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INTERVIEWEE: Vice Admiral (Ret'd) Hugh MacNeil

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Richard Gimblett

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Vice Admiral (Ret'd) Hugh MacNEIL

Interviewed 28 November, 2005

By Dr. Richard Gimblett

I: [Canadian War Museum Oral History] Program interview with Vice Admiral Hugh MacNeil recorded on 28 November, 2005, at Ottawa ON. Interviewed by Dr. Richard Gimblett, Tape 1, Side 1.

M: My name is Hugh MacNeil. MacNeil is spelled M-a-c-N-e-i-l.

I: Good afternoon, Admiral. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you please start by giving me a brief summary of your career in the Navy, and especially hitting the points in your career that you think became important to you in your future command of Standing Naval Force Atlantic.

M: Right, well, I started in 1952 as an RCN cadet at the newly-established College Militaire Royale de St Jean, spent three years there as part of the first graduating course. Then, almost two years as a Midshipman in various ships: cruiser ONTARIO, the destroyer HAIDA, and lots of seasickness in the wooden minesweeper, the TRINITY. And then, very luckily, went to the United Kingdom for the second-last course to do so, of the Junior Officer's General Education War Course, at the Naval College at Greenwich, followed by about a year and a half of professional courses in England in gunnery, torpedo, anti-submarine and so on. While the equipment was slightly different but the training certainly was good. I learned there that when a Chief Petty Officer screamed at you about one inch from your face, saying, "Them what's keen gets fell in [indistinct word]," you bloody well did!

So it was really good training and then back to Canada and the usual sort of profile – watchkeeping ticket in one of the destroyers and I served in a number of frigates, five, in the next few years and then became, leading up to STANAVFORLANT, the operations officer of a frigate. The first Canadian Forces Command and Staff College in Toronto followed by two years at the Royal Military College as the naval staff officer where I relieved the distinguished historian, Dr. Alec Douglas. Big shoes to follow, I might add. And then back to sea as executive officer of a destroyer, followed by executive officer of the support ship PROTECTEUR, followed by captain of the SAGUENAY. And then an interesting tour in NATO Headquarters that was supposed to be three years but became 20 months – not any of my doing. And I was lucky enough to be sent back to our new ship, the ALGONQUIN, in command. After that to run the Maritime Warfare Centre in Halifax, then known as the Canadian Forces Maritime Warfare School. And from that to

the National Defence College – interesting year. Served with a lot of people that I'd then serve with again in National Defence Headquarters years later. That was my first tour of two in headquarters. And then, fortunately, became the Commander of the First Canadian Destroyer Squadron of six destroyers and from there went on to promotion to Commodore in January of 1982 to command the – it was Canada's turn to command the Standing Naval Force Atlantic and that's when I took over.

So, things that were important to it. Obviously, some service in NATO – NATO Headquarters – was interesting to see the political lay of the land. Also, I was the operations officer of the SKEENA when we were in MATCHMAKER II, it was called, which was one of the two lead-ups to the establishment of the Standing Naval Force Atlantic. That would have been in 1966. So I had some idea of what it was like to be a ship's officer within the squadron itself. And then, of course, being the commander of the Canadian destroyer squadron, the First Squadron, it's really the same job. You've got a bunch of ships, a number of captains, you've got to make sure they do their stuff and you've got to be able to fight the squadron. So, those were very good lead-ins to it, as well.

And also, having been Commandant of the Maritime Warfare School, one of the jobs of the Commandant then was the Chairman of the NATO Anti-Submarine annual Panel which changed tactics, the anti-submarine tactics, which were then put into the tactical publications, like ATP 1 – Allied Tactical Publication 1 – and the anti-submarine tactical publications. And that was very interesting, chairing the panel of about 50 people of Captains and Commanders of all the sea-going NATO countries who would hammer and fight lustily over whatever their favourite tactic was which would eventually have to be agreed. So that was good experience as well. So I think all those things leading up to it, I certainly had a reasonable idea of what this Standing Naval Force Atlantic was all about and how it should be, I thought, played.

I: Good, thank you very much. Can you describe the events leading up to your selection as the Commander of STANAVFORLANT?

M: Well, you might say funnily, the dart board, you know. The darts are thrown at the dart board and some stay in and some fall to the ground. I think it was pretty clear that the requirements were to have run one of your national operational squadrons. That wasn't true in all cases because of certain circumstances but that was usually one of the main criteria. Obviously, you had to be promoted to one-star – in our navy to Commodore. And, I think, to be at the right place at the right time, which is so often the case. And I was just fortunate to be there at the right time.

I: And you were chosen because Canada was chosen and it was just Canada's regular turn?

M: Yes, that's true. When it all began, the nations that were deemed to have the capability of commanding, not just the, sort of, training and experience of who would be the commander but also had the requirements of a command ship capable of dealing with

all this [indistinct word]. You had a large number of staff, which doesn't mean they are falling all over themselves, but you are running very complex operations frequently and therefore you've got to have the command and control capability. And in our time when Canada's turn came up – which was one every four years – it began first with the United Kingdom and the Americans and the Canadians and the Dutch. And that was the sequence for a number of years. And then after I had commanded the first German, two years later, took the command. And they are now in the stream. I think it is now true that the Spanish may well be in there as well. Changing complexities and so on, but the basic idea is still there. So that's one of the reasons as well.

I: OK. Now, when your name was put forward by Canada, did it have to be approved by NATO as well?

M: Yes. It had to be approved by the Supreme Allied Commander in Norfolk who assumes operational command of the Standing Naval Force Atlantic, then the Standing Naval Force Atlantic.

I: Now, is that a pro forma process or is there a possibility that you could have been refused?

M: It could have been. Sure. Yeah, if they had known something that was fairly unsavory or something like that. Or if they'd looked at the background and said, "Look, this person really hasn't run anything. He's never really commanded a ship, or something." It wouldn't make much sense, obviously. Because you're going to be dealing with a lot of captains from some fairly hard-nosed navies, very professional navies, who expect the Commodore to know what he's doing. And if he doesn't, it will soon become apparent.

I: And you evidently had a proven track record in all that.

What operational briefings did you receive prior to assuming command? And I'm thinking both nationally and NATO.

M: Well, starting nationally, I had a very good intelligence session in Ottawa. Had about a week in Ottawa. The Command was extremely helpful in Halifax, the Commander of Maritime Command and his staff, again, with operational matters and so on. I did a little bit of training in the Maritime Warfare Centre, about a day. And then I went down to Norfolk and met the Supreme Allied Commander, then Admiral Trane [?]. [indistinct phrase]. It was very interesting. Very, I wouldn't say suave, but very switched on and highly respected admiral with bags of experience. And he was very helpful in many ways.

And one of the things I remember asking him several times was, "Well, look, sir. Some of the ships that are going to be in this force will have nuclear weapons. And how do I respond when I get into somewhere and the first question I'm asked is: 'Are you carrying nuclear weapons and why are you and so on?' And he said, "The answer is we neither confirm nor deny." And I said, "Yes, sir, but that's not going to satisfy the Press." He

said, “The answer is we neither confirm nor deny.” I said, “wait a minute.” He said, “The answer is ….” He told me three times so I finally got the message. And it proved to be not a problem anyway.

One of the things that I do remember, though, that in every admiral serving in SACLANT HQ in Norfolk – this is how the Americans work it. I went down to call on the Supreme Allied Commander and, at the same time, they had me lined up to visit every admiral. Eventually, I wound up as one of those admirals as the Chief of Staff Operations. Especially the American admirals, looking at their background – because you’re given a very little, sort of, small bio of them – something, there was some common thread. The common thread was either that they had all served at some stage either with the Secretary of the Navy or the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, one had been the coach of the Annapolis Naval Academy’s football team, one had been, you know, on the staff of – that’s how they got noticed. There’s so many Captains in the American Navy, and they’re all marked as ten out of ten all the time on their what they call Fitness Reports, that somehow someone has to notice. So it was a very interesting thing that has always, sort of, stuck with me. That how they [indistinct word] these.

I: Yeah, yeah.

M: So, but anyway, the briefings were certainly worthwhile as SACLANT was the ultimate decider of what was going to happen. Canada, of course, retained full command of their ships, the ownership of their ships, but they were chopped to the operational command of Supreme Allied Commander. And in my time, we spent 99% of the time either in the North Cape down to Gibraltar, all of the eastern side of the Atlantic, eastern side of the North Sea and so on. I was then chopped operationally again to the Commander Eastern Atlantic or the Commander in Chief of the Channel, one person with the same hat.

I: I’d like to explore those command relationships in a bit more detail later on. For now, still looking at the briefing process leading up to your command, how long did this process take? When did you start preparing for your command?

M: Well, I got a call from the Chief of Defence Staff, General Ramsey Withers, some time shortly after New Year’s, out of the blue, and he said,

I: New Year’s ?

M: New Year’s 1982, some time in January, I’ve forgotten when, about mid-Jan when the sweepstakes take place. And he phoned me up one night and said, “You on [being] promoted Commodore, I’d like you to take over the Standing Naval Force Atlantic.” And I said, “Well, that’s just wonderful,” and so on. So it sort of began then but I was still in command of the First Destroyer Squadron. And I stayed there until the end of February. There wasn’t any briefings ‘til then. We were at sea doing various things, either working up ships or taking part in exercises or so on. So I was relieved about the end of February. I’ve forgotten exactly when. And so I, basically, had March to get

organized, to put the staff together and so on. In retrospect, I really didn't select any of the staff. They were selected for me by the career managers, and so on. Without being pompous about it, I've always felt that's the right way to go. You work with the people you get. Most of them were extremely good, as a matter of fact.

And, really, while on the subject of staffs, there was often a sort of national sniping at STANAVFORLANT, quite unjustified in most cases. In my experience, the staff officers and the staff were as good as any national staff, and probably better in many cases. Often, because they especially put people in that were going to do well. And I know many of them went on to higher things. One became the head of the Dutch navy, for instance, and so on. That was a complaint that I thought was quite unjustified.

I: I was going to ask you there, which staff are you talking about because there are two staffs.

M: I'm talking about the international staff.

I: The international staff.

M: Although I had – Canada provided the bulk of the staff as well. For instance, physical training people and that sort of thing and some of your personal staff like your steward which you couldn't get on without, whether you like it or not, and people like that, and communications. Chief Yeoman of Signals and the Chief Radioman were Canadian.

I: While we're talking about staff, can you describe the organization of Standing Naval Force Atlantic, at the time. Well, if you could start with the staff first, please.

M: Well, the staff – the Commodore, at that stage, came from one of four nations, which I've mentioned. The staff would be chosen to supplement that so they all didn't come from one nation. And that rotation was known a number of years ahead. So each national poster, appointer, could actually think about it and put the right person with the right qualifications [indistinct].

I: Would they come just from those four nations or from the other maritime naval …

M: They came from other maritime nations as well. For instance, the Norwegians which have never commanded, and probably won't, because of the things I've said – which is not to say they're not switched on. They just don't have the command capability physically. They would have a communicator now and then – a communications officer. The Danes certainly had – in fact, one of the most brilliant officers I had was a Danish Lieutenant Commander who is now the captain of their latest big all-singing, all-dancing ship – a fighting ship, a supply ship, an army-carrying ship, and that sort, which was just in Halifax about two weeks ago. He's now a Captain. They can serve till they're about a hundred and fifty in the Danish Navy, I think. He will go back and be promoted Commodore and be the head of their operational fleet, their at-sea senior officer. So,

that's all to say that the staff officers were well-chosen by their countries. I had two – and the organization under the Commodore is that there's a Chief Staff Officer who is a Commander, and he is someone who has had a command of a destroyer or a frigate or something like that. So he knows what the score is, has been through lots of tactical training courses such as we run in Halifax, and so on. Various countries run their own. And then under him – and he ran the whole staff. He was in charge of the whole lot, for the Commodore.

And then you would have a Communications Officer who is a specialist in communications. You'd have a squadron technical officer who would be an engineer of some description, either a combat systems engineer or a marine engineer. A squadron supply officer who was usually the supply officer of the flagship. That made it a lot easier. And provided by the nation, provided by the Commodore, someone to run programs other than operational programs. And then a whole host of Chiefs and Petty Officers, specialists in their own right – Chief Yeoman of Signals, Chief Radioman, Chief Electronic Warfare. I'd better look at my little things here.

I: We're getting a general sense of these…

M: All the specialists you need. So the staff was fairly large which, again, was why you needed a flagship capable of handling it. Which wasn't as bad as being in the VICTORY, or something like that, with all the [indistinct word] [chuckles]. But it would still put a bit of a strain on the flagship. And we had 280s with around 330 people anyway, and all the cabins were absolutely filled with the staff. My experience was that they got on extremely well. They were highly professional. I had a really switched-on, really Prussian, German operations officer, the second one I had – steel-blue eyes and so on. Extremely – not just adroit but very, very professionally trained and so on, and very hard working. Absolutely characteristic of that part of their race. So I was very pleased and very happy to see a number of them go on and achieve very senior rank in their respective forces.

I: You mentioned the German was the second operations officer you had so obviously people were rotating in and out. Did you start off with a group and then they would all change at once or was…

M: No, that's why there's – I wouldn't say it's a five-year plan – but the staff is organized by the Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic to whom SACLANT, the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, gives that role no matter where they're operating. So that then there is some cohesive planning and there's a STANAVFORLANT permanent planning officer on the staff, often a Canadian as a matter of fact, handles that. Who does both the planning for which nation is going to supply what staff officer and so on. So there is a whole matrix produced a number of years ahead of time so nations know. But also works a great deal with SACLANT on planning the annual program which involves, basically, every NATO exercise that's going on unless they have to do something else like dealing with the Russians or, nowadays, being in the Adriatic or something like that.

I: Now, that's an officer based at the shore headquarters.

M: Yes, exactly. And to answer your question specifically, no, they wouldn't all change at once or else you'd have chaos. They were there on a year's appointment and one would be changing about every quarter, something like that.

I: OK. So there was a progression and a retention of knowledge and a corporate memory would be allowed to build up.

M: A little bit of an overlap, a week or so, so that he could see what the score was. And what we would do – I imagine each Commodore ran it the way they wanted to but what I would do is, under the chief staff officer, assign each staff officer a different exercise to do the basic planning of. Because, although there is now and then the perception that this is just one movement from one port to another for cocktail parties, I didn't find it that way at all. In my year, we were at sea for 210 days of the 53 weeks. And when you are in port, it's not a holiday at all. There's a lot of work to do because you are usually involved in the wash-up of whatever you've just been through and the detailed planning of the next exercise. Each staff officer, in turn, was given an exercise to plan. And then he would come up with a general brief and the staff would have a go at it and then we'd all sit down to go over the thing and decide that, no, we don't really like this and change it this way.

A good example of that was Lieutenant Commander Helmut Kuntz.

I: Could you spell that name, please?

M: [spells name] This is the Prussian officer I was talking about. When he joined, he was given the – one of the next exercises coming up was – our role [?] was to be the ASW commander for the Sriking Fleet Atlantic for Exercise NORTHERN WEDDING 1982 which was a major deal. We then had nine ships and a few others assigned to us. Anyways, he produced a really neat plan and when we were going over it in my cabin with the staff officers, they basically said, "Look, this is a wonderful plan but our job really is to protect the striking fleet and kill submarines. While this is all beautifully staffed out, kind of like the Schlieffen Plan, it's not going to do it." He was rather crestfallen but went away, in very well-trained staff manner, and came back with a much better plan which was terrific. We did extremely well, largely based on what he had put together. But it shows the caliber of these guys, that he didn't go away and say, "Well, the Commodore doesn't know what he is talking about. [indistinct phrase here] I was quite impressed by a lot of those guys.

I: And there were enough different exercises during the year with different focuses that it allowed you the flexibility to develop different plans?

M: Oh, absolutely. Because you never just went to sea for the sake of going to sea. Time was valuable and all the other things. But you're always doing something that's [indistinct word]. For instance, even if you're just moving from one exercise to another,

you're exercising within the force. And there were always such simple things as quizzes, technical quizzes, operational quizzes, electronic warfare quizzes, and that sort of thing. And a lot of fleet maneuvering, especially for ship handling for junior officers and so on. And a lot of ASW training, flying training, and a continuous [muffled words]. It wasn't just a parade for amusement's sake. So all those things had to be planned as well.

And then, of course, the post-exercise when you were in harbour, and there was a lot of work to do in preparation for – I wouldn't say the lies that are told – the post-exercise debrief, often with maybe a couple of hundred people in attendance, those that could get in, either the air component or whatever.

Without jumping ahead, that's one of the things I really enjoyed doing many years later, was being a planner for all the major NATO exercises, and then the game director for the War College [muffled word] and the chair of the wash-ups for the major exercises. So, all this was good experience leading up to that.

I: Now, those exercises were planned by the international staff. Can you tell me a little about your Canadian national staff – and I assume they arrived with you?

M: Yes, they did. I had, of course, a Flag Lieutenant who did Flag Lieutenant things and so on. Obviously it's a chore. Chief Yeoman, really, he was the senior Canadian on the staff as well and was really the senior Chief Petty Officer for the staff. And we had a physical training person who was a Canadian Army corporal, as a matter of fact. I had a Writer who was an army warrant officer. A writer meaning secretary, basically, because there was a huge amount of correspondence in addition to all these operational things. That was about the nub of the Canadian staff.

I: You didn't have your own Canadian staff other than the Flag Lieutenant, did you?

M: Yes, I did. His name was Hales[?], same one that Gordie Edwards had, as a matter of fact. He was there in charge of [muffled words]. Give me a minute, I'll look it up.

Yes, a LCmdr who did general duties of organizing all sorts of things that weren't specifically operational.

I: OK. Good. Now, can we look more at the composition of STANAVFORLANT at the time? What nations provided ships during your command?

M: When everybody was there, there were nine nations. That only happened when we were up in Norwegian waters. Because the Norwegian navy at the time– I'm not sure now – had a national rule that said Norwegian ships could not leave national waters. They really didn't have the capabilities anyway. They trickled out a little bit but basically that was it. We were up in national waters anyway. We spent almost a month, two months, up there in Norwegian waters.

So the basic navies, there were always five anyway: Canadian, American, German, British and Dutch. And in my time we frequently had a Belgian ship, and now and then one from Norway. We had three Norwegian ships but in turn, and two Danish ships. So, that brings it nine. But the hard core was five. On the western side of the Atlantic, it was basically five nations.

I: Can I ask you, please, to do a comparative rating of the ships? I realize it's not very fair but some time has passed by and we'd like to get a realistic assessment of the quality at the time. Can you rate the ships of the Force in relation to each other and to those of Canada?

M: Sure. Well, taking the Canadian ships first. There were three flagships. There were, in this order, HURON, ALGONQUIN AND ATHABASKAN. Like in any nation, any squadron – in the First Destroyer Squadron I had there were six ships. One was usually in refit, or coming in to refit or going in to refit. And you had two probably very, very good ships, two that were good and one that wasn't very good. And it depended almost entirely on the captain setting the tone. Obviously, not exclusively [indistinct words] a terrific first lieutenant, he needed a little help to run the ship for the captain. [indistinct word] that seems to hold up pretty true. Sets the tone and the pattern and the officers take their cue from them.

So, what was true of the Canadian flagships – they all did well, but some were obviously better than others – it was true for the national ships. Of the American ships – I had three – the first one, I thought, was not particularly good. And that was the captain. Now, he had been with the Dutch commodore for about half his time. But he was – he just didn't seem to have the idea of what this was all about. And I certainly had several sessions with him to try and convince him what it was all about. Second one was absolutely excellent and the third one was the best of all. And it wasn't, I don't think, because I was, sort of, getting watered down in my own attitude. That's the way it was.

The British ships – had three – the first one, again, had been with the Dutch commodore – HMS DANEY [?]. He was very good and would have stayed another three months with me but the Falklands War came along. As a matter of fact, the night when SHEFFIELD was sunk we had been on an exercise and we were going into Wilhemshaven the next morning. And they asked to stay at sea so they could have a memorial service. It was a huge shock for the Royal Navy, no question about it. And that was one of the interesting things about my whole time there. We were almost the only game in town because the British navy was in the South Atlantic, almost lock, stock and barrel. So that ship left after Wilhemhaven. She was pulled out of the Force and sent back and two weeks later was off to the Falklands, had something called SEA SKUA put on board, and a few other changes.

I: SEA SKUA ?

M: Yes…

I: Could you spell that, please?

M: [Spells it]

I: That's two words.

M: Two words, yes. It was a missile system put on to their helicopter, basically. And they had a number of other things done, preparing for the war. Like stripping the ship clean of combustible materials, getting rid of everybody's uniform and issuing cotton gear and on and on and on. And I can remember – I'm getting off the track here – but I can remember when they did get into Wilhelmshaven the next afternoon, the next morning after that I went and spoke to their ship's company. One of those times when you could have heard a pin drip, on the quarterdeck, all there about 190 or something like that. And I can remember saying one of the things to them that, although this is a very serious time and you are all extremely concerned about the whole thing, even though I am a Canadian telling you this, this is often the way Britain has started her wars. In the end, good training and good leadership which you will get from your admirals and officers, in the end you'll prevail. So, away you go, to, you know, to get over there, get yourself changed and off you go and so on. I think it was quite good. I know I felt quite emotional about it as well after I'd done it. Anyway, that proved to be the case, as a matter of fact, which is often the way, starting slow.

They were replaced by a ship called the ARETHUSA. Want me to spell that?

I: Yes, please.

M: I'll probably have to look it up.

I: You know what? I can. A-R-E-T-H-U-S-A. I know because I've just done some other research on a sister ship or ship of the same name

M: OK. Long-time name, of course. Their names are like that for centuries or so on. She was not very good, frankly. And again the tone was set by the captain. Understandably, they were grossly disappointed not to be going to the Falklands cause that was the game. If you were in the Royal Navy, that's where you wanted to be. But their captain was very difficult about it. He hadn't got over that [?] and he couldn't quite understand. So, I found him petulant and a kind of a bully to his ship's company, as a matter of fact. And it tended to show itself. Just as a simple illustration, one of my pet things was, in the middle of the night or something when we weren't doing anything particular, I'd say, "OK," or in the daytime, "Darken ship. Close down all the hatches, everything, all the way down. Put everybody in their mess decks or wherever there's [indistinct word]. Get in the ship, turn out all the lights. And if you have any smoke rings, use some smoke." Allow the coxs'n to have a flashlight and that was about it. And then pipe "Emergency stations" and get everybody to come up through the escape hatches to get out.

Years ago I was in HAIDA as a Midshipman. And I came up for the morning watch to relieve the second officer of the watch who was a sub-lieutenant [indistinct name]. The captain was up there and had been up there for about an hour. About an hour prior to that the officer of the watch had been relieved by the commodore of the aircraft carrier then, because they had come within about ten seconds of cutting HAIDA right in half. They were doing – I'm kind of rambling – but these exercises for changing the screen, without lights, intermittent radar policy. And of course the radar was lousy in those days anyway. Looking down through the bridge through to the operations room, and the officer of the watch had 'lost the bubble' and had a closing speed of close to 40 knots. And it was just – absolutely just unbelievable seconds and we would have lost dear old HAIDA. And I was in a little cabin at the very aft end of the ship. So I've never forgotten that. And there is no way that the ship's company would have ever gotten out. I always thought that was good training.

Anyway, to get back to the point, the captain of the ARETHUSA would get on the blower and say, "Speak to the commodore. I think this is foolhardy and [indistinct words]." "You can think what you like but get on with it. And if you need to issue everybody a flashlight, go ahead and do it and that sort of thing. Get on with it." But that sort of thing would keep coming up. He wasn't running it. I happened to be running it – and so.

I: Now, what about the other navies contributing ships? You hit the main ones …

M: The Dutch, on the whole, were extremely good. I think, ship for ship, not a big navy but very good ships. Their new frigates had come on stream at that stage of the game and the Dutch officers were very well trained, no question about it, and they ran very good ships. I had ZUIDER KRAUS, their operational support ship, for quite a while and two of their frigates.

I: Could we spell ZUIDER KRAUS ? Again, I know that one.

M: ZUIDER KRAUS, taking me back a long number of years.

I: ZUIDER KRAUS [spells name] I know that one because she was in the Persian Gulf with us back in 1990-91. Beautiful ship.

M: When I had her, she had just introduced women, before we had. So that was an interesting experience [indistinct words]. Another one, called VAN KINSBERGEN [spells] and [consults papers] BANCKERT, again one of their new frigates.

I: And that was Dutch also ?

M: Yeah. There's the guy, by the way, who became the Chief of the Naval Staff, took over from this Danish [?] guy. We were all quite surprised by that, as a matter of fact, [indistinct] Dutch navy.

So, yeah, contrasting ships, the Dutch were extremely good. The Brits were very good, too, on the whole, except for that one. Canadians I've mentioned, Americans I've mentioned. Germans, again, it depended very much on the captain, no question about it. Some were more politically oriented as captains, more social guys, but two of them were extremely good. And with all of them I'm very good friends nowadays. In fact, one of the captains was the captain of the ROMMEL whose father had been a U-boat captain during the war, captained U-205 in the Mediterranean and he had been badly wounded. And in this ROMMEL's ship, in the captain's cabin – which was a CHARLES F. ADAMS ship that had been rebuilt by the Americans and they named them after the army, navy and air force leaders least associated with the Nazis – and this one was the ROMMEL. And the naval one was the LUTCHENS [?] and so on. Anyway, in his cabin he had this sort of framed letter and in German it said something like, "Dear Wolfgang," I think his name was, to this man's father, the captain's father. "We had great times in the Mediterranean. Sorry you have to go back to the Fatherland," and so on. And at the bottom, big flourish, "Rommel". It was really quite something to see this letter. Anyway, this guy was the captain…

I: The captain of the ship actually had a letter from Rommel, signed by Rommel …

M: To his father

I: …to his father. Interesting.

M: Who got out – no German U-Boat, as you may know, escaped the Mediterranean. They were all sunk.

I: That's right.

M: After he left, then it was sunk [indistinct words].

I: And reinforces the fact that the Second World War was only a generation removed from our own service. And here are the Germans as an ally, and quite a good and trusted one.

M: Indeed. Very enthusiastic. And I would obviously not get on to this but in speaking with the Germans – I always went to speak to their ship's companies and so on – and it was always very interesting. Turned out extremely smartly, very clean uniforms. And as you – very different the way they do things – as you go up the brow and so on, the people standing there, they turn and salute you as you go along. And speaking to the ship's company, obviously, in my case through a translator…

I: The captain often.

M: …say "Good morning." All, you know, 200 guys say, "Good morning, Commodore." [laughs] But they always, they fell right in with the program. They were good.

I: Now, those were the big five navies. Did you have any others that joined you?

M: Yes. We had three Norwegian ships, three small frigates, about 15 or 1700 tons, in Norwegian waters. And we spent at least a month and a half up there, often acting as a Russian invasion force in the fjord just next door to Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula. So that's as far over as we could go. And the papers would always be full of it, of course. We were trying to provoke the Russians and all that sort of thing. But we acted as if we were a Russian invasion force going in there and would [indistinct words].

I: That's the whole STANAVFORLANT…

M: The whole STANAVFORLANT, yeah.

I: …acted in that role in a larger exercise?

M: No. It was a sort of Norwegian ops exercise. And against us would be the Norwegian Air Force and most of the Norwegian Navy, their fast patrol boats with their missiles and their very small submarines. Tricky waters up the fjords [muffled word]. And so we did that and they thought it was so good they made us do it again, as a matter of fact, they liked it so much. But it was an interesting navigational feat for the captains, running around in the dark and all that sort of thing.

I: That's an interesting exercise. Can you just tell me a little bit more about the exercise, give me an assessment of – you said it was good for you. Was it good training for the Norwegians?

M: Oh, I think so. Yes. Because they were obviously were extremely concerned that the Russians might take over. And these huge German guns were still there that had been built at the head of the fjords during the war – 16-inch guns – not sure what the millimeter would have been. They required 200 people to run them. And they were built by slave labour and there are hundreds of graves lying around, sort of on the outskirts of where these things were built, by the slave labourers who died of hunger or too much work and so on. Anyway, these things were pointing down the fjord and the fjords were 40-50 miles long, that sort of thing. So, as we would attack, it would take several days trying to get in against the air force and all these small submarines, being fired at by all these missile what-nots. So it was a very good command and control exercise. And missile weapons control exercise.

I: And, I would imagine, a very good exercise for you as well…

M: Oh, indeed.

I: … forcing the war potentially home to the enemy.

M: Yeah, and trying deceptions and all that sort of thing, all sorts of electronic warfare [indistinct word]. Yeah, it was harrowing for the ship's captain because you were never

out of the scene which was there. It was like a three-day war. Then we went off, sort of re-grouped and had a wash up at [muffled word].

I: Interesting. So, other than the Norwegians, any other smaller navies?

M: Yes, the Belgians twice. They had brought on a new stream of frigates, fortunately. They were very keen to be part of all this. I don't mean this in any silly fashion or anything: they were kind of growing up. They had always had a terrific time getting enough ships of reasonable caliber to take part. They are a very good minesweeping navy. They had always been part of STANAVFORCHAN, the Standing Naval Force Channel, which was minesweepers from a number of navies with Channel ports [indistinct words] nations.

So, two Belgian ships were extremely good, and one Portugese ship [indistinct word], an older frigate, did as well as she could. They weren't used to being out of southern waters, and they did the Norwegian thing. It was quite a strain on the captain, I know that. I was very good friends with [indistinct] and he ended up [indistinct] Portugese navy. But it was a very difficult thing for them. And I know their Commander in Chief [?] and the operational commander, who was also the Commander in Chief of the IBERLANT peninsula, was very concerned that they wouldn't be seaworthy enough and that sort of thing. So I had to keep a weather eye out for them. I know a number of times they would either get him to come over and see me or I'd go and see him in his cabin and find out just how he was doing. He came close to having a problem, as a matter of fact. Anyway, everybody rallied round him and kept it going.

I: Now, did that cover it? Were there any other nations involved?

M: No, the Spanish hadn't joined. We could talk about that. I think that's it. There were nine navies all together.

I: OK. Could you describe the level of what we call 'interoperability' now? How did the ships work together? Were there problems or was there a working-out process?

M: Yeah, that's one of the main strengths of the Standing Naval Force Atlantic and one of the main reasons it was founded, was to continue to work on interoperability. Just as an aside, in NATO Headquarters, as a staff officer in the Research and Development cell, it was called, within the management logistics cell, we were there working on interoperability and that sort of thing. A very good report was published, pointing out all these problems within NATO. It was unclassified, fortunately, and my older brother at the time happened to be one of the two presenters on *Panorama.* So, I asked my boss who was an American colonel, if I could send it to him. And I did. And we didn't think much of it. Six weeks later my brother phoned me up and said, "Yes," that Robin Day, who was the other presenter and the guy running Panorama said, "Yes, we're going to do it and it's going to happen in about three months' time. And it will be shown on such and such a day." So I went to see my boss and said [indistinct] panic. We went to see our next up who was a Belgian general who had come from running the Belgian corps before

going to NATO. He was going to 'square NATO off' and get things organized. And all hell hit the fan because the head of PR for NATO, who was a Norwegian – Assistant Secretary General for Public Relations – got really in high dudgeon because, "Who is this obscure Commander in this place who is organizing this film and so on?" Because people had to be told about it. Everybody had to be interviewed, all the big wheels. He was ready to have me thrown out, and so on. Fortunately, the Director of the International Military Staff, a guy called Schooplouw [?], General Schooplouw [?] – how you spell his name I can't remember. But he stood up for me, thank God.

Anyway, the film was terrific. They interviewed, of course, Admiral Hill-Norton who was then the Chairman of the [indistinct], the Secretary-General, on and on and on, all the guys. And it was done in such a way – a one hour program on the problems of NATO interoperability and standardization. And it showed a wonderful example, just to give you one idea, of the Standing Naval Force Channel who were then in a German port, or something [indistinct]. And there were five minesweepers, all berthed abreast of each other, and there was a German petty officer on the jetty with all these fittings. And my brother, who speaks a bit of German, was interviewing him. And he was saying things like, "And you take the [indistinct word] from the Dutch and you put the [indistinct] from the American [garbled word] and you…" So he had this great big [indistinct word] fresh water hose that connected up. And it was so telling of the problems.

I: And each and every one of them was different.

M: Each and every one of them was different. Yeah. And this was a very simple thing, of course, water hoses. So what? And if it was true, then the other things…

So it had, I believe, now without being silly about it, a fairly profound effect because it was shown in every major industrial outfit that had anything to do with armaments and so on. So in the end it turned out all right Years later, as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Ops down in SACLANT Headquarters, I went over many times to brief the Military Committee or the North Atlantic Council, sometimes both. And once it was on interoperability. And here I am standing there – Lord Carrington was then the Secretary General, you know, then the Foreign Secretary and so on – and he said something like, "This is a real problem in air defence over Europe, a serious problem." Aircraft couldn't land or refuel or re-arm, because of the IFF problems which is specifically what we were dealing with. They were going to shoot each other down, basically, blue-on-blue sort of thing. So I said, "This is nothing but tangled knitting wool." I had given it to SACLANT twice before he went over there to give it. Anyway, I think it went over fairly well. Every time after that Lord Carrington used to say to me, "Well, Admiral, when are you going to get into a blue uniform?" And I always would say, "Well, sir, I think you might ask the Canadian ambassador and the Canadian government about that." He was [indistinct]. Anyhow, that's neither here nor there.

I: Now, you've touched a couple of interoperability issues. How did that impact at sea?

M: Well, it wasn't a problem, frankly, because the Force made sure before you went there that you had the right stuff. You probably know that when data systems were being put in, after the fax thing and then onto data systems, one of the first ones was the British one called Link Ten. They thought it was pretty neat and the Americans were then developing Link Eleven. And it became pretty clear that, despite cross-patching, you couldn't have these two systems. So eventually the American one prevailed for obvious reasons, Link Eleven, and everybody had that.

The flagship had SATCOM so we could do some of the big stuff. But everybody had all the right frequencies and all the number of radios required. And there would be extra fitted if necessary. And, of course, all the publications. And the beauty was, without being too corny about it, that you could sail and you didn't have to – if you didn't want to, you didn't have to give any orders at all. People could start operating right away because of the annual meeting of the three committees: one the above warfare committee; the one I used to run, the anti-submarine warfare committee; and, the communications committee, which hammered out all these things. I mean, that's one of the glories of NATO standardization, in STANAVFORLANT.

I: I'd like to shift now to look a little more in depth at operations. What was the mission of STANAVFORLANT, as you understood it at that time?

M: The first mission is to be the on-call force, the ready duty force ready to go at 24 hours notice within the NATO area. We couldn't operate outside the NATO area without the specific permission of the North Atlantic Council. And that was given now and then, for an operation or something that obviously had started to spill over the borders. But the main idea was to stay with in the NATO context. And, for instance, when Dan Mainguy took over, after that little debacle we had, he had the last quarter, I think it was in the Caribbean where they did mostly missile shoots and things, they had to have special permission to operate 'out of area' to do that.

I: We're getting very close to the end here. I'm going to pause it for a minute.

End of side one, narrative Vice Admiral Hugh MacNeil.

END OF SIDE ONE

I: Canadian War Museum oral history program interview with Vice ADmiral Hugh MacNeil, Tape one, side two.

Admiral, I'd just asked you about the mission of Standing Naval Force Atlantic. At the time you described for me the primary mission. What secondary missions were there?

M: Well, the secondary mission was to work on and promote interoperability, as we talked about that a bit. And, thirdly, to demonstrate to all the NATO nations, the maritime ones, that there was this force in being and the importance of NATO. That

latter requirement became quite apparent just toward the end of my time in early 1983 when Spain was having a referendum as to whether they would join NATO or not. The then Prime Minister of Spain was pushing for it but there was an awful lot of opposition. And in my time, toward the end, we did the first ever STANAVFORLANT visit to Spain. A very interesting visit and I can certainly talk about that at some stage [muffled words].

Well, the day before getting there we stopped all the ships in the Bay of Biscay, a lovely long oily swell so no problem there. And all the captains came over and we had a little session about what I expected was going to happen in Spain from what I knew. And the one thing I certainly told them was that there was to be no nonsense. This was to be a visit without any problems, people ashore and all that sort of thing because the Spaniards are in the throes of deciding whether or not they were going to join NATO. What we didn't need was a lot of nonsense ashore and so on to detract from the main event.

So we get in there and I went ashore doing the normal calls and the first one was on the mayor of El [?]. El [?] was the northern port where Hornblower, of course, had been held prisoner as a Lieutenant and so they had all that [indistinct]. Went to this whacking great square with the Belgian captain whose name was Degreet [sp?] and the German captain. I always took two captains on these calls. The mayor in his office just off the square. The square was filled with, they estimated, at least 3,000 people, huge banners in Spanish saying, "NATO go home! No NATO," and on and on and on. Well, it was Communist agitation [muffled words]. The mayor was a Communist. Get in to his office. He was like a cat on a hot tin roof.

The usual drill is you sit down and have a cup of coffee or a glass of port or something or other and you exchange presents [muffled words]. He said, "Here's your [garbled word]. Thank you, very much." And that was it with him. But then the rest of the visit was extremely good. The army, of course, was all for this. I shouldn't say that, actually. The army was a little more hesitant because they were a more keep-civil-order army than a fighting army. The navy was very much all for it. We had quite a lot of truck with them. I, of course, met all the generals commanding the various areas and all that sort of thing.

On the whole the visit went well, except on the first night the Brit ship, a very good ship, they got into a snarl downtown because they were re-fighting the Falklands War with the Spaniards who didn't exactly like the fact that Argentina had been defeated very decisively. So, when I heard all this – big punch up and so on – so I stopped their leave for the next three days. That was it. And the next morning my chief staff officer, very good guy, British commander, Royal Navy commander, my ops [muffled word] said, "Sir, can't possibly stop [indistinct words]." "Too bad, I already have and I'm not going to have any of this stuff. [indistinct words] the squadron."

The next night, the Danish ship who had re-joined the squadron just that day, as a matter of fact, she was the one, which is another aside. Who after she had left the squadron, [names the ship] about six weeks after she had left the squadron – a wonderful ship but absolutely very Danish – had inadvertently fired a – not an Exocet but, Good Lord, the big surface to surface missile, the Harpoon missile – into Jutland. And I could talk a lot

about that but I hasten to add again she was not part of the squadron when that happened. Anyway, they got into some fisticuffs that night, the second night in [muffled word], so I stopped their leave as well. So we only had five ships' companies ashore. I don't say this with any sort of pride or any nonsense like that. We just weren't going to have any nonsense because I knew darn well that NATO Headquarters was looking at this very carefully to make sure that this all went well. The high-priced, high-level negotiations were critical and a run ashore on some little shoal [possibly not accurate, muffled] nonsense that the Spanish could point to.

I: Spain did join NATO so obviously it was…

M: Yes, they did…

I: What other more general tasks was STANAVFORLANT called upon to do mostly? You've described exercises. Was there anything else?

M: Well, only once, surveillance with the Russians. Whenever we're up anywhere north, of course, they would turn up. And there was once we were sent off specifically to look at one of their task groups that was doing something. That was in northern waters. And nothing spectacular happened there. Of course, it shut down most of our circuits and they had theirs shut down, with their listening going on all the time, obviously. Unless you were a fool, you didn't play any hi-jinks with the Russians. I'd been through a lot of that stuff when I was driving ALGONQUIN and rushing at other ships, you know what I mean? Use the gas turbine to pull the brakes on and stop. That agreement had been reached between the three big navies, the Russians, the Americans and the Brits, to stop harassing each other at sea. So there wasn't any of that. But we were sent out to look at them. We steamed along side, a safe distance and so on, and not a smile or anything like that, no wave. And you'd have to be a fool to make any hi-jinks or you'd probably end up on Moscow television the next night. So obviously you had to use your head about this sort of thing. So there was nothing spectacular there at all, just normal stuff.

By then, things weren't winding down. We were still very concerned about the Russians but the really hot part was over. We thought that nobody would be fool enough to get carried away and do something dumb.[indistinct phrase] But they were very professional. Anytime you saw them they were spic and span looking ships. Whether the gear worked, of course, we were finding out later, all the redundancies [indistinct words].

I: But you never did have any ….

M: Nothing serious, no.

I: … in the interaction with the Soviets at all?

M: There was always an ELINT vessel there, checking up, listening to us and so on. But we had to go about our business.

And then, other things we did were, well, like being the ASW commander for this huge exercise, Exercise NORTHERN WEDDING, which is the main – every year there is a huge NATO exercise, one in the western Atlantic, more or less, and one in the eastern Atlantic. This was in the eastern Atlantic, [indistinct] North Sea.

And then we did an awful lot of exercises known as Joint Maritime Warfare School, same organization as we have at the Maritime Warfare School in Halifax, or Centre, as it's now called. This is run by the Brits where they do their operational training, to bring ships together, squadrons together, with the air force and submariners and so on and basically fight a two-week war. We did three of those, mainly because the Brits were off in the south Atlantic. So it was very good experience for us. It's a really hard go, and there's no let-up to it. And on one occasion, I was the commander of one force, the blue force. The orange force was fought by the Flag Officer, First Flotilla. We each had about 20 ships. Huge gale was threatening and they were on the eastern side of the United Kingdom – we were on the eastern side and they were on the western side. When this huge gale went through they really got bashed around in the [Minches?]. We were around the Shetland Islands and so on, and I was really quite surprised at how much cover we got from anchoring the ships and hovering there and stemming the sea for about a day and a half. Very low-lying islands, as we all know, but there was enough so that the small ships weren't smashed around. After the first night, I went out with the flagship with the British frigate behind us and she just couldn't do it. ALGONQUIN could have done it with discomfort but the other one would have probably lost her radars. So we put back in and waited until next morning and went out. But the other ones on the other side had a lot of radars lost, boats had been swept away.

That was a very good exercise. And the chap who was running that eventually became the First Sea Lord [muffled words] good guy. [muffled words] another exercise down in Norfold, a political exercise, rules of engagement and a lot of guys from the State Department and the Foreign Office. I was running one side and he was running the other so we turned up again.

I: You had mentioned in passing, some operational work that you had done off the island of Bara [?].

M: Yes, operational is rather a stretch but we were working with a British nuclear submarine and funnily enough had on board, my ship the flagship, the captain who had been the captain of the CONQUEROR, which had sunk the BELGRANO. He wasn't the captain at the time. He had been relieved in the normal course of things but his wife – a bit of an aside here – but his wife had been thoroughly harassed after the cruiser had been sunk, thinking it was he that had been in command. And they had to put her in hiding and so on, find a safe house for her, things like that. Anyway, he was on board because we were working with this nuclear submarine and he was obviously an experienced submarine captain. But the submarine had a problem and had to go back to Faslane. So we had 24 hours before the next thing we had to be on target for. So, through Ben Becula , the RAF station on that island,…

I: Could you spell that for me?

M: Yes, [spells] Ben Becula, an island in the outer chain of the outer Hebrides. MacNeils think we came from the Isle of Barra – we're not quite sure because parish records were not all that well kept – that's the homeland of the MacNeils. So, through the parish priest, we said, "Could you get hold of the MacNeil if he's in residence and see if we could anchor outside Castle Bay?" Answer came back: yes. So we went in there and we had, I think, eight ships at the time anchored outside Castle Bay because it was too shallow. And I went ashore with, again, the American and the German captain, called on the MacNeil.

We had a lovely dinner and stayed on and then all the other captains and the staff came ashore, in the Great Hall. Drank them out of all their whiskey and so on. The then MacNeil was the 46th Chief, a professor of law at the University of Chicago as a matter of fact, very nice man. Next day he and his lady and the Lifeboat Cox'n, Robert Allan MacNeil, came out and had lunch. We had to leave at two o'clock and get going. There was quite a swell running. I'll never forget, Allan MacNeil was quiet elderly, 75 or something, and anyway bounced in and out in the boat and bouncing up and down. But anyway, they told us these lovely stories of the filming of Tight Little Island, Whiskey Galore, Compton [sp?] Mackenzie's book on the Isle of BArra. One which had been told many times was, one little old lady who spoke only Gaelic would be in the movie scene all the time. And she would be saying, " [imitates Gaelic]". And they finally had to figure out what she was saying. And what she was saying was, "These God-damned people don't know anything about making movies. I've got to go home and milk my cow." [laughs] But anyway, it was a very interesting course and quite an eye-opener for the German and American captain, too. Anyway…

I: What were the most important events that occurred during your time in command? You mentioned the Falklands War as occupying much of your time, and Spain joining NATO. Was there anything else?

M: I don't think there was anything horrendous, no. In a way, that perhaps is a good thing. We didn't lose any ships or anything like that. I think we did a pretty reasonable job, as a matter of fact. My attitude in running the squadron was like running a Canadian squadron, to do it with a certain amount of firmness, briefing the captains when they first joined. When a new ship would join, I'd get him over to my ship and I'd go through what I called my "27 Points." Not like Woodrow Wilson, but I'd had 27 Points, they'd just be written down. To go over with him things like navigation, what I expected of him and what I expected of his ship's company. That they were fully participants and not when we were in, say, their country's ports and they'd all leave. They'd take part in whatever we had going on, and really wanted to hold him to that. And when we got in to a foreign port, I didn't expect him to go off and deal with their ambassador. They were there to represent NATO and not their nation, that was the whole point of it. And then go and speak to the ship's companies for about half an hour and tell them all these things as well. [indistinct phrase] So, you know, that seemed to help.

And I didn't think that we should treat it as some sort of special deal that we had to have kid gloves and so on. They were professional people and expected the [indistinct] to be professional. But we had to do something. We couldn't have them broken down, or not working or not able to work together. Cause you never knew when you were going to get something from CinC EASTLANT saying, "Go there. Do that." So that was my, basically, form of command and control, I guess. You know, hands-on to the extent necessary, but make the captains realize that they had the responsibility as well to make this thing work.

I: Now, despite all that, did you have any particularly vexing operational problems?

M: I think the worst operational problems were with the helicopters. Despite all the work of all the ships' companies, the HELAIRDETS, the helicopter air departments in many of the ships with the helicopters were difficult, no question about it. The ones that could operate best were the Canadian ones, provided the dear old Sea Kings were working, which was frequently a problem…

I: Even then?

M: Oh, yeah, no question about it. And we would have to now and then send off the flagship – in fact, I spent three days of a big exercise in one of the Dutch ships, transferred the staff, too, the operational staff [muffled word] – because the ship had to go back and land those helicopters and get replacements sent [muffled]. So that was a problem. It wasn't any fault of the ships' companies. They did everything they could. And, of course, the Canadians could operate in the worst conditions, worse than the other navies, because of the Beartrap system, and all the other [indistinct word].

But I think that was the worst one. The gas turbines in the ships weren't a problem. The smaller ships, you had to watch you didn't break them up. And I know the German ship that was the first one that I brought back across the Atlantic – I joined in Norfolk and went to Halifax and did workups in Halifax and went straight across and never went back to the other side. She had a hard time keeping up because she was built for the Baltic, not for the North Atlantic. So you really had to watch. I know that their navy was very concerned that on the way over she had been beaten around because there was that Dutch-German naval standoff from the Second World War a little bit. [muffled]. It was none of my business but it was important to make sure that you looked after the ship. You can break a destroyer [indistinct] in my view.

So, I think we were lucky from that point of view. There weren't any major disasters that way. Nobody ran into each other or that sort of thing and we did a lot of – a lot of high speed, tight formations. Even with computers, you know, they're plotting where you have to turn. Loved doing those things like turning down [muffled words].

I: Changing focus a little bit, can you describe for me, please, your daily personal routine?

M: Yes, I think it was partly tempered by a briefing which I forgot to mention a little while ago. After Admiral Train [sp?] then I went to EASTLANT and called upon the man who was to be my boss for the whole year – the first part of it anyway – Admiral Fieldhouse who was then just at the beginning of running the Falklands War as the Commander in Chief Fleet from headquarters in Norfolk – rather, Northwood, England. So I went to call on him at nine o'clock one morning and he had been down in what he called the "hole" in the bottom of the headquarters in Northwood, about three floors down, a bomb shelter operations centre. And he came up in his Brit wooly-pully and he gave me two hours which was very good. He had the job as COMSTANAVFORLANT, the second British one many years before, and he served in the submarine squadron in Halifax. So he knew Canadians. And he'd known, without being too funny about it, previous Canadian commanders. And so he said, "Look," – he'd found it the hardest job he ever had, which for a submariner was [indistinct words]. He said, "Look, you're going to have a terrible wear and tear on your body, so you've got to look after yourself." I think he was warning the Canadians [muffled words], not to put too fine a point on it.

So I bore that in mind because you could have been up the whole time and when you get into harbour, you are pulled right, left and centre. You are doing all the important things you have to do, of course. You are representing NATO again [muffled words]. And you are also trying to lead your ships' companies [indistinct] they have a reasonable time and play the game and so on. So, you've got to look after yourself. Apart from that, your personal life is very much like a national squadron commander when you are at sea. And you also, without worrying about it, you are aware that you are also the NATO one so you have a slightly higher national goal [muffled].

I: Can you describe some of the routine things that you would do every day – if there was a routine?

M: Yeah, Sure. It might be that you were up all night as well because if you were the boss of the whole [indistinct word] fleet and you [indistinct words] and you had good competent staff officers, you write up your night orders. You go over with them what you expect to happen in the middle of the night. But you're obviously on call as well because it is your responsibility in the end to make sure that you're not putting your ships into jeopardy and that sort of thing. So, in the middle of an operation you're there till you're so bloody tired that you just have to – and you have a flag captain –you just turn it over to him with your operations officers and that sort of thing. And it very much depends on the relationship between the Commodore and his staff and the flag captain and the staff. That's got to be very hand in glove. If there's a Mexican standoff or something, it is not going to work. So you've got to be very much, not in each other's pocket, but there has to be confidence between the two of you. So the navigation [indistinct words]maintain the ultimate control but you turn over the details [indistinct word] to the flag captain.

If you're just going from A to B at night and you're moving around and so on, then you set out what you want done. You say, "I want the fleet to be there at that time [indistinct words]." No big deal about it. But otherwise, if you're, say, in Exercise NORTHERN

WEDDING, and you're the ASW commander responsible to the commander of the strike fleet, you're on the ball. You're spending a lot of time in the ops room and the bridge, of course. But you can't run the whole thing yourself. Neither can a Captain. He depends upon his officers to follow what his plan is and to make sure they follow the appropriate methods [?]. Same thing [indistinct word].

I: Can you give me an appreciation of the split in time between operational matters and administrative matters?

M: Yeah, I'd say at sea it's 90% operational, if you consider as well the planning for the next exercise which would be ongoing when you're right in the middle of one. Or not just exercise, some operation. In harbour, it would be more administration. You could call the observation there 'showing the flag', if you like, going giving speeches, a reception or something in the city, the mayor of this or that. Doing the wash-ups, or attending the wash-ups. There we would not be running them, of course, but would be a participant [muffled] a lot of preparation for that. After NORTHERN WEDDING, you'd have to explain yourself and know what your plan was, how you ran it, what was good, what didn't work in that scenario. [Indistinct] fix it. That's a big part of the administration.

And then there were always – people were being hurt or something like that and had to go home. Or some guy's wife [indistinct phrase], that sort of thing. And in harbour, like preceding commodores, we had programs, of course, every port, if there was any time at all, for the ships' companies. We ran mini-Olympics and that sort of thing, tugs of war. The [indistinct] gave me hell one time because he thought it was promoting drunkenness with chug-a-lug contests. You line up, you know, seven ships on the jetty, twenty guys with a full beer and you drink it down. Canadians always won it and the Yanks were always second. [muffled sentences] tugs of war and all that. And then each ship in turn was detailed off to run a program for the officers, in addition to things they had to do, of course.

Two of them were, I think, really pretty memorable. One was in Glasgow, if we have time to talk about this. It was the Canadian ship's turn and they worked up this op order called 'Operation Hunt the Haggis'. And the idea was to have Haggis [indistinct]. The night before this, I had been organized by the resident naval staff officer to go to the Great Northern Yacht Club annual ball, a dance. I wore my little dinner jacket and so on, and went off dead tired, just got in that morning. All the ships, seven of us – eight of us – in the King George V dock, looked like a bunch of Dinky toys in this huge dock. It was huge with these ships sitting there. Anyway, went off to this thing. I won the door prize, that was organized, along with Scottish country dancing. But at half time I was sitting at this table with a great big guy who'd been a Major in the British Army who was then the head of the biggest butcher chain in Scotland. They had something like 26 shops. So I was telling him for something to talk about: "We've got this haggis hunt tomorrow and we haven't got a haggis." So he played the game. "What do you want, the one with four legs or six legs, six [indistinct word]?" and all that sort of stuff. Anyway, the upshot was that the next morning at nine o'clock one haggis was delivered to the flagship, with this

little truck. And one was put down in the [indistinct words] butcher shop window. After lunch, of course, everybody is at flying speed, the Danes, the Dutch, the Germans and everybody – all lined up – and all the officers. The Danes with their helmets [muffled words by chuckles].

I: I'm presuming horned helmets.

M: Yeah, horned helmets, Viking stuff, eh? Everybody in national sort of whatever they found with the Operations Order and it was a sort of scavenger hunt. You would find your way down and there were all sorts of clues. About six o'clock that night, the Brits won the thing. They found the haggis and they – of course, pubbing all the way – they went next door to a pub. The Danes came along, saw the haggis, went in and got it. They were, you know, bloody tired, probably drinking the whole time. Got into a tram car to go back to their ship. No one told them you were supposed to cook a haggis before you ate it. They ate the [indistinct] thing. It was a hell of a good deal, there.

And another thing we did was have the first squadron mess dinner – you know, officers' mess dinner. And a lot of the ships said, "No, you can't do it. You can't order officers of the Dutch navy – you cannot order officers to go to a dinner." That sort of thing. And we tried in Norway to have it somewhere and I got this great confidential message from, I think it was Hagensburg [?] where the admiral was, saying, "Commodore, you don't understand. We don't have liquor in our messes [muffled phrases]." Eventually, we thought we were going to have it in Brest and unfortunately a guy got killed there so [indistinct] the Dutch on the Zuider coast and they were feeling down in the mouth so we couldn't do that. And so we did have it in Zeebrugge and it was just great. It was terrific. All the officers from all the ships, we played games, made them all play [indistinct] Cock of the Walk [?] and all that stuff. Of course, some stood around and said we were crazy [indistinct phrase]. [More indistinct sentences] Cause it's very hard to organize.

I: That sort of moves naturally into the subject of discipline. What was the state of discipline among your ships?

M: In the Canadians it was good. The Brits were good, apart from the little thing in [?]. The Americans were very good, surprisingly enough. No question about it, they were very well [?]. The Germans were good. The only real characters' antics were from the Norwegians. They would get themselves pissed. The only time they were really out of anywhere was in Zeebrugge and they lost a guy who, I think had been pissed, came back aboard and was allowed to go ashore again. And there was some [indistinct word] beating [?] that went on. And the Norwegian police came down to try and sort it out but they could never find out what happened. So they were not used to being outside their country [muffled]. And the Danes were the Danes, they were good guys. On the whole, I don't think there were discipline problems. There were no serious discipline problems. I mean, I think I had more discipline problems in the destroyer squadron, First Destroyer Squadron, people who [muffled] in those days as homosexuals and caused problems [muffled] NATO port. Now, mind you, the captains were responsible for their own ships,

too. So they probably dumped everything [muffled sentence or two]. I never noticed any serious discipline problem other than the thing I mentioned in Spain. [muffled sentence]

I: Now, was that one port or did those sort of situations arise elsewhere?

M: No, they didn't. Because that was part of it, that they weren't there to – that was one of the things we said. We're not here to show that NATO's like Wellington's armies, you know, or Napoleon's armies, eating off the fat of the land. Here to have a good time. But there's no point in ending up in the clink or that sort of thing, or giving NATO a black eye. Same way for a Canadian squadron going to [?]. [two muffled sentences].

I: Looking at the flip side of that, were there any problems with dependents while you were deployed that had an impact on…?

M: Not that I know. I think it's very different nowadays, quite frankly. Then it was not the 'old days' but it's certainly pre-email. And I know the annual briefings that the Admiral gives to people in Halifax, to old characters like myself, we talk about these. And I often ask him how to deal with, say, in the Gulf War, [muffled word]. So, once you sailed, that was it. Mama had to get on with it. Now, clearly, if there was a serious domestic problem, every captain would do his darndest to get the person back, of course. [muffled sentence] But there was no manifestation that this was a problem. I think it would be much more difficult – [muffled] I don't know that much about it cause I'm not current. But if you're getting emails all the day about how the dishwasher isn't working, how someone has got the whooping cough or whatever, Jolly Jack will be worried about that and go along and have a few more tots [muffled]. It's just too bad. Before you sailed you wrote a letter home once a week and you were doing pretty well.

I: Mail had no trouble finding the ship?

M: No. Canadians were pretty good about the whole thing. CinC EASTLANT was very helpful.

I: You've given me a segue into the final topic I'd like to address and that's a more detailed look at command and control. Who was your higher headquarters? Who did you report to?

M: Well, eventually to SACLANT, of course, but through the Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic. I did very little reporting nationally. I think I wrote to the Admiral a couple of times to tell him what we were doing [indistinct words]. And they were very supportive, the Canadians supporting the flagship [indistinct] spare parts and that sort of thing. And that, of course, was more difficult because we were on the eastern side of the Atlantic virtually the whole year. [indistinct] work up [indistinct] outside Halifax [indistinct] But my main boss was, directly, the Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic who was Admiral Fieldhouse who, if I may say, when I joined and I went, obviously – called on him – and he was in the middle of, as the Commander in Chief Fleet, running the operational direction of the Falklands War. I think that the Brits had it very well

organized. In fact, when I was VCDS I tried to re-organize the headquarters somewhat along their lines. where people like the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the General Staff and so on set the general policy, with the government of course. And then the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Operations – they had three Lieutenant General equivalents – would then give CinC Fleet their order. Fight the Falklands War. Here are the resources. Now get on with it, basically. So the operational commander was [indistinct word]. And that's where the Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, went to have her briefings [muffled].

Anyways, I called upon him at nine o'clock. He had been down in the hole for two hours that morning, down in the operations centre, and came up and he gave me two hours of his very valuable time, at that stage of the game. He'd had the job of Commander in Chief Forward [?], Commander in Chief of COMSTANT[?] and FORLANT[?] a number of British times before. So he was well versed in what this was all about. He made the point that your body could be pulled operationally to six points and also that when you were ashore, when you were in harbour, there were a lot of things to do and so on. So, look after yourself, was basically what he was telling me. And so I bore that in mind. I saw him fairly frequently during the period and he [indistinct words] come to sea with us, that sort of thing. Very good operational commander, despite the worries he had at that stage of the game fighting the Falklands War [indistinct words].

I: Do you recall his name?

M. Yes, his name was then Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse.

I: Fieldhouse.

M: Fieldhouse, spelled "field", "house". He eventually became the First Sea Lord and after that he became Chief of the Defence Staff and then he became the Secretary – Chairman of the Military Committee at NATO. A fine guy. He had served with the Canadians in the British submarine squadron in Halifax. So he was the main boss all the time. And CinC EASTLANT Headquarters had a lot of the staff work for the Standing Naval Force Atlantic anyway so they were very much in full swim of the operational planning and what we would do next. They would give us our orders if we had to chop something and go do a specific task.

And then you would be chopped, really, under the immediate authority, to some extent – say we were working around the Iberian Peninsula with the Commander in Chief IBERLANT whose headquarters is outside Lisbon. If we'd be doing an exercise with the Portugese forces – their air force, their navy and so on – then they would be the ones running that exercise. But our operation was – so you would chop to them for that control. But your actual operational boss was still the Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic. Same thing with the Norwegians. We'd chop to the German command, the Danish command inside the Baltic.

I: Did you get inside the Baltic?

M: Yes, we did, yeah. We did exercises with the – quite tortuous ones actually – with the Germans and the Danes. Two exercises, a lot of night action and so on. Turned around through those very narrow waters.

I: [indistinct interjection]

M: Yea, and again that was largely against submarines, air force, gun emplacements ashore, that sort of thing. Very good exercise, very good navigational exercise for the ship captains.

I: Obviously the relationships between you and EASTLANT were good. What were the facilities for command and control within STANAVFORLANT? How were orders passed?

M: As they would be in the national squadron, by voluminous message traffic, except when you're on message restrictions during exercises or something. But, yeah, by message traffic basically, letters now and then. An awful lot of signalling, lights and that but basically message traffic.

I: Message traffic, was it a high frequency broadcast – you mentioned you had a satellite channel?

M: Yes, we certainly did and some of the other ships did as well. But, no, it'd be high frequency broadcast [indistinct].

I: Well, how was command and control exercised within the force? How did you communicate with your ships? Did it vary depending upon different circumstances?

M: Yes, normally, if there was no restriction on using different frequencies, all the ones you have. They all were tactical frequencies. So, they'd be used for the constant buzz and chatter. And, of course, with the links – most of the ships were link-capable – so that's how an awful lot of the data that we'd transfer back and forth….Normal message traffic. Nothing unusual. Nothing that you wouldn't use nationally.

But every ship – the point being, I suppose, you may be asking – every ship would make sure that they were fitted, before they left their nation, with the gear that was going to be interoperable. If they didn't use it generally nationally, they'd get hold of what was needed.

I: And did you find that many of them had additional equipment fitted for the task?

M: Yes. I can't remember the specifics but I don't remember there being a problem.

I: So STANAVFORLANT, in fact, would you say, demanded a higher standard than was typical for most navies?

M: Yes. I would say. You basically had to come up to the best navy, that's what it amounted to. And the lead navy, pretty well was the Americans. [indistinct muffled sentence] And that's very true of our navy today. If you're going to operate with the Americans we have to get with the program. They keep pushing the envelope, of course, so you've got to keep buying.

I: That covers the list of questions I had for you. Are there any points that we have not made that you would like to address?

M: In relation to the Standing Naval Force Atlantic. I think I'd just say it was a terrific, wonderful year – terrific challenge – very glad it happened. And I was very sad – I understood fully – when Canada had to drop out for one of its terms when we were going through quite a change in our navy three or four years ago. And just took the ship out of Standing Naval Force Atlantic. I'm happy to say that they're now back in. It's a different organization but the idea's the same.

It's an extremely good thing and I think it's very good for the nation as well because I was just re-reading this little book that was produced at the end of my year by each of the ships. Each of the commanding officers said that preparing for – it was a lot of work getting ready to join the Standing Naval Force. Every nation does that so they're up to snuff and they want to put their best foot forward, represent their country well whether they're a flagship or not a flagship. And they're all keen. It's not a [indistinct] organization [indistinct]. The staffs are certainly good as the national staffs.[indistinct sentence] if you were a ship driver type. And I think each nation looked upon it as the prestige of their nation was riding on that ship's shoulders. And I'm sure their captains understood that because they were the best captains [indistinct], couple of exceptions, top quality [indistinct].

I mean, for instance, the second American ship was one of the Spruance class, a very big ship, 7800 tons, deep draft, [muffled]. And you're going into the Syke[?]. Well, the tolerances under the bridge for the Syke and the [indistinct word] are very limited. And the Captain came up and said he couldn't do it. [muffled] it's going to be tight. How about bringing over your ship's drawings? So he brought over all the ship's drawings with his navigator and his executive officer. [indistinct] huge bloody drawings and checked out the draft and everything else. And, by God, good for him, he agreed to do it. They had about a foot and a half under the [?] hanging down under the bridge and about two feet under the keel, the lowest part of them.

I: This had to have been dependent upon the height of tide.

M: Precisely, this had to be just at the right moment. And he did it. And we were in first, my ship. I was looking through the big telescope, binoculars, watching him come in and heaved a sigh of relief. But a lot of guts because most would have said no. And no way I could have forced him to do it. If something happened…[indistinct]

I: Obviously built some long-lasting friendships and relationships. I was intrigued where you noted in your biography that you have annual reunions with the ships' captains who were in your Force at that time. I've never heard of that sort of thing. Can you expand on that a bit?

M: Well, yes, the Force under me expanded. I left on the 7th of April, 1983, in Lisbon and the American took over and the Force carried on. New ships joined and so on. And then in 80 – and after that I came to headquarters in Ottawa as Director General Personnel and Careers Other Ranks, DGPCOR. First job in Ottawa [indistinct phrase, chuckles]. And I had to go over speak to the troops, we had the air force and army in Europe. And while there I went through NATO Headquarters. My chief staff officer had been a British Commander, Royal Navy Commander, then was on the British Delegation in NATO Headquarters. And we had lunch. And it was his idea, why don't we have a reunion? Pick a time when most of the captains would be in because people were still at sea and so on. So we did and we started in 84 and it's gone on since then. Every year – I haven't been able to get there every year but pretty well – and one of the captains agrees to host it. And it's been held in Germany or Holland or England or Portugal or Belgium, Canada and the United States. And so every year we've done it. And we've had wonderful tours of eastern Germany and – the program more or less comes down to meeting on Friday for howdy-doody and get together again. And now people's wives are participating so it's a band of brothers and sisters. And it's as if we'd never left. So the pattern is get together on Friday evenings and then on Saturday they've arranged some cultural tour. Last year we were in Brussels so we went to the Battle of Waterloo. We've gone through art galleries or watched people make china or whatever it is, depending upon what they can organize. A terrific tour of eastern Germany a few years ago and met people who had helped bring about the revolution and so on. And then on Saturday evening we have a sort of formal dinner. We started off by wearing Mess Dress but that was too much to drag around the world and then dinner jackets and that was too much. And now it's wear suits. And this past year, for instance, we were staying in the [?] Place Albert in Brussels, which was a [?] club. And had dinner in another army mess, very nicely done. And then the next day it's a brunch or something somewhere, maybe some other tour laid on, maybe see an art gallery. And it's just very informal but a lot of fun. Next year it's going to be in Holland and so on. We've been in Halifax. We've been in Norfolk. We've been in Washington.

I: Intriguing to see how people develop over the years. As you've noted, several have gone on to higher rank in their own service, as you did, and then on retirement from the service have moved on to positions of influence in other walks of life.

> M: Yes. The ASW officer, the second one I had, was a Dutchman and he went on. It was [Dutch name]. I'd have to look it up to spell it. And a Lieutenant Commander and he went on to command a ship and so on and became eventually the chief of naval staff. And his final job after he retired was comptroller [?][indistinct phrase] which has often gone to a retired vice-admiral. They had one vice-admiral who was chief of naval staff [muffled words]. One of the Germans became an admiral and was the deputy commandant of their national

> defence college, retiring from that. Canada packed up the National Defence College in our country just about the time the Germans figured they better have one so they started it. The Americans, one has become an admiral. The Portugese, one became an admiral. Yeah, so on the whole they have done very well.

You have to write them up. That's another thing about command and control. You're not in their direct promotion stream, of course. Neither are they in the Canadian one. You obviously write them up and send it back to their national headquarters through the system to Commander in Chief Eastern Atlantic. And you give the captain a copy. You basically say what you think. We know each nation assesses their officers in a different manner. Some are confidential and some aren't confidential, their strengths and weaknesses and all that. Anyway, you try to obviously be fair. Take note of what you understand to be the different national ways of going about things. But you also have to say whether the guy was good or not. [muffled phrase]

I: Good, good. Well, great, Admiral. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

Interview with Vice Admiral Hugh MacNeil on 28 November, 2005, interview ends.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS