job?

ALLAN: I would say that it has to be MIL because they took the brunt.

INTERVIEWER: They were the first ship.

ALLAN: Takis Veliotis didn’t really teach them very much. He had a few ideas that were probably welcomed but MIL was they did their job.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yes..... There was Mr. Rochette and [others].

ALLAN: I liked the main members of both shipyards. I had very much respect for them. They were willing and able and had the capability of doing the job. Their leadership was good. I wouldn’t say it was very, very good. But they got strength each day as the time went on and they got to know us better. So they weren’t afraid of us. We weren’t about to crucify them. We wanted to get the ships out.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember Maurice Gendron?

ALLAN: Yes I think there is a picture of him somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure yes. He was the ship manager.

ALLAN: Yes. Each yard had a good ship manager.

INTERVIEWER: Jimmy Gilliland.

ALLAN: Jimmy Gilliland was the guy in Veliotis' yard. I hear he just died not too long ago. Takis.

INTERVIEWER: When you go into the contracting type of thing was there any overruns?

ALLAN: Oh yes there was overruns. My attitude towards that was just look at the reality of the problem. Did we specify correctly. Had we made any errors? Was there a problem that would result in a change? All of these things. I took them all and looked at them. Generally the shipyard was satisfied and if I was satisfied with all the guys behind me and they said "yes that is a good solution" we would accept that without a quarrel, without you know.....

INTERVIEWER: The Navy was happy with the four ships, were they?

ALLAN: Oh yes. The Navy was bloody happy with them.

INTERVIEWER: Good, good.

ALLAN: That is not to say there weren't changes made in years afterwards but we got the ships in service. They were useful ships and they are still going.

INTERVIEWER: Well the HMCS HURON apparently is decommissioned out in Esquimalt. But the other three [are operational].

ALLAN: I don't know why that happened but I guess the Navy had to.....

INTERVIEWER: Had to decide on one.

ALLAN: I don't know why HMCS HURON would be the "one". But if you had McGillivray here or Hitesman or Yanow or McLean.....

INTERVIEWER: Well Hitesman and McGillivray are both gone.

ALLAN: Yeah? So they can't participate in this but so all you have left is Yanow. You might talk to Bob Yanow or Mick McLean. Mick McLean is easier to get at. He's right here.

INTERVIEWER: He plays bridge.

ALLAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How was your relationship Navy versus your DSS organization? Was it easy or...?

ALLAN: They were part of the organization. They controlled much of the money for particular projects. We had many, many projects that I didn't have anything to do with except make sure that they fit in and the time frame. But as far as I'm concerned we had a good relationship. Sellick used to get mad at me often and I used to get mad at him. But we had a relationship. His boss was Al Allan. As I now remember. But there was another guy who was the boss man and he left and then things changed. It was tougher for Sellick to get things done. He had to go over and explain this: Al Allan had to explain this and that. I forget who the new guy was but I knew that they were having a tough time. Particularly near the end of the project. See I was with the project for 3 years.

INTERVIEWER: Were you at the end when they finally had to pay the shipyards? Did they go under or over budget?

ALLAN: I think we were over budget but not by much.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember how much it cost for the four ships?

ALLAN: No I can't remember. But it cost a lot.

INTERVIEWER: About 250 million dollars. Something like that.

ALLAN: It was near that. You should be able to find that out.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Then when you are finished the DDH 280 project what did you do then?

ALLAN: What did I do then? Oh what year was that?

INTERVIEWER: The project was '72-'73 was the end of the project.

ALLAN: I was promoted Squad commander of the 1st Squadron in Halifax. Dougie Boyle was there. So I got my fourth stripe. Went down and ran the squadron.

INTERVIEWER: In the DDH 280 program, Jock, the shipyards had a contract with the Naval Central Drawing Office in Canadian Vickers in Montreal. They did the complete working drawings and the "as fitted" drawings for the ship, and they would go into the shipyard for construction. Could you tell us about the relationship you found between the shipyard with the drawings and the problems that you had as the project manager?

ALLAN: Well there was a clash of sorts between the drawing office and the shipyard. The shipyard would want to do it this way and the Crown would want to do it that way. You had to balance the rights and wrongs of it. Because either you were going to demand a higher price by doing it the shipyards way or you were going to have to take a slice off your design work and find another way to do that.

HEARNSHAW: Interview with Vice Admiral Allan

End of Side One.

CANDIB Oral History Program Interview with Vice Admiral Allan.

Tape One, Side Two

ALLAN: I think that through the preliminary design, as the shipyards began to get a picture of what they were going to do [they could] see the difference [between] what they were going to do and what they would do. There had to be a coming together.

INTERVIEWER: But as I said at the beginning, the contract was with the shipyard, and they in turn] with the drawing office so they were contracted. So really the Navy didn't have too much to do with that. It was between the companies themselves. There was something [like] 3,000 to 4,000 working drawings for the ship. About 300-400 "as fitted" drawings. There were a lot of drawings that had to be done by the NCDO.

ALLAN: Well the NCDO was a faithful supplier of information but they were constantly badgered by the shipyard, well maybe badgered is a poor word. But there were complaints about 'there is an easier way to do this than that', and that sort of thing. There was a compromise most of the time. I think Canadian Vickers would have its ways and they would follow the instructions of the government-you guys or us guys, and the shipyard would say "it is going to cost you more money or whatever." [and] we would have an argument.

INTERVIEWER: But do you think there were any arguments that never [were] solved? Would you always come to an agreement?

ALLAN: Yes we did.

INTERVIEWER: Whether it cost more money or not, you needed it, was probably the decision.

ALLAN: If you look back at the cost of the ship's program, and you said that it cost 250 million a ship you won't be buying the ships at that price in the next batch by a long shot.

INTERVIEWER: By a long, long shot. In the shipyard you had Alec Arnott and I don't know who was in Lauzon?

ALLAN: You mentioned him. He was a tall guy.

INTERVIEWER: Don Wilson? No.

ALLAN: Well you can find out.....

INTERVIEWER: Anyway how was your relationship with Alec ?. Alec was the PNO, Principal Naval Overseer, in Sorel and you were project manager of the whole program.

ALLAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with Alec?

ALLAN: It was great. Both yards. It was great.

INTERVIEWER: Did Alec report to you?

ALLAN: He reported to somebody in.... there is a name of the organization that puts supervisors in shipyards and he's the leader of all the men.

INTERVIEWER: TSD. [Technical Services Detachment]

ALLAN: TSD is it. So he had his group of guys but we talked every time I visited him. I got letters from him I got letters back from him. About troubles, what to do about this and what to do about that. He never left me out of the loop.

INTERVIEWER: That was good.

ALLAN: Neither shipyard did. In fact nobody left me out of the loop.

INTERVIEWER: Good. Do you believe that these companies benefited from the DDH 280 contract?

ALLAN: Yes I think they made a fair amount of money.

INTERVIEWER: Both yards....well MIL is completely gone..... and Lauzon.

ALLAN: Yes but that is not because of the 280 program.

INTERVIEWER: No.

ALLAN: Well hell they never had such a program ever. That program was the biggest program that a shipyard in Canada ever had until they did the 12.... whatever the hell their name are now.....But it is so far back there.....

HEARNSHAW: The CPF.

ALLAN: The CPF yes. They were both happy and I was happy. I didn't think they got more than they deserved but they got what they deserved.

INTERVIEWER: Well that is good, yes. No the DDH 280s were designed by the Navy people, and you [were] part of it of course with the Combat Systems, but then the next program that came along, the big program, was the Canadian Patrol Frigate (CPF).

ALLAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: There the Navy, DSS went out [to] industry and [got] industry to design the ships.

ALLAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a good move for the Navy to do that?

ALLAN: I think it was a good thing for the Navy to do because the Navy was dropping away and we didn't have the number of resources, like you and I and so on. By the time they started the program I don't think they could have handled it.

They would have had to hire a bunch of sailors. So I think that that was the chance of our industry to really grab hold of the thing..... How many ships was it?

INTERVIEWER: 12.

ALLAN: Those ships are fine.

INTERVIEWER: Yes but they cost an awful lot more. A lot more.

ALLAN: Well you see you can't if you are looking for a solution on the costs then we did on the 280s a lot of work, from DSS and from all of the other agencies, that we couldn't do any longer, because we didn't have enough resources. Do you see?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

ALLAN: If we had another program a year or two later when the 280s finished, if [we] had [of] had another program [and] that would have been caused by the Government of Canada- if they had stayed with the number of men that we had-we could have done the program the same way we did the 280s.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So it was a gap of time from the completion of the 280s and the beginning of the CPF?

HEARNshaw: And in that time you lost all the staff.

ALLAN: You lost everything.

INTERVIEWER: Now if....

ALLAN: The shipyards played the game: they wanted to be able to have a bigger share and they did. And so, you know, you have to look at those ships and say despite the fact that it is a contrary situation of us having all this talent at the end of the 280s and the CPF being so much later on. The Government [of] Canada narrowed in the force until we didn't have enough talent there as we should have had if we wanted to. But it's the government's bloody problem.

INTERVIEWER: Now that the CPF has been completed for a number of years, now there is talk of the Joint Support Ships being built. Would it be fair to say that we will probably do the same procedure that we did with the CPFs but we wouldn't go back to the old DDH 280 way?

ALLAN: I don't think you have a chance. I don't think you have a chance. First of all you don't have the talent in house and secondly the talent is over there in the shipyards if they give them the job before they forget.

INTERVIEWER: But the talent in the shipyards is non-existent. In Saint John's, MIL....

ALLAN: That's the problem. So either government has got to say we will recruit an awful lot of smart guys right away and do it. Like hell they'll [get a] lot of smart guys right away because the economy has been absent of that kind of technology for years and years and years.

INTERVIEWER: And so has the shipyard. The shipyards are not building any ships now.

ALLAN: But the shipyards have got the upper hand. They built the last series of ships.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, but you take the CPF [program] now, [it] was completed in 1990....

ALLAN: 1973, I went down to the 1st Squadron. I was a squadron commander. What I was really there for was to finish off the job of getting the 280s underway.

INTERVIEWER: But I was just going back to the CPF completion and that period now has been so long that all the shipyards now are completely non active.

ALLAN: Are you active now? Are we active now?

INTERVIEWER: The Navy?

ALLAN: Are we active now in terms of building or constructing ships?

INTERVIEWER: The Navy has still got talent to be able to define the ship and specify what they want. But going back to the CPF way of doing it, they have to go out to industry to get it designed and built.

ALLAN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: And they have to start up from the beginning. So maybe what they should do is the Navy should build their capabilities up and do it in house like we did the DDH 280s.

ALLAN: The Government isn't going to give us anymore more money to buy anymore sailors with technical talent. It is clear.... well it is not clear. This particular situation that we have when the Liberals are gone and we don't know what is going to happen. We don't know if that guy [Steven Harper] well, he sounds like he is pro military, but we don't know yet. He surely has been advised on how much it is going to cost to do things. Surely they have had the objective of trying to get ships built. But I don't hear those kinds [of] words yet. That we need a larger Navy. We need a larger Air Force. We need a larger Army.

INTERVIEWER: General Hillier is going for that now.

ALLAN: Well he is doing the right thing. He is kicking the pot while it is hot, boy. He is going to get somewhere. I was talking to him yesterday when he was doing his stand up/stand down thing. He has got a determined look in his eye. He knows that he has to act quickly and show the Canadian people that it is worth having. The conservative leader Harper, well he is an unknown. The words I hear up to now are nice to hear.

INTERVIEWER: He has got no military background at all.

ALLAN: No well he is talking about 3 ships up in the straits, up there in the north.

INTERVIEWER: In the Arctic.

ALLAN: Yes and that is a good sign.

INTERVIEWER: Very expensive business.

ALLAN: Yes, but once you start to get ships then maybe you will get more. If you don't start to get ships then you will never get more.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have anything more you would like to add before we close?

ALLAN: Well there is probably much more, but I think you have a feeling for the program and as I said just a few minutes ago, the ships were very fine ships as far as I'm concerned, since I was the squadron commander who took them to sea and operations.

INTERVIEWER: Then I wish to thank you for sharing your experiences with us. I particularly want to thank you very much for the pictures and the documentation that I can see that Anne has collected, and I can see right here about 10 books, volumes of notes and cuttings which I will put into the files and a.....

ALLAN: I can't let you have these but..... because it is all a litany of the Navy and how Annie and I lived together under the circumstances that we got.

INTERVIEWER: The ones of the 280 are going to be very, very good for us to put into the archives.

ALLAN: You might want to look at this...

INTERVIEWER: Let's finish it off now. The interview with Vice Admiral Jock Allan on the 1st of February 2006 interview ends.

END OF TRANSCRIPTION