



Oral History Interview Transcript

Interview Control Number: 10-C25

Interviewee: John Mason

Interviewer: Sid Jorna

Date of Interview: February 10, 2010

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Transcribed: Joy Thatcher

Transcription of Interview Number 10-C25

Interviewee: Captain John Mason

Interviewed February 10, 2010

By Sid Jorna

Tape one, side one

INTERVIEWER: Captain (ret) John Mason recorded on the 10th of February 2010 at Victoria B.C. This interview follows one conducted by Tony Thatcher on the 23rd of March 2009. In that interview his experiences in two shipyards and as an Engineering Officer taking over three vessels in HMC Ships BUCKINGHAM, OTTAWA and CHAUDIERE were explored. This interview is to explore some of elaborations on HMC Ships BUCKINGHAM, OTTAWA and CHAUDIERE and to look at some of the later experiences of Captain Mason as a senior officer in the fields of diplomacy and naval intelligence. At this point, I would like Captain Mason to state that he has read and signed the CANDIB release form and to introduce himself.

MASON: John Mason, I am sitting here in my living room with Sid Jorna who will be conducting an interview with me concerning my experiences in shipyards and probably other areas. I have signed the information...

INTERVIEWER: ...release form.

MASON: ...release form and so I'm looking forward to the interview.

INTERVIEWER: You mention in Tony's interview some notes about the HMCS BUCKINGHAM.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That you, was it the RNO staff that you were on at that time?

MASON: She was built in Vickers...[Capt Mason was not sure of this. Further research indicates she was built as a River Class Frigate by Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Co. Ltd. Lauzon Quebec and launched 28 April 1944 with Pennant number K685. She was decommissioned in 1945 and recommissioned as a Prestonian Class Frigate with Pennant number 314, 25 June 1954. She was decommissioned finally 23 March 1965 (Reference Allied Warships WW II, Google search)]

INTERVIEWER: Vickers

MASON: It was the PNO staff...

INTERVIEWER: PNO staff.

MASON: Principal Naval Overseer.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: I'm trying to remember the name of who he was, Frank Fribour was it, Freeborn ? I'm not sure if that's the name.

INTERVIEWER: Frank [Freeborn] You mention that it was a re-build job.

MASON: A re-build.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, like you mention that the *Buckingham* wasn't like a new construction at the time.

MASON: No, well it had been alive and used in World War Two.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: It was in for a lengthy refit at Vickers [Montreal] post war.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: This is 1964 was it?

INTERVIEWER: '64 would [seem] okay. She was what a Prestonian Class frigate?

MASON: Yeah that's right yeah.

INTERVIEWER: She'd have to be triple expansion ...

MASON: Two of them yeah, yeah basic engineering.

INTERVIEWER: Basic engineering.

MASON: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any of the details of what her refit consisted of, were there any great modifications made that you can think of?

MASON: Well reciprocating engines always need bottom ends to be refitted and occasionally top ends, shims, put leads in, crank them up and measure them, pretty basic engineering,

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: don't do that anymore.

INTERVIEWER: No.

MASON: I'm glad I had experience in a reciprocating ship because that was as I said basic engineering...

INTERVIEWER: Basic engineering.

MASON: and yeah I think the boiler pressure was, probably forgotten it, 180 PSI I believe. You'll have to look that up I can't remember exactly so long ago, saturated steam of course, reciprocating auxiliaries. The only turbines were the turbo generators,

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: DC generators, DC power.

INTERVIEWER: DC power.

MASON: Yeah where we needed alternating power we had to have motor alternators throughout the ship, mainly for radio work.

INTERVIEWER: Right. MG sets, MG sets.

MASON: Yeah, yeah motor generators pretty reliable old ship, not a very big ship.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember were there any great modifications made during this refit?

MASON: Of the BUCKINGHAM?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah or was it just basic refits, restore...

MASON: She was being outfitted for the Pacific...

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MASON: No wait it was ANTIGONISH, I'm getting ahead of it; no, no I don't remember of any, yes, wait a minute, wait a minute yes she had the first experimental or prototype helicopter landing deck.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

MASON: They were testing the idea so for that reason we didn't go on any, very many exotic cruises.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: They didn't want the enemy to see this helicopter deck.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MASON: So we missed a trip to Europe.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's an unfortunate outcome.

MASON: And so on but, well several trips to Bermuda.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, were these experiments with the helicopter on BUCKINGHAM, were they deemed to be successful?

MASON: Oh yes because after that they started refitting a number of ships to take them and the new ships coming out were equipped with hangers and helicopters.

INTERVIEWER: Right, those would have been Cadillac destroyers....

MASON: Yeah, yeah, of course we had no hanger for aircraft on the BUCKINGHAM, they put big canvas tarps over the beast, trying to hold it down on deck. We had [pad] eyes on the deck, but the subsequent ships had hangers.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: In fact I'm getting ahead of myself, but the first of the turbine ships had one funnel right where they wanted the hanger,

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: so they had to extensively modify the boiler uptakes to build two funnels and with the hanger in between.

INTERVIEWER: With the hanger in between.

MASON: Yeah and then as the new ones came out they were built that way.

INTERVIEWER: Right, I remember in the Annapolis Class.

MASON: Yeah that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Just going back to the BUCKINGHAM for a minute, were these Prestonian Class frigates a Canadian design or did they come over from Britain, do you recall that?

MASON: I think they were a Canadian design. I didn't see any RN Prestonian Class; don't know if there were any, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I was just wondering because...

MASON: The Canadian Navy was the first to launch the idea of helicopters on destroyers.

INTERVIEWER: Yes they were and they made it very successful.

MASON: Yes, yes followed by all the other navies pretty well but BUCKINGHAM was the first.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: And the ship rolled at sea when it was quite interesting to watch them hauling down the helicopter. Onboard that ship I think they brought in the first so called "bear trap".

INTERVIEWER: Oh they tried that on BUCKINGHAM?

MASON: I wish I could remember to say yes but I was on a ship which had it.

INTERVIEWER: It was quite innovative.

MASON: Yeah, actually just like a bear trap, it had a probe and a snap got it on deck. Then it was safe to secure it, but memory is not good I couldn't even remember Thatcher, gee.

INTERVIEWER: The bear trap they, they were originally built by Fairey Aviation.

MASON: Were they, I guess?

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MASON: I kind of think they were built in Dartmouth, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so the BUCKINGHAM became kind of an experimental ship.

MASON: That's what it was, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Machinery stuff would have been pretty stable in all this, no big changes in the machinery or...

MASON: Main engines?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah main engines like boiler systems.

MASON: Not to my knowledge no, no.

INTERVIEWER: Anything in the armaments that was...?

MASON: Well they had, they had to remove some armament to make way for the deck, back aft. In fact the whole configuration aft because there was deck houses back there, depth charge throwers.

INTERVIEWER: They used the old Squid - over the mast?

MASON: I don't think yeah, yeah I don't think BUCKINGHAM had Squid, I can't recall exactly but you couldn't have had it and the platform because the platform was where the Squid used to be.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

MASON: No.

INTERVIEWER: They would have had to remove that.

MASON: Of course, that's true. I wish I could remember precisely but when you served on so many ships you tend to get them mixed up.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MASON: I served on 9 ships during my career.

INTERVIEWER: Nine ships.

MASON: And I get them all mixed up with who was on which ship.

INTERVIEWER: I can understand. You and Tony dealt with the three, which were the BUCKINGHAM and the OTTAWA and the CHAUDIERE.

MASON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You were the Captain of the ATHABASKAN?

MASON: No, ALGONQUIN.

INTERVIEWER: ALGONQUIN.

MASON: The first ALGONQUIN.

INTERVIEWER: The first ALGONQUIN. Before we get to that I'd like to ask a couple of questions about the OTTAWA. You mentioned in the interview that this was the third OTTAWA.

MASON: Yes during World War Two there was one OTTAWA which was torpedoed and sunk.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: Replaced by the second OTTAWA,

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: during World War Two so this one was post war of the new construction. It was the third OTTAWA.

INTERVIEWER: The reason I'm curious is because the book I was reading makes mention of the first OTTAWA.

MASON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Which was I guess it was a British design.

MASON: Oh, yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: They called them River Class Destroyer.

MASON: Well maybe, I don't know if it was in the British Navy whether it was River Class but certainly the Canadian ships tended to be that unless they were Tribals.

INTERVIEWER: Well the Tribal looks very much in the pictures that I was looking at that the first Tribals was going in 1942, 1942 yeah, and the first OTTAWA sank and...

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: ...that was the end of the first OTTAWA, so we have a picture of the River Class which looks remarkably like the first Tribal Class.

MASON: Oh, Tribal had 2 funnels.

INTERVIEWER: Two funnels, yeah.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So in this picture I'm wondering if Tribal Class wasn't a Canadianization of the basic British design.

MASON: No it was a British design because there were British Tribals like I think of ESKIMO and a dozen others, they were British, so it was a British design brought over here. I think four of them were built in Halifax Shipyards like NOOTKA, MICMAC and I can't remember the others.

INTERVIEWER: So the second OTTAWA was that also been a River Class or?

MASON: Well it was named after the Ottawa River.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: Or the nation's capital if you wish but I think it was a River Class. Yeah we knew it was a River Class and whether that was a British design I kind of think it was, but I wish I could be sure of that.

INTERVIEWER: Actually if we stop this for a minute I can show you a picture.

MASON: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I can show you here a picture of the first OTTAWA which is a River Class.....

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: ...destroyer and then over here we've got the later ATHABASKAN which is a Tribal Class.

MASON: Yeah, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And they look very similar but maybe you can point out some of the differences.

MASON: Well the River Class had two funnels both the same size and two boilers and of course two engines in a separate engine room but the Tribal had two funnels again but the forward funnel was much larger than the after funnel and the forward funnel provided the uptakes from two boilers and furthermore the Tribal Class had certainly an engine room with two engines but also a gear room where the gears transmitting the rapidly rotating turbine speed to the shaft...

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: ...where it was reduced.

INTERVIEWER: Yes so that's quite an increase in horsepower... gearbox (?)

MASON: Oh yes, oh yeah oh yes because they were very fast well over 32 knots and I think some made more than that on trials but we're talking about calm seas.

INTERVIEWER: Calm seas.

MASON: Yeah in the average North Atlantic they did not do that.

INTERVIEWER: No that's right. So that's an interesting difference between, I was trying to puzzle them out.

MASON: Well I hope that helped.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah it certainly did yeah thank you very much. The other one that I'm curious about is the CHAUDIERE and you stood by the CHAUDIERE, it commissioned in 1964 was it?

MASON: Well no it would have been first the BUCKINGHAM in '64 then it was OTTAWA in '66 and I think CHAUDIERE in '69.

INTERVIEWER: '69. CHAUDIERE was one of the St. Laurent Class was she not?

MASON: Restigouche Class they used to say.

INTERVIEWER: Restigouche Class, okay so that was a variant of the Saint Laurent...

MASON: That's right yeah. She was a very comfortable ship, enjoyed that very much.

INTERVIEWER: I was reading about the CHAUDIERE'S predecessor which there's a picture in this book showing it closing up on U-744...

MASON: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: ... a boarding party. Do you know any of the history of the CHAUDIERE, like do you know what the evolution of it was?

MASON: Not going back that far no.

INTERVIEWER: That was in the Second World War.

MASON: Yeah that's right. I think Pat Nixon was the CO. He later became Squadron Commander of the 5th squadron.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MASON: Four stripes.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: And I don't know what became of him after that, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So the later CHAUDIERE that you stood by would have been considerable upgrade in technology from the BUCKINGHAM, the OTTAWA.

MASON: Yeah, well of course. It had double reduction steam turbines. The first ships we had with double reduction gearboxes which enabled a faster turbine speed hence more efficient and increased endurance, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So she'd be actually, she was after the third OTTAWA wasn't she. The third OTTAWA was in '56 so the CHAUDIERE would have been quite an advance over the OTTAWA.

MASON: Well yes the third OTTAWA of course was not one of the St. Laurent, Restigouche Class. She was a World War Two ship yeah and by the time they got to the improved Restigouche Class, they were very modern destroyers. As we said they had 2 boilers each at 550 PSI controlled superheat to 750 degrees, very automatic feed systems. In fact run by compressed air with the Bailey Meter system.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, right.

MASON: Gave very little trouble. In the olden days they usually had one hand on the upper catwalk looking after boiler feed.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: But that's not a really problem with the newer ones. Just as well because they went through a lot of feed very quickly.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. You mentioned in your interview with Tony that there was a problem with risers?

MASON: Yes well that, I don't know whether there was a problem with all of them but certainly in OTTAWA which I was standing by at Vickers [Montreal] we had problems with the riser connecting the main drum down to the lower drum. It started leaking where the riser went into the drum itself, 4 inch pipe...

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: ...and so we couldn't fix it in the shipyard so they complained to Babcock Wilcox in Galt [Ontario] and they sent two people down together with a big pipe expander, internal expander, and they worked hard at that; in fact managed to get it tight by putting this big set of rollers into the mud drum and cranking it around and around. They knew just how far to go with it before they over stretched it and then it successfully tested.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Successfully tested.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That's the part that I missed in the interviews, what they actually did to fix it.

MASON: Well yeah it was a big roller a set of rollers.

INTERVIEWER: And that stretched, expanded the metal on it and made it fit better.

MASON: That's right, that's right, yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's quite interesting. And that was on the OTTAWA?

MASON: OTTAWA, yeah. That was in Montreal that's right.

INTERVIEWER: In Vickers in Montreal.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So the OTTAWA, I'm just a little, I think this is my confusion not yours but the OTTAWA was a, was that a St. Laurent Class or was that?

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, St. Laurent Class.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, It's one of the early ones isn't it?

MASON: Well I think so.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah 1956 or so.

MASON: Yeah '56 about there.

INTERVIEWER: Which would have been the first generation of these new Cadillac Destroyers.

MASON: Yes, yes that's right.

INTERVIEWER: The Y100 steam plant.

MASON: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So by the time you get to CHAUDIERE those problems would all be behind you?

MASON: Well that's right and most of the problems were overcome, the first ships we'd ever had with controlled superheat and well that made it more efficient and they worked very well.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that we need to talk about in those three ships?

MASON: Well in the Restigouche Class they had modern update evaporators.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: And usually their real problem in destroyers was fresh water but it was not a problem with these they were double shell, fairly automatic. They injected a compound whose mixture I've forgotten in the feed, sea feed of course which reduced it bubbling and boiling, boiling over and therefore enabled you to operate the evaporator at a higher output.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember who built those evaporators?

MASON: Oh I can't be certain, I think they were made in Canada.

INTERVIEWER: Would that be a Babcock design?

MASON: It probably was, I can't be certain.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: Now of course in modern ships they laugh when we talk about evaporators because they have now an ion exchange system,

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: which I don't completely understand, but they make water like you wouldn't believe.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, probably a reverse osmosis.

MASON: Yes that's exactly what it is, reverse osmosis. I was never shipmates with one, wish I had been. I've spoke to those that have them. They say they're virtually trouble free.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, you can buy them for under your sink.

MASON: That's right yeah. The trouble with evaporators you had to clean them down, blow them down and which interrupted the process and occasionally you get a slug of sea water coming over which would ruin the output.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay maybe we can just pause this for a second. John just getting past all the technical stuff of the CHAUDIERE and OTTAWA and all that I'd like to talk a little bit about your experiences in command. I believe you commanded the ALGONQUIN. Can you tell me a little bit about that ship and how we acquired it what it was all about?

MASON: Well we acquired ALGONQUIN and SIOUX together and as I understand it they were gifts from the RN. These were two boiler ships. They had a burst of speed about 30 knots, fairly good sea boats, as much as a destroyer can be. The machinery was not radical or new and it took some maintenance but we managed to keep it all going.

INTERVIEWER: Were they a turbine design?

MASON: Turbine yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you take them on any really interesting cruises?

MASON: Well we were over to UK several times. We were certainly in Bermuda perhaps 3 or 4 or more times. We took her up to Montreal for Expo. The ship was open to visitors.

INTERVIEWER: I think I actually went onboard her.

MASON: Yeah and yes we visited all the way down the east coast of the USA, Norfolk down around Florida and in to New Orleans. A good place for shore leave; jazz and so on.

INTERVIEWER: I guess. What sort of time frame are we looking at? What time frame was this?

MASON: I'm trying to think what timeframe it was. I think it was in the late sixties, early seventies.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: Yeah, and at the end of that we paid her off into the reserve fleet. For some strange reason several years later she was re-commissioned with a skeleton crew and brought around to the West Coast...

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MASON: ...where she lay against the wall for a couple of years and was then scrapped. Don't know. Her last commanding officer then was dear old Larry Dzioba.

INTERVIEWER: Larry Dzioba yes, that's a name I know. I'd never sailed with Larry but I knew the name.

MASON: Well he died young.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, he did that's right. Okay. So you mentioned that you had served on a number of other ships as well. Can you remember any of them?

MASON: Well in World War Two my first ship was the NIAGARA.

INTERVIEWER: The NIAGARA.

MASON: Ex USN, four stackers, four boilers.

INTERVIEWER: Four boilers, right.

MASON: Yeah, turbine ship with reciprocating auxiliaries, terrible sea boat, very narrow and long, would roll in a harbour if a harbour craft came alongside.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Was this a destroyer?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, but it had bunks. The only ships in the Canadian Navy at that time, with bunks...

INTERVIEWER: bunks

MASON: ...which were okay, we thought it was alright. We just spread our hammocks out on the bunks. The hammocks had a little mattress in them and in really rough weather we'd have to lash ourselves in.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MASON: She'd roll and lift one screw out and then the other. Shake the whole ship. Well, terrible sea boats; not designed for the North Atlantic.

INTERVIEWER: Are you talking about the sea boats or sea keeping qualities?

MASON: Sea keeping qualities, I meant sea keeping qualities, yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: Then I was drafted up to, again Canadian or before Canadian Shipyard in Vickers Shipyard to commission the FORT ERIE, which was a frigate.

INTERVIEWER: Same as the BUCKINGHAM?

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Prestonian.

MASON: Well no, it wasn't because it was a frigate before it was modified to look like a Prestonian.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MASON: No it was a basic frigate with a short foc'sle, reciprocating engines. There, I went there as I had been taking a course for ERA and apprentices. We had to go to sea for six months as stokers, which frankly I think is a terrible waste of talent because we finished passing all the trade tests and examinations ashore; marine engineering...

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: ...and then we go and serve as stokers in boiler rooms and bilges for six months to get our auxiliary watch keeping certificates and then we could be rated acting 4th class ERA.

INTERVIEWER: Oh good.

MASON: We had Petty Officers uniform and moved from the stokers' mess to ERA's mess, which was a different life.

INTERVIEWER: Right, so the time frame here would have been late, mid-fifties right? The time frame for the FORT ERIE would have been in the fifties?

MASON: Oh, FORT ERIE...

INTERVIEWER:... early sixties?

MASON: Oh yeah well World War Two, it was '44.

INTERVIEWER: 1944, I see.

MASON: I think we commissioned her in Quebec City.

INTERVIEWER: Was she built in Canada?

MASON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Actually Canada had a very, very vibrant shipbuilding industry.

MASON: Yes oh yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Then the transition to a smaller Navy that must have been a challenge.

MASON: That's right, yeah. When we were in Quebec City outfitting it, they towed in SHAWINIGAN less her stern; just been on her way from, down to Halifax for her first time and she was hit by a homing torpedo blew the stern off her and killed a couple that's all not a lot but of course she was helpless, she had to be towed back to the shipyard in Quebec City. Not great for morale, the rest of us were standing by ready to go.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a ship was SHAWINIGAN? What kind of a vessel was SHAWINIGAN?

MASON: Oh, she was another frigate.

INTERVIEWER: A frigate.

MASON: A frigate yeah, she was a total loss, scrapped. From there I went, I was drafted to Pictou Nova Scotia to stand by the refit of ANTIGONISH a frigate which was bound for the Pacific War and we had just commissioned it. We were getting ready to go over workups in Bermuda when the war was over so that was almost the end of that. We took her around [by Capt Mason's request on review, delete word "around" as she was already on the East Coast] to Halifax, bid farewell. We arrived I'm pleased to say after the Halifax riots; we were not part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. So did the ANTIGONISH get paid-off from service right away or did she stay in service for a while?

MASON: I, I'm not sure I think probably so yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Probably went straight up to Sydney Nova Scotia [reserve fleet].

MASON: I guess so. I was RCNVR.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: And so I was hostilities only and I was released and I used my DVA credits to get a degree in mechanical engineering in Toronto.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, you got yourself back in the Navy?

MASON: Well yeah I don't know if I was thinking openly about it but finding a job was difficult there was so many of us. I had an offer from CIL to be the assistant to the plant maintenance engineer in Beliol, Quebec, 'dans la Belle Provence'. I was thinking very hard about it when I had an unexpected letter from RCME, RCME offering me a commission as a second Lieutenant at 250 dollars a month.

INTERVIEWER: Yes I'd say so.

MASON: That was a good lot of money in those days,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MASON: So I took the letter down to HMCS York which was by then on the waterfront. It had been an old automotive building and the staff officer at that time was Ward Palmer and he's retired out here now. He was a reserve officer so eventually I got a letter saying yeah they were interested in talking to me. I had to go to Ottawa for an interview.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: And so did he. He wanted to go RCN, so it turns out that we both passed the interview. You know, a bunch of gentlemen with gold sleeves and blue stripes, and went in to the permanent force and he was the one that swore me in; so we joke about that when I see Ward. He's still here.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: Do you know him?

INTERVIEWER: No.

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so let's just pause this for one second. So you were, they set up a special board for your watch keeping ticket...

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: ...because you were the first of the engineering officers that would be able to aspire to command.

MASON: That's right. Yeah and well I felt fairly confident, not overly confident but well they asked me all sorts of questions mainly on things like ATP-1 and the manoeuvring guides and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: What would you do if? And they decided I guess to confirm my bridge watch keeping ticket.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: So I went back to the ship and lo and behold I was the senior watch keeper.

INTERVIEWER: And what ship was that now?

MASON: That was CHAUDIERE.

INTERVIEWER: CHAUDIERE right. So you were senior watch keeper just like that.

MASON: As I was the unmarried one I kept the watch, set the watch keeping schedule. I always made myself duty watch the last night in port, duty watch the first night in port so that would make me very popular with the other officers.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: And that's home port that is.

INTERVIEWER: Home port, yes.

MASON: Quite the reverse in foreign ports.

INTERVIEWER: Foreign ports yeah. How long was it from doing watchkeeping to when you actually got to do command?

MASON: Oh quite a while.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MASON: I then had to write, and/or sit, the command exams.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: A series of command of exams on various departments of a ship and the Captain is supposed to know quite a bit about each one of them but I had notes and I took some courses and you know it's alright. I had to write a navigation paper and I had been taking sights. I had a sight book and passed those exams fairly well and then finally came the Board.

INTERVIEWER: The Board.

MASON: Took place onboard the Carrier with Scruffy O'Brien in charge.

INTERVIEWER: BONAVENTURE.

MASON: And several other Commanders including my Captain and you know; what would you do if, kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: You're ordered to render assistance to a Greek merchant ship that is on fire at such in such a position, what would you do? Well first of all determine where the ship was and see how long it would take me to get there,

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yeah.

MASON: ...get a boarding party ready firefighting party and this is what gave them a laugh, find out who on the ship could speak Greek.

INTERVIEWER: ...speak Greek.

MASON: Of course then they got a chuckle out of it. I guess I came up with most of the right answers.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Did you pass the first time?

MASON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That's good; a lot of people have done that a few times.

MASON: And some don't. Yeah it was quite a day.

INTERVIEWER: Right, and were you appointed as Commanding Officer right away?

MASON: Well I was disappointed most people who pass the Command exams get a ship very soon.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: But I got posted to the Defence Research Establishment in Dartmouth. I was disappointed but they always have a navy officer there.

INTERVIEWER: Liaison.

MASON: The Navy, I don't know if I was a Commander yet or not. We did write ups and papers on the use of underwater detection systems. We had a little trial vessel which would go to sea and drop charges over the side and measure how fast sound travelled under water.

INTERVIEWER: Alright.

MASON: It was alright.

INTERVIEWER: Was this using explosive charges with the Julie system I think they called it?

MASON: I don't know what it was called. Finally the appointment came through posting me to command of HMCS CAPE BRETON. At that time it was a shore bound ship!

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: Alongside. It had gone to sea previously in the past even as far as the Pacific islands.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: But it wasn't going to sea anymore and I thought it was a lousy job, not at all satisfying so I went to see the Admiral. And I said 'this is not good enough. I've been through all the hoops and hurdles and so on and I don't want this job'. He said 'aha, I see, aha, alright Mason we'll give you a call'. So I went home and went on leave, yeah, built ship models I guess for about a week and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. Finally the 'phone rang and it was the Chief of Staff, Pratt. He said 'Mason, come on down here please'. I don't know what the hell that meant. I got down there and he said 'the Admiral wants to see you'. I went in, he said 'alright, Mason, against my better judgement we decided to give you a ship. Now you have a great responsibility in your hand - 250 men's lives. Do you understand that?' 'Well, yes sir'. 'And the decisions you make could mean life and death or loss of the ship. Well, perhaps'. He said 'none-the-less we're going to appoint you in command of ALGONQUIN'. I said 'wow sir, thank you'. 'Now keep her off the beach'.

INTERVIEWER: Showed a lot of confidence.

MASON: That was my appointment.

INTERVIEWER: Right. So roughly what time frame was that, what are we talking about?

MASON: Well, we're looking at the '69 - '70, early seventies.

INTERVIEWER: Early seventies.

MASON: Yeah, I can't remember exactly.

INTERVIEWER: You were in command from?

MASON: Just about a year.

INTERVIEWER: Just about a year.

MASON: I was lucky to get that much I guess but let me tell you this. The ship did well.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: I had a wonderful group of officers. Leo McDonald was my operations officer and in exercises we scored good points. We didn't make any mistakes that I know of and we did alright. In wash-ups afterwards they'd mention ALGONQUIN did this and that and you know took a scent of the quarry and wore it down, yeah. But there were a few nights when I had no sleep, but that's alright.

INTERVIEWER: That's part of being in command.

MASON: Yeah, yeah. I had, except for one, I had greatest of trust in my officers. This one guy was a drinker and he was the gunnery officer and the time came for gunnery alignment tests and as my gunnery officer he was supposed to be there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: They couldn't get him up, he was drunk in his bunk. So I called the Squadron Doctor and he went over and he agreed the guy was drunk. So I court martialed him and testified all that and this doctor was of course a Reserve and had to come back down from Toronto to testify. And I'm not quite sure what happened, but he was dismissed [from] his ship and as far as I know he disappeared [for all I, perhaps] care. But what really irked me was this guy was on watch when we brought the ship around from being in refit in ...[Sorel Quebec] and we were going through the Gulf of St. Lawrence and it was October, no, it was November I guess, and so I got my head down and finally someone came and shook me and said Captain, Officer-of-the-Watch would like you on the bridge. So okay, up I went and we were surrounded by ice.

INTERVIEWER: Really.

MASON: I said, 'why didn't you call me earlier?' 'Well I don't know. I don't know, thought it was alright, saw another merchant ship going through it'. 'Yeah, well that ship's got thick skin, not the thin skin like this little thing.... '

End of side one

Start of side two

MASON: ...Cranked her around and traced our path out of the ice till we got to the end of it, then turned right and navigated with a searchlight all the way around it, around Cape Breton Island. And so it was after that that this guy was drunk in his bunk.

INTERVIEWER: Right,

MASON: But geez.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that would be quite..

MASON: Scary thing to get up at night and the ship is in ice.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: He hadn't called me.

INTERVIEWER: He hadn't called, well that's...

MASON: Yeah, my Night Order Book specifically said that anything unusual that occurs, call me.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: I said 'my God'.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, well okay so after you left the *Algonquin* where did you go after you left?

MASON: After I left ALGONQUIN, Ottawa.

INTERVIEWER: Ottawa.

MASON: Headquarters - one of the many who disappeared there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: God, and what was I doing? I first went up there, I was the ship design and construction and working for a construction Captain who'd never been to sea and we were approving and

suggesting modifications to ships. It wasn't a great job. I had experts working on it for me. I really had to just look at them and approve or whatever and, oh, about that time I was on the Headquarters ski team. I was a fairly good skier. I was an instructor and we went to Valcartier for the Canadian Forces ski championships. Well to cut a long story short, in the final, downhill final I tripped and fell and broke a leg. So that was the end of my skiing for a while anyway, and I was at the hospital in Quebec City and they took me by ambulance back to Ottawa. And well, I was on crutches of course and was able to go in to my job. And then to my delight and surprise, what happened? I was over having lunch in the Army Mess in Ottawa. You know Ottawa, I expect so. I'd go there or the Navy Mess and in came my boss Captain Jerry Daniel and the Division Boss Air Commodore Aldwynkle all smiles and waving a piece of paper. Congratulations you've been promoted to Captain.

INTERVIEWER: Oh very nice yes.

MASON: And the job was, I was to go into Intelligence,

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: Never been in Intelligence before, but sure, anything to do with a Captain.

INTERVIEWER: ...versatile.

MASON: Yeah and I was working for a funny guy, Brigadier [Kenyon], what the hell's his name. I had four or five bosses in fairly short time and each week I'd give a briefing to the big shots, you know CDS and so on, on the latest intelligence on the enemy in the Boardroom and I did that for four years. But in the meantime I'd been reviewing the reports from the various attachés around the world. I thought that would be kind of nice, so I, the guy looking after things like that, I told him I said I wouldn't mind being an attaché. He said good I'm looking for somebody for London. I said well go right ahead. So that changed life and I was four years at CDLS in London with family, kids going to boarding schools; pretty good life nice allowances and enjoyable. Knew my way around the Ministry of Defence and talked to people I knew and then time came it... at that time it was Dan Maingay that came around and said 'have you thought about my next move'? He said 'well where would you like to go next'? I said 'I don't want to go back to Ottawa. I've only got two years to serve'. He said, 'well I'm looking for somebody for Norway'. I said count me in. That's where I spent my last two years.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get involved, when you were in Norway was part of the intelligence gathering business to do with anything industrial or anything like that?

MASON: Norway was a friendly country.

INTERVIEWER: Yes of course.

MASON: Not like those who went to the Soviet Union or Poland or something. It wasn't a tough job for gathering information although I had a camera and I had a little short course on how to be a spook, but it was really quite delightful. Lovely country, wonderful people.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I'd imagine so.

MASON: Quite an affinity for Canada,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MASON: Yeah, a lot of them trained here during the war.

INTERVIEWER: Did they?

MASON: Yeah. I can speak a little Norwegian enough to get by... [*statement in Norwegian*]. I took courses in language but most of them spoke some, or some very good, English.

INTERVIEWER: Yes

MASON: Oh you get up in to the country or somewhere you know, you want to remember some Norwegian.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: I've forgotten most of it, but if I was to talk it I could probably get back in to it.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Did you have much to do, anything to do with Sweden at all?

MASON: Yes I was cross-accredited to Sweden and Denmark.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MASON: I visited those places about once a month; go to attaché tours, which they sponsor. [Delete word "God"]. The Danes of course, organized tours to Greenland.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes.

MASON: And we over-nighted in Iceland on the way, both ways, and they had an old DC-4 cluttering around there and we visited all the strange little places in Greenland including Thule, the American base, and very interesting, yeah and Iceland. We visited the U. S. base there, had a briefing on what they were doing. And Sweden, they organized an attaché cross country ski tour.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MASON: And I was a fairly good skier by then, even after my broken leg, but yeah this was a really a great tour. They organized a tour around the highlands, but stopping every night in [Capt Mason request we delete "a koja "] a ski hut, all prearranged and everything so it was really great. We were gone for about 5 days I think, and then back home. Rita wasn't with me of course because I was on this attaché tour.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MASON: But she loved Norway and she took courses at the university in Norwegian.

INTERVIEWER: Norwegian.

MASON: Yes she had to pass a primer exam which she managed to do.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Okay, John as you finished up in Norway you actually retired from the Navy. I guess I need you to reply.

MASON: Yes

INTERVIEWER: [was that in] 1978?

MASON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And then you went presumably into industry.

MASON: Well that was one of the options, but we decided we wanted to live on the West Coast and then we moved out here and because you could choose your last retirement place and we chose the

West Coast. Well in Vancouver looking around for possible jobs, but there seemed to be possibilities with the BC government over in Victoria. So went over and had a job interview and got a job working in the Ministry of Industry and Small Business. This is looking at proposals from industry to do various kind of businesses to enlarge businesses to create jobs and we would look into these things and some of them worked out quite well. And computers were coming in then and I took courses at the local community college, Camosun, and learned a bit about computers so I was there in the transition to computers for the Ministry. So I was in on the ground floor of writing programs and teaching people to use them and that was very useful. But at 65, I could retire and I decided that I would. Although I was on contract for a couple of years I decided that I'd had enough. I wanted a little more time for myself and did just that, retired in *delightful* Victoria.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. John I think we've just about come to the end here.

MASON: Well I hope I've been helpful.

INTERVIEWER: Well I'd like to thank you very much.

MASON: Well it's been helpful to me too, remembering.

INTERVIEWER: Remembering yes, but you've been able to elaborate a little bit on these ships and the technology, some you know their ups and their downs,

MASON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: and the interesting aspects of your career so thank you.

MASON: Right.

Interview ends

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

ATP-1	Allied tactical publication
CDLS	Canadian Defence Liaison Staff
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
DC	Direct Current
MG	Motor Generator
PNO	Principle Naval Overseer
PSI	Pounds per square inch
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy
RCNVR	Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve
RN	Royal Navy