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CNTHA NEWS

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Cape Bretoner at Large – A Memoir

Retired RCN Maritime Engineering officer **Captain Roger Chiasson** has just self-published his memoirs, now available through Friesen Press. Over a third of the book, which took him 10 years to write, chronicles his 38 years of naval service during the era of the Cold War. "*Cape Bretoner at Large – From New Waterford to Tokyo and Beyond*," describes his journey from his time as a military college cadet through to his appointment as Canadian Naval Attaché in Tokyo and his retirement in 1998. Many aspects of his story will be familiar to others who have done their own naval service, and to his credit Chiasson has not shied away from sharing one of his less glorious experiences as a ship's Engineering Officer in the interest of passing the lessons along.

The following excerpt details a busy and productive period in Chiasson's career that included publication of a much different kind of volume of knowledge.

Naval Engineering Headquarters

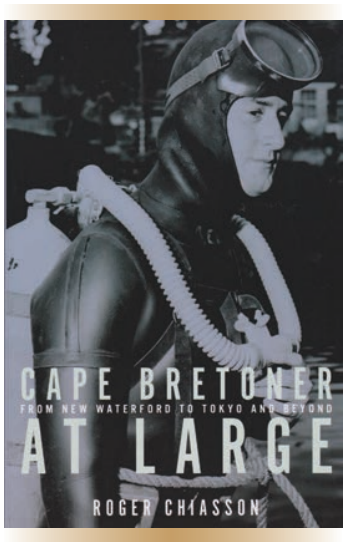
An excerpt from the author's memoir

By Roger Chiasson

And so, after having successfully avoided headquarters for 21 years, I found myself in Ottawa as Section Head for DMEM-5 (Directorate of Maritime Engineering and Maintenance, Section 5). It was far from a sinecure. I worked 60-hr weeks for four years in what was one of the most demanding jobs in the entire headquarters. But, again, I was the right candidate for the job, since I had accumulated a lot of experience in shipyards and I was known for my penchant to improve the way the refit business was conducted.

My primary responsibility was to manage ship refits for the entire Navy, involving both commercial shipyards and Naval dockyards. To support me in this part of my duties I had two Lieutenant Commanders (LCdrs) working for me: one responsible for small vessel refits, with a small staff, and another responsible for major warships, with a larger staff, most of whom were responsible for managing individual refits. In addition, another LCdr was responsible for submarine refits as well as acting as the "class desk" for all issues pertaining to technical support for submarines.

In effect I was the ship-level "class officer" for all Naval ships. The Naval technical headquarters also had a number of Life



Cycle Materiel Managers (LCMMs) who were responsible for procurement and in-service support of individual equipment and systems, such as main propulsion,

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engines, boilers, etc. If any of the technical support issues fell outside the boundaries of these LCMMs, they usually landed on my desk.

My duties also included chairmanship of the Ship Modification Review Board. The board met quarterly to review proposals for, as the name of the board implies, modifications or improvements to Naval ships. These proposals were an important part of maintaining a fleet of ships, which our Navy would be expected to operate for several decades. These proposals would include all manner of changes to ship configurations to introduce new equipment, although legally the changes could not introduce new capability. As a result, many of the changes were to incorporate replacement equipment that had become unsupportable because of the lack of spare parts or commercial technical support. The Modification Review Board had to consider such factors as affordability and the impact on ship stability in their decisions. Since two of the board members were Naval Captains that out-ranked me I was in a delicate position since the final decisions, after due consultation among board members, were mine.

As could be construed from my previous comments about the conduct of ship refits, I worked in a rather tumultuous world, where a lot of the issues emerged with little warning and in which many of the decisions were seat-of-the-pants. There was never any predictability or stability, and a lot of effort seemed to be going into "fire-fighting" rather than planning and managing. One of the priorities I established early on was to develop a refit management manual, since very few of the activities and processes were written down. While the Standing Orders that had been developed at the overseeing detachment in Montreal could be considered a "tactical" guide to running refits in a shipyard, what I had in mind was a more "strategic" document to guide the process at the national level.

The first step was to hire a former Naval engineering officer to create a flow chart, as best he could, documenting the processes that we were using. The next step was to examine the chart to see if

Photo: mbpowell, Ottawa – https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3135422

The MGen George R. Pearkes National Defence Headquarters Building in Ottawa.

we could be doing things in a more effective and efficient manner. The conclusion was that the system was in fact quite sound. The fact remained that, since there were no formal guidelines, individuals often had to learn through their mistakes. Normally the next step would have been to contract someone to author a new volume of the Naval Maintenance Manual. However because of my career experience I concluded that I was probably the right person who had experience in all the steps and the nuances of the refit management system, so I decided to write the manual myself. The problem was finding the time, in what was already more than a full-time job. I decided to take three weeks off around Christmas one year, and Volume 7 of the Naval Maintenance Manual was born.

CNTHA online – insight through hindsight

By Don Wilson, CNTHA Webmaster

Since going live in 2004 the CNTHA website (www.cntha.ca) has gone through many updates to improve how we inform and serve our visitors online. We are always keen to hear from anyone who might have ideas for added features, or content that will help us in our primary mission of preserving Canada's naval technical heritage for future generations. CNTHA maintains contact with DND's History and Heritage organization, and also with the RCN's Maritime Equipment Program Management organization in order that we can optimize our efforts.

Much of what you see has been developed by retired members of the naval technical support community who were once actively involved in Canada's various naval ship and equipment development, shipbuilding and operations programs. For young professionals in active career mode today, there is much to be learned from their insights.

We encourage all of you, young and old alike, to take an active role in contributing to the discussion through the CNTHA's oral and written history program, and through your letters to the publication you are reading now. We look forward to hearing from you at info@cntha.ca.