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Name: Admiral O'Brien
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript:

Transcribe by:

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	I am Admiral Sir William O'Brien. I joined the Navy in nineteen hundred and thirty, and I joined it because I saw my brother, seven years before, because he was seven years older than me, in his beautiful new uniform when he went to Dartmouth. I thought he looked nice, and I could think of no other reason why I joined the Navy.
01:00:22	<i>Okay, that's fine. What do you remember of the thirties.</i>
01:00:25	<p>Of the thirties. Oh, I can remember very well joining Dartmouth, and being, come out of the train, crossing the ferry over from King's where, and then marching up to the college. We were all falling in and marched up. We didn't have a march then, but all thirty seven of us, thirteen and a half year olds, with the college looming hugely on the top of the hill there.</p> <p>I can remember the arrival. I can even remember what happened afterwards. School was the first thing, was that the principal made a glass and looked at our chests. We had to do what was called a belly, a belly muster.</p> <p>We pulled our shirts up over our shoulders and he examined our chest. I was covered in spots because I had very uncomfortable under clothes, which I complained about to my mother, but she refused to change them.</p> <p>I was in isolation for the first two weeks of my life in the Navy because doctors weren't very good in those days, and couldn't tell a sweat rash from any other rash, so I was, I lost my first fortnight in the Navy.</p>
01:01:34	<i>But why, seeing somebody looking very dapper is one thing, but obviously thirteen and a half years of age was, there were other choices. Why did you think I've got to go and do this.</i>
01:01:47	I've no idea. I was, truly. I was always going to go in the Navy, as far as I can remember.
01:01:53	<i>Okay, good. Were there any stand out moments during that very early period of training for you.</i>

Time code	What is said
01:02:01	<p>I loved Dartmouth. Not everybody did. It was an extremely strict regime then. You did everything to order, you doubled everywhere. Everything you did could be construed as a fault. They were called guff rules, all sorts of those, full trump when you're wearing a blazer going up to the sports ground, you had to have every button done up, otherwise somebody would come along, and you would get what was called a tick.</p> <p>A tick went into the book and when you went four ticks, you went for stripes on your bottom that night, in your pajamas.</p> <p>As I say, you doubled everywhere. You saluted everybody, on every master you passed, however often you passed him in the corridor, you saluted him and every officer. You got a picture of youngsters carrying a number of books under their left arm, dashing along because they had to be doubling, and trying to salute at the same time.</p>
01:03:09	<i>Where are you from. Were you by the sea, were you a swimmer. What was, how did you adapt to the sort of physicality of it, the sea life, if you like.</i>
01:03:19	<p>We didn't have much sea life there at Dartmouth, to start with. I played most games quite well. I loved sport. Again, that was a good place because you had to. You were obliged by the rules to do what was called the log.</p> <p>The log was to take a certain amount of exercise. Run three miles for example, or play a game of rugby, or play a game of cricket or soccer. I liked playing squash, but unfortunately squash was only half a log. You had to do something else to make up the other half.</p> <p>This stuff had to be registered every day, and you were warranted by your term cadet captains, who were prefects, really, other cadets more senior to you who had considerable disciplinary powers over your.</p> <p>It could be sadistic or brutal, but on the whole, they weren't. Justice was usually meted out with reasonable correctness, I think.</p>
01:04:27	<i>Talk me through a little bit more of the Dartmouth experience, and then when you started to get a sense of sea legs and adapting to that. Or would that beyond Dartmouth sorry.</i>
01:04:39	<p>It's really down Dartmouth. Yes, we did a good deal of time down at Sankey, on the river Dart in boats. Cutters and dipping out cutters, and rowing in gigs. Nothing very advanced, it was all quite simple stuff. It's much better now, I think.</p> <p>I don't think I learned much seamanship, really, at Dartmouth, in that way. I learned a good deal of discipline, but not seamanship. We were drove pretty hard by the retired petty officer.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:05:18	<i>How long did you stay there, and where did you go next.</i>
01:05:21	<p>At Dartmouth? You stay three and a half years at Dartmouth. Three and a half years, so, and then we went to sea, on HMS Frobisher, which was converted into a training cruiser. We did two cruises in her. We did one to the Baltic, and one to the West Indies, my two cruises.</p> <p>Sounds fun actually, but you're fairly limited. Leave stopped at seven o'clock, wherever you were. I can remember for instance, in Stockholm, there were an extraordinary pretty girl, and having to go back to the jetty at seven o'clock, and see her walking away with one of the lieutenants, on some lieutenant's arm. And feeling very bitter, I had to go back on board.</p> <p>I didn't think I would do that now. We were seventeen and a half years old, but no, you were given pretty little latitude.</p>
01:06:20	<i>How were your sea legs. Did you suffer sea sickness, were you</i>
01:06:29	<p>I was very, very, very ... It's quite a story, actually. I was very seasick indeed. I as seasick almost at the smell of our fuel, when the ship rolled, and the vents from the fuel tanks let out that horrible smell, I felt seasick at once.</p> <p>I was violently sick. I can still remember his name, one petty officer to whom I'm eternally grateful. His name is Petty Officer Hendy, and I can remember him picking me up from underneath the first cutter, one of the boats, sitting there absolutely miserable being sick, and taking me by the scruff of my neck and making me get working.</p> <p>He mothered me. He was really kind, actually. I've always remembered him. I still went on being seasick until years later in the Mediterranean when I was navigating a destroyer during the Spanish civil war.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:07:19	<p>We left Malta, and we were senior officer of four ships and I was the navigator, so my navigation was important. I knew what a lousy navigator I was, and how bad I was at taking star sights, and I was fairly panic struck actually. We left Malta, and the clouds descended. I didn't see the sun and didn't see a star for three days.</p> <p>The last night, there was a brief interlude when the clouds broke and I took some star sights, and got a fix, got the ship's position. With no competence, I didn't sleep that much, at four o'clock in the morning, which was when we were making a rendezvous with four other destroyers. I was up there worried stiff. At four o'clock the four destroyers appeared.</p> <p>I'd done it. My navigation had suddenly become good. But what was really come good was, I suddenly realized it was very rough and I wasn't feeling seasick. The first time I had any real responsibility in the Navy, and that was the first time that anything felt really serious. Gosh, I'd have got the stick if we'd ended up fifty miles away from the rendezvous.</p> <p>I wasn't, and I've never been, seasick since, or felt seasick since. Quite extraordinary. Seasickness is not entirely a physical problem, it's a psychological one, obviously.</p>
	Start of Film 2
01:08:50	<i>Talk, chronologically shift through a little bit, from that early stage on the Frobisher. Unless there's any other stories on the Frobisher you want to say.</i>
01:08:59	I've lots of stories, but -
01:09:01	<i>Any more enjoyable ones.</i>

Time code	What is said
01:09:02	<p>Oh, Frobisher was ... I can remember Barbados, where there were a lot of, seemed to be an awful lot of pretty girls and we used, we could go ashore in the afternoon and there was dancing on the, sort of a pier, sort of a ledon on the beach there. I had a happy time with a girl called Ruth Becca. I don't know what's happened to her.</p> <p>Then one say swimming, I trod on a sea egg, and my foot was full of all of those horrible spines and they went septic. I was excused boots and I went around the H.M.S. Frobisher in gym shoes.</p> <p>I unfortunately discovered dancing with this girl in the pavilion on the beach, and that was the end of my leave in Barbados. I didn't go ashore again. I have lots of silly stories, but they're not worth retelling.</p> <p>From there, I went to, we were at Winded Courses. Did a year at Courses. Greenwich, which was lovely, and down in Portsmouth. Gunnery school. Torpedo school, navigation, et cetera. At the end of which you had examination to pass, qualify as a sub lieutenant. That was a lovely, that was 1937. A lovely year, I enjoyed that very much. My 21st birthday, anyway.</p>
01:10:40	<p>From there, I went, I said I was quite good at sports, I was. I used to play rugby for the United Services club in Portsmouth, and I played for the Navy on one occasion. I was given what's called a rugby appointment in those days. We, the Navy, tried to keep its rugby team strong by appointing officers to ships that didn't go to sea too much. I went to HMS Wolsey It was the target ship for the submarines in Portsmouth. We were a nine to four ship.</p> <p>We went to sea at nine o'clock for submarines, fired our torpedoes at them, at us. We picked them up and came back into harbor again. I went up to the rugby round to train. So that's what a rugby appointments.</p> <p>I found this very tedious, actually, just this nine to four. Also, rugger. It wasn't rugger that got me, it was the drinking beer afterwards. I've never been good at quaffing big quantities of beer. In fact, I never drink beer at all now.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:11:52	<p>We went to rugger matches, and then you got into the sharabang, or the coach to come back and you stopped at every pub on the way back. These blokes put pints of beer down themselves. I simply couldn't do it and all I wanted to do was get back to my, some girlfriend or other who I probably had at that time. Certainly had.</p> <p>I went to London, asked to be given another job and I was sent to some, sub lieutenant to HMS Garland in the Mediterranean. 1st destroyer to them. Nine boats in the flotilla then. Three flotillas in the Mediterranean, so the harbor would actually be chock full.</p> <p>This in nineteen thirty seven. My first captain was, I was only a very short time with him. Then we came, the ship came back to England. We paid off and re-commissioned. There's a silly story about that, too. Do you want silly stories.</p>
01:12:58	<i>Please.</i>
01:12:59	<p>We're all in the Mediterranean. The sailors had acquired a sort of habit at that time, masses of parrots, parakeets, canaries and other birds. Not a lot of birds, just those birds. There were lots of them on the ship. Unfortunately, there was cases of psittacosis in England, the parrot disease and you weren't allowed to land any of these birds. So, all the officers went on leave except me, I was the junior boy left behind, and I suddenly found we were being visited by a team from the ministry of fisheries and agriculture in order to exterminate all these birds, which they had on board.</p> <p>He said he'd be on board at nine o'clock in the morning. He came with a big barrel and lots of gas and stuff to suffocate these poor birds in. I got piped, all sailors with birds muster on the fo'c'sle and all the sailors came on the fo'c'sle, not a bird. Not a bird in sight.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:14:13	<p>Well, this was very embarrassing. The man from ministry said, what in the world has happened to them. A sailor came forward and spoke to me and said, well sir, I know about birds, and I couldn't bear to think of them suffering so I killed them all sir, last night. Humane like, but I killed them all, they're all gone. Because everyone had gone ashore, vanished into the houses. There wasn't a bird on board. This was very embarrassing for some to have ran, but the ministry man couldn't do anything about it. They had all gone.</p> <p>Then we went back to the Mediterranean with a new captain, quite a different character, this. I can't pretend I found him a very attractive character, but he was extraordinarily good ship handler.</p> <p>He handled that destroyer so beautifully, but for some reason he liked to have me, his absolute bottom number, his most junior officer, he liked to have me as officer watch when he was doing high speed maneuvers. I was always giving the orders down the voice pipe and I was also keep station, the ship in station, at thirty knots.</p>
01:15:34	<p>Nine destroyers, all dashing into a torpedo attack, in close company. Only one and half cables apart. That's only three thousand yards. I mean, much less than that. That's only seventy three hundred yards, sorry. I got tremendous practice at handling the destroyer at high speeds in close company, with lots of other ships.</p> <p>That was wonderful and I got a taste, a real liking, for that and what I really loved in my naval career was to handle ships. Real joy.</p>
01:16:13	<p><i>It's interesting. You said he was a really great ship handler. What makes a ship handler on something as big as a destroyer? How are you driving it, do tell.</i></p>

Time code	What is said
01:16:26	<p>It's an eye. I can't fair make it. You get an eye for it and you absorb what the ship's turning circle is at different speeds and what will happen if you go starboard thirty up to speed, what the ship will actually do and how to adjust speed to keep the exact station or to take up station.</p> <p>The most tricky, do you want this lesson? The most tricky of all of these things was to take station astern of a ship, approaching him from ahead. Let's say you're both going in opposite directions and you have to pass down one side of the ship that you're going to take station on.</p> <p>Turn in behind him and the thing was to end up exactly right. Exactly at one and a half cables behind him. That took a eye. Not everybody had it, or not everybody developed it. I knew, there was one very well-known officer who didn't have this eye, but he had a good mathematical brain.</p> <p>He worked out on paper the turning circles, the physical aspects of his particular ship using a stopwatch. He had a stopwatch around his neck and he did all his maneuvers by stopwatch and by what he learnt on graph paper in the chart room or somewhere. He really got quite good at it.</p> <p>He was Admiral Denny, he became Admiral Denny. From my battenning around we were about leaving for sea gone, but ...</p>
	Start of Film 3
01:18:18	<i>That was 37. I think you touched on Spain. Did you get involved in the...</i>
01:18:24	<p>We got within the ship, in Garland. We, it was called the NYON, N-Y-O-N patrol and we patrolled off Spain. But also, we went and did something else. We did, we used to transfer prisoners, nationalist prisoners to the government, and government to the nationalists.</p> <p>That meant going between ports on the east coast of Spain and to Majorca.</p> <p>For instance, we enter Alicante and we took on board a lot of nationalist prisoners, including Francers, at least on one occasion, actually. Took them all then up to, sorry, we took them from Marseille, we didn't take them from Majorca. We took, ah, memory is lost. We had to come from Marseille from Majorca, or both. I don't remember now.</p> <p>But I think, but we didn't take any the other way. It was always nationalists of Republican Spain, we seemed to be carrying. I don't remember that we ever carried republicans back to Nationalist Spain.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:19:48	<p>But we used to spend a lot of time in Majorca, because the British Consul in Majorca was a retired lieutenant called Hillgarth. I've got a biography next door of him. He had a tremendous war, subsequently, because he was a great intelligence man. He ended up as a captain, as the chief intelligence staff in the Far East.</p> <p>Anyway, Hillgarth, for some reason, Hillgarth didn't have sufficient codes for his, for the purpose the foreign office was using him. He was already an MI6 man. So there was always, the ship that was in harbor used to decode all his messages, and code them up. Then I was a signal officer, so I used to do Hillgarth's communications with the foreign office.</p> <p>That meant going to and fro from the consulate with sealed bags of these messages for him, and taking back [inaudible] ones.</p>
01:21:00	<i>All this time, operating in the Med and heading towards a rising German power, what are you understanding about the threat from Germany, if anything at this point. Or, are you very much focused on...</i>
01:21:15	<p>Oh, very conscious of it, because all the others, all this was also, the Abyssinian, time of the Abyssinian war, so you already has Mussolini lording it about the place. In fact, we spent, in HMS Garland we spend more time in Alexandria than we did in Malta.</p> <p>We were stuck in Alexandria for months and months and months. I'd already been stuck in Alexandria because of revenge and valiant, we were in Alexandria for practically half my time as a midshipman.</p> <p>We'd had all the Abyssinian, all the lead up to the war. You'd gone through Munich in 1938, and this is the time we were in the Med. We were conscious. Anyway, the Germans around in Spain, there was the episode with the Deutschland.</p>
01:22:09	<i>You were a young man, obviously an ambitious young man. Did you have a, can you recall how you felt about this rising power. Was there a fear, was there excitement, was there a...</i>

Time code	What is said
01:22:22	<p>I don't think it was fear, no. I felt excitement. As far as I was concerned, I had only one ambition really in the Navy. I never had an ambition to become admiral or any of that stuff. I wanted to command ships because it was obviously such fun to do.</p> <p>I worked as hard as I could in every way to make sure that I ultimately did command ships. And that's what I think I was concentrating on, I'm not really thinking about war or otherwise. The war intervened. Mussolini went into Albania, if you remember. I was actually, I'm half Maltese. My mother's Maltese.</p> <p>I was in a cinema with all my young cousins, aged from about six to twelve, five of them, when up on the screen came the things saying everybody return on board, all officers, all men, return on board your ships. We rushed back on board, and this was Mussolini walking into Albania.</p>
01:23:37	<p>On our way, we went to Alexandria again, on the way from that last bit of water. I miss the fact I'm half Maltese meant that I had rather a different life than most naval officers in Malta, because I had my grandparents living in Malta, in Valletta I could go and stay almost in home in Malta.</p> <p>That meant that I also met a lot, met all the young Maltese. The young Maltese were much, much prettier than anything else that was around in Malta at the time. I was a midshipman. Because of my connections, my [inaudible] and the other midshipmen as well, had a great time because there were lots of very charming and attractive women around, or girls. We are young men.</p>
01:24:31	<i>Moving on.</i>
01:24:34	<p>When war came, we were, Garland and several other ships were sent with Honorable Captain Creswell in H.M.S. Afridi a tribal class destroyer. We were all sent into the Red Sea. The possibility that Mussolini might come into the war at that time, had to be catered for.</p> <p>We went down the Red Sea and patrolled off Italian Somaliland That's all around Aiden, I can't, I don't know how long we were there before war broke out.</p>
Start of Film 4	

Time code	What is said
01:25:18	<p>I can remember war broke out, we were at sea, patrolling off the island of Parim.</p> <p>I was actually officer of watch when the message came through that war is declared and I can remember leaning over the bridge. My captain was reading a book on the flag deck. The flag deck is slightly lower than the bridge.</p> <p>Leaning over the side of the bridge and saying to my captain, war has been declared, sir. He dropped his monocle that he used to wear, out of his eye onto his book on his lap and said thank you. Put it back in again and went on reading his book. It was a good act.</p> <p>That was the same captain, who I didn't very much care for. Anyway, we then, England did not go into the war, so back we came up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal, and when we got back in the Mediterranean, the ASDIC the sonar, detected an inverted comma as a submarine, of course it was a wreck, it wasn't a submarine, and we ran over it and the captain ordered somebody to pull the depth charge.</p> <p>The depth charge is on the stern of a destroyer, were activated, dumped into the sea manually by a handle, just like an old brake handle on an old car, which was pulled, hard, towards one. One grabbed it, pulled it towards one, and this mechanism went right through the ship, right to the back end of it and released these depth charges into the sea.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:27:07	<p>Except that in this case, it didn't, because the whole damned thing was painted up from peace time, and the depth charges stuck, and not one went over the side.</p> <p>That was disaster, and the captain got extremely angry, quite rightly. Sent for the gunner. Now the gunner on that ship was a newly fledged officer from the lower deck. This was his first ship as an officer, a warrant officer. This particular captain was fairly brutal.</p> <p>Anything he found, you were wounded or hurt, he twisted the knife. He was sadistic. And he'd been, frankly, I tell the story to explain the history on it, but he was beastly to this particular officer.</p> <p>He was always vindictive towards him, and unjust. There he was sent for, and given an absolutely justified reprimand because this was his responsibility, the depth charges hadn't gone. But it tipped the balance and this officer, I'd met him actually.</p> <p>I'd passed him as he went down aft again. He was so angry, he'd lost all sense of proportion. He was, I'm not going to use the language he was using, he was swearing and blasting away as he walked around the deck, roughly saying this depth charge is going to go over the side, even if I have to kick it over myself. In fact, I think that's what he did say.</p>
01:28:53	<p>Off we went to do another run onto this supposed submarine. By that time, the chap working the depth charge lever had vanished. And the captain told me to get under it. I crouched down, and I grasped this thing. As I say, it was like a brake handle with a grip on the top which took the break off and it allowed it to pull it towards you.</p> <p>But unfortunate, the previous gunner had been an extremely clever man, and he'd devised a thing for this mechanism, whereas previously, you pulled the lever and it went it's whole length and then it pushed a buzzer, and the buzzer went honk on the quarter deck, telling the man down there that the lever had been pulled, and therefore the depth charges should go over the side.</p> <p>If they hadn't, he would do it manually there. Instead of that, he flipped the buzzer at the other end and the buzzer honked as soon as he moved the lever, rather than when you moved it it's entire length.</p> <p>Over the years, a little bit of play had got into this and when I went down and gripped it, it was sufficient play in the movement to make it go honk. We were only doing five knots. The gunner had, his senses had entirely gone out. This sir literally kicked the depth charges over the side. We were doing five knots.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:30:28	<p>Well, they didn't actually damage the ship too much, because we got a bit away from them, but the blast of them dropped the depth charges in from the throw on the side of the ship. You have the depth charges in a trap up the back which went over the stern and on the side of the ship, which were blown out from throws, depth charge throws, blown out either side of the ship.</p> <p>Those were bounced out and fell right alongside of the ship, and when off fifty foot underneath us. That wasn't very good, and the boat, we broke our back. We had to be towed back into, and absolute wreck into Alexandria Harbour I was, I'm glad to say, exonerated before the board of inquiry.</p>
01:31:22	<i>I bet that [inaudible] did he.</i>
01:31:28	<p>I wrecked a ship, but they are breakable, yes. There we are, so, the ship was patched up in the dock at Alexandria, then we went to Malta where she was properly restored, but we then left her, and went to another ship, which was being converted to an anti-aircraft destroyer from being a World War I, being a, H.M.S. Wolsey. We went to that ship.</p> <p>I had every reason to suppose I would be first sub lieutenant because our person from the previous ship had gone home. But by one of those whims of the admiralty, the sub lieutenant was a direct entry into the RN from the RNR.</p> <p>There were quite a lot of them. They were known and the hungry hundred because they were hungry for jobs and they often didn't get them.</p> <p>He was one of the RNR transfers and on being confirmed as a sub lieutenant, he suddenly got two years seniority and was senior to me, so he became first lieutenant and I stayed where I was. This is slightly bitter.</p> <p>Anyway, I worked navigation of the ship and we brought her home and went to Rosyth, where she was employed on the east coast convoy duties. And running down from Rosyth to Harridge and Sheerness, and back again.</p>
01:22:02	<i>What were you convoying.</i>

Time code	What is said
01:33:04	<p>We were convoying, mostly all coasters, all down the east coast of England, mostly coal for Newcastle. Mostly coaler's Feeding down to the London power stations. Other ships, obviously, too, but all coasters. Large coastal convoy, thirty or forty ships at a time. Which one took down into narrow columns in the swept channel.</p> <p>Mostly uneventful, odd air attacks, but nothing happening. The only eventful thing that happened was when they got some leave by going aground. Coming back into Rosyth one day, in the winter.</p> <p>It was blowing up a real storm from the northeast. Tremendous snow, and visibility almost nothing. We came in, we went down to the fourth bridge and we were told to go to the tanker, which was anchored in the river there, below Rosyth We'd done this umpteen times.</p> <p>We went down the port side of the tanker you turned around, you came up and went alongside it. But what we didn't know, and I couldn't tell because there was no visibility in this snow storm, was that the tanker let out goodness knows how many shackles of cable.</p>
01:34:30	<p>Well normally when she sat at anchor with about say three or four shackles of cable, she had the whole roll out, because it was a blank sail hard, and her stern was just above the mud bank, or whatever.</p> <p>But we came down her port side, turned around her stern, as we turned, our screws hit the mud. We got along side, but both screws were badly damaged. We went into dock and got two weeks leave after that.</p> <p>Part of that actually being because the spare propeller is coming up from Davenport. Got shunted into a siding Cardiff or Swansea or somewhere, and got lost. So we had a nice little bit of leave as a result of a bumpy run. I was navigator of that ship and I'm glad to say I was exonerated again in board of inquiries that followed.</p>
01:35:24	<i>Did you go to Dunkirk on the HMS Wolsey</i>

Time code	What is said
01:35:28	<p>No. We were rather bitter that we didn't, that we were asked along the east coast. I said, I was a bit dissatisfied with my job as navigator. I felt that I should be first up. I went down to London during this leave and complained and the bloke, the commander in the office, the pointless commander asked me a strange question.</p> <p>He said, you still speak French. I was very positive and I said yes. He said, you sound doubtful. Go away for a week and learn it. Now this is because this captain of mine, the one that we, from H.M.S. Garland, when we're in Marseille, used to occasionally go to the night clubs.</p> <p>He's a very insular man, foreignness started at Dover as far as he was concerned. And he had no French, and I did because I was quite well taught at Dartmouth, had a very good French master. I had enough French, anyway, to translate for him as he drank his, sipped his stuff with a pretty girls in these night clubs or wherever.</p> <p>He wrote in my report, speaks fluent French. Entirely incorrect, I didn't. Here I was being asked did I still speak it. Anyway, I went away and I found my then girlfriend knew a Russian girl, who had been educated in a French convent, who spoke absolutely fluent French. And I spend a week with her, off and on, and rubbed my French up a bit I suppose.</p> <p>And then went, was sent to lay mines in the Rhine. This was a little known naval adventure called Operation Will Marine, though there were no Marines, but it's called Operation Royal Marine. A Churchillian idea.</p>
	Start of Film 5
01:43:09	<p>Before the war, Churchill had been in Germany and he'd observed how dependent the Germans were on their canals for the movement of their trade and so he got, he devised the idea of laying mines in the Rhine.</p> <p>They were then run up, because the Rhine runs very fast, it runs three or four knots mostly. Putting mines in the Rhine in France, and up going into Germany and so Hitler better using the waterways, just canals. It was canals and rivers that the Germans were dependent upon, or used a great deal, anyway.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:38:20	<p>This was quite a good idea, and somebody devised three kinds of mine. One that went rolling along the bottom. They were about, like a great big football. You would carry one against your chest like this. That was called a slug that run along the bottom with the tide.</p> <p>There was one that was called a porpoise that had a tail on it. It was just negatively buoyant and so it went to the bottom, the tail hit the bottom, and it bounced to the surface and then it went down again, the tail hit the bottom and it bounced to the surface.</p> <p>The third one had a little cork floats and it was just underneath the surface. The thing was to take these things down to the Rhine and put them in where the river, where the stream came to the French side, and then they would serpentine their way down into Germany.</p> <p>The French, however, wouldn't let Churchill start this game because they were frightened one, they'd go off in Belgium or Holland, and Belgium and Holland were then neutral. Or, two, if they did go off, then all the reprisals would come on France, and France would suffer.</p>
01:39:41	<p>So that not untypical of the French attitude at that time, or French government attitude. Misure Daladier who had been prime minister, who was now Minister of Defense, was the man who was stopping this. And Churchill actually flew over on one occasion.</p> <p>We were already there, we were on the Rhine, ready to put these things in. And when Churchill tried to persuade Daladier they must go ahead with it, because the Germans by then were pushing up and [inaudible] and the were on their way to Bologne.</p> <p>But he wouldn't. Churchill is reported as saying, remonstrating with Daladier, and saying if we didn't do it nous allons [inaudible] l'omnibus, which absolutely baffled Daladier who never heard of the missing the bus phrase nous allons [inaudible] l'omnibus.</p> <p>We marked the omnibus, totally. By the time the French gave permission for the launching of any mines in the Rhine, the Germans had crossed it at Sedan They were over it. But anyway, we started launching them, and actually, stopped all traffic right up to [inaudible], which is quite a long way, by blowing up the pontoon bridges and it was successful, but too late. The Germans were over.</p>
01:41:15	<i>Where were you going in?</i>
01:41:18	I'm sorry. Where were we. We were at a place called Soufflenheim which is just north of Strasbourg. Quite close to Strasbourg.
01:41:22	<i>How far down the Rhine were you going. Were you niching right on the outside, or how far inland were you.</i>

Time code	What is said
01:41:32	<p>Oh, I see. We were in the Maginot Line which was on the Rhine, which was there. We were billeted with the [inaudible] and the 23rd regiment of infantry. In the Maginot Line.</p> <p>Quite interesting. They had a, in the officer's mess where we used to go to lunch, we had a bullet up with all the flags in it, and every day the swastikas would advance and they would all be terribly depressed. They'd sit there very, potentially very depressed. And then there'd be a slight reversal somewhere, and they were all smiles and they were still saying on the, the motto of the Maginot Line was on the pas par. They won't pass. They'd already passed. But never the less of the pas on par. No, no. Nous allez alons. They uses to say we'll have them just the same.</p>
01:42:39	<p>And then this, when the alarm went off and they bottomed again because the Germans advanced and the flags advanced. Eventually, we were commanded by Rear Admiral Fitzgerald. Admiral Fitzgerald recognized that this was slightly dangerous, and we better get out of it. We got, I presume he got permission to evacuate.</p> <p>The night before we actually quit and left this regiment and went west, they gave us a farewell dinner. Marvelous dinner with the center of the table covered in flowers and the flowers said One pas par. Still, at that stage of their defeat, they were living on slogan. That slogan.</p> <p>Anyway, we then go into all our trucks and took out all our mines, and went west. We laid some mines in the Meuse, and we laid them in the Ain, and then we tried to turn them into some extraordinary idea of the French army, turn them in to landmines.</p> <p>They were totally unsuited for that, they were far too big to bury or put on, in roads. Then we went to Paris. We were only in Paris for a day. We didn't realize that things were getting serious there because we found everybody in the embassy burning all the books in the garden. All of the papers.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:44:21	<p>From Paris we went to a place called..., I can't remember his name now. Oh, terrible word to pronounce. B-U-E-I-E-L Bueiel. Anyway, it was a village near, oh no. We went to Cezanne first of all. Cezannes's quite a amusing story.</p> <p>In Cezanne, which is halfway form the Rhine to Paris roughly, we were billeted in an orphanage. There were all these poor, sick children in this orphanage, looked after by a lot of not very good ladies.</p> <p>We made friends with them, and I made friends in particular with a boy called Andre. He was about four or five years old, I suppose. We played a silly game. I put him on my knee and there's a French chat children's game, j'tat te un parlez monton, or parlez bouchez. I hold you by the chin, and if you laugh, I slap you. J'tat te teta. Anyway, I don't remember how the game quite went, but those are some of the words of it.</p> <p>I used to play with this child. And then one day when I came down, things were really getting bad, the Germans were advancing pretty, well, everywhere. This child ran towards me shouting, boujour Papa, boujour Papa. A sailor walking by said hello sir, been here before.</p>
01:45:59	<p>But this was a, the women looking after the establishment briefed this little boy, for they were hoping I'd take him on and the, which was sad. I didn't, I couldn't anyway, unfortunately. I wonder what happened to him.</p> <p>But then after [inaudible] nesr the Ruhr this was. Then the strangest thing happened. That was the war collapsing around us, and other, I think it was one hundred sailors suddenly. A hundred sailors arrived, reinforcements for us.</p> <p>Why, I don't know. I suddenly found myself with another officer in this little village with a lot of mines, and a whole crowd of sailors, also in sailors uniform, not in khaki. I don't know how we got rid of them.</p> <p>We used them initially because the villagers were all evacuated. They weren't total evacuate, but they all had evacuated in front of the advance. It was evacuated because the chap who went first was the butcher and the grocer, so there because no food and you had to get out of your village.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:47:23	<p>As a result, none of the cows were being milked and there they were, all in the fields, bellowing their heads off, in great pain, poor things. So, in some of their minds, with these sailors, because we hadn't got any orders to do so then, we put them into little groups of three and off they went to milk the cows.</p> <p>How the cows enjoyed this, I don't know, but I think some of them were being relieved of the pain. We got rid of the sailors somehow, but I still had the mines. Eventually, I was told to evaluate the mines and we got control of a train and got, I'm sorry, the mines were still in the train. That's right.</p> <p>Off we shunted to try and take them away, but unfortunately the rail had been bombed and the line was broken and all the trains were just stopped. There were rows and rows of trains. I didn't, had no idea what to do, in fact. I had one sailor, myself, that's all on this train.</p>
01:48:34	<p>We were sitting eating, I can remember exactly. We were eating a corned beef sandwich at the time, when up drove a car, driving very fast, with a Commander Wellbee in it, who was one of the organization, telling us to get out quick because we were in no man's land, so we jumped in this car and we were taken off to L'Amour.</p> <p>In L'Amour we did one, or was it two. Certainly one night when we laid mines in the Seine, at a bend of the river of the Seine. I don't know what significance that bit of the Seine had, but I know we laid mines there.</p> <p>It was a fully dramatic night because all the oil tanks at Ruhr were on fire, and we were seeing this colossal blaze and the front line was quite close and we weren't laying our mines in a quite orderly fashion.</p> <p>Below were we are, they were thinking the Seine would take them away and blow up something or other, and when a motorcyclist, French motorcyclist, came through and told us he was the last driver, everybody else had gone and there was nobody between us and the Germans, and they were coming along fast and he dashed off on his motorcycle.</p> <p>What we did then was actually, we then threw the mines in the Rhine, we didn't lay them in the Rhine.</p>
01:50:21	<i>Literally yourself, you...</i>

Time code	What is said
01:50:22	<p>We threw them over the weir, hoping they wouldn't explode and they didn't. We threw the whole lot over and then drove back to Le Mans and I think next day, or the day after, we went to [inaudible] and we were evacuated in comfort, in the Duke of Westminster's yacht.</p> <p>Which was, Duke of Westminster's yacht It was a World War I destroyer he was a very rich man it was a WWI destroyer converted into a yacht and we went back to Plymouth in that.</p> <p>And that, let's draw a breath.</p>
	Start of Film 6
01:50:57	<i>Tell me about HMS Witherington. What was it like to get back to sea.</i>
01:51:04	<p>Oh, I've got, please get back to sea. Well, I've enjoyed my little spell pretending to be a soldier. HMS Witherington, which is a straightforward four point seven inch four gun destroyer from World War I. I joined her in Dover and took over from Lord Beresford, actually, who then went on to be first lieutenant to Mountbatten and Kelly.</p> <p>He, quite interestingly, he was an Oxford group man, and I think the ship found me quite a relief because I didn't have my silent hour at five o'clock in the evening, which apparently he used to have where nobody was allowed to disturb him.</p> <p>Typically in war time, because the war doesn't stop at five o'clock. Anyway, this ship was grounded by a chap called JB Palmer, whom I knew, purely because he'd been a term officer at Dartmouth when I was a cadet.</p> <p>He was a very, very nice man, but a rather indecisive one. He had great difficulty with making his mind up and that isn't really too good when you're a captain of a ship. I got a picture of this extraordinarily nice man, who I was very fond, standing in his cabin doorway when I posed him with some problem.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:52:34	<p>He did the most extraordinary thing which is difficult to do. I suggested, I don't suppose he would try it, he stood on one foot and with the other, we went up and down the calf of the foot he was standing on with one of his hands, he twirled his hair and this was while he stood and made his mind up.</p> <p>On one foot, with the other going up and down and twirling his hair and in general, this is not being proud or anything I made his mind up for him. He was waiting for somebody to tell him what he should do.</p> <p>He was quite good otherwise on the ship. He as on patrols in the channel, we worked out of Dover, we worked out of Portsmouth. We very nearly did one operation out of Dover, which, thank God, we never achieved.</p> <p>It was another Churchillian idea and it was really a success to send in the King of Spain's beard. It was to blow up Bologne harbour. A ship called the RFA War Afridi tanker, of a Royal Fleet Auxillary tanker, was filled up with every kind of petroleum and diesel and fuel oil you can think of.</p>
01:54:01	<p>We were to escort her across the channel, and keep the, bombard the entrance to Bologne as she broke through the boom at Bologne, and then exploded in the harbor and split all this fuel oil on, which would then burnt the harbor up.</p> <p>We started off getting across the channel and I still remember the smell because the ship, that ship, was designed for a heady, that's fuel oil, and they had a lot of very light fuels, of gas, et cetera, which got through the cracks and evaporation and the atmosphere wasn't one of, the smell of petrol everywhere.</p> <p>Very explosive, so that to say, we were moving across the channel and fortunately, the wind was in the wrong direction. It was canceled and we turned back. I'm not a bit sorry it never happened.</p> <p>Apart from the fact it would have been unpleasant for Bologne, but I think it was a, it was going to be a disaster. The ship's we were escorting, the gunnery system on H.M.S. Witherington, was so primitive, we wouldn't have been very useful, keeping down the fire coming from the shore in the harbour. I doubt we would have been able to achieve it at all.</p>
01:55:32	<i>Was it a southwesterly wind then.</i>

Time code	What is said
01:55:34	<p>You needed another, a northeasterly not northwesterly wind. You needed the wind blowing into the land. And it was obviously blowing away from it. That's why were asphyxiated behind this tanker, because we weren't, we were actually following her.</p> <p>The captain, the senior officer of that operation was Captain Agar, who do anyone at VC and Zeebrugge Anyway, it didn't happen. Nothing very exciting ever happened in that ship, in the channel, that I can remember.</p> <p>Other than when we were sent once from Plymouth to go right down to the channel islands or near them, to try and pick up some airmen who'd been shot down, and were apparently been seen in the water. We didn't find them.</p> <p>We were then picked up by a German, Junker 88 bomber. One single aircraft who proceeded to follow us back to Plymouth, bombing us gently on the way. One after one after one he did over us, dropping I suppose five hundred pound bombs. They weren't very big.</p>
01:56:48	<p>He wasn't very good at dropping bombs on us, and we weren't very good at firing at him, because we had no anti-aircraft guns proper. We roared away at thirty knots, the captain pulling the wheel hard over every now and then so the guns would get elevation to fire at this aircraft, and we'd bang at him.</p> <p>The bombs came quite near, but never near enough. It didn't hit us, anyway, and we went back to Plymouth. That was the only action we had in the channel on that ship. We had no action when we then went up to Liverpool and, there's a bit more to the story, actually.</p> <p>While we were in Plymouth, we had to do a shoot, a practice shoot. And the commander in chief came out to watch it. That was unfortunate, because it wasn't very good. The gunnery system on that ship was elementary, and we really weren't very good at using it.</p> <p>Admiral Sir Martin Eric Dunbar-Nasmith VC, this was. And he wrote us an extremely rude letter and it said within as if, the next time there wasn't a significant improvement, then the captain and the first lieutenant would be relieved. But off we went to Liverpool fortunately, so that was, that Sword of Damocles was no longer hanging over us, or so we thought.</p>

Time code	What is said
01:58:17	<p>In Liverpool, as I said, we did various convoys again, absolutely uneventful. Went out and came back again. The only events, I got my mother up to Liverpool while we were in there at one time, and we both stayed at the Adelphia Hotel. We chose the time on the very heavy air raids on Liverpool. Colossal air raids on Liverpool.</p> <p>I came in to harbor on the ship, went to the Adelphia Hotel and met my mother. We both went to our separate rooms. I went to bed, went to sleep. I had the most wonderful night's sleep. I was very tired after the convoy we'd just done, for some reason. I had little sleep on it.</p> <p>I came out in the morning, on my landing, got into the lift, and said to the lift person in the hotel what a nice quiet night, wasn't it. And he practically hit me because I hadn't heard a thing. The whole of Liverpool was on fire and the place had been bombed to bits. Not the Adelphia Hotel.</p> <p>My mother had been woken up by it and she'd come along the corridor and banged on my door and when she couldn't wake me up, she'd gone back to bed too. We were the only two people who got a night's sleep at the Adelphia Hotel that night.</p> <p>Really, quite serious damage.</p>
01:59:44	<p><i>You just touched on a thing. What was it like being on a first World War ship, being a sub lieutenant. What were your</i></p>
01:59:53	<p>I was first lieutenant on the ship, actually. They weren't very comfortable ships, but not bad. The design of destroyers remain much the same. H.M.S. Garland, which I'd been in previously, was a much more modern ship. And I suppose the ward room was a bit more comfortable. And there was a bathroom.</p> <p>There was no bathroom in Witherington. I drew a bath in a tin bath on the deck in your cabin, and you clipped the tin bath on the bulkhead while it was on the deckhead above your bunk when you weren't using it.</p> <p>An unfortunate steward had to come and bring you hot water to pour into this tin bath. Fairly primitive, but no more, not very much more uncomfortable than later build World War II destroyers.</p> <p>For the sailor, too, not much difference. You got a bit more comp. So does accommodation in destroyers, I'll talk about it more when I come to offer about their accommodation, because it comes into the story. But it was pretty damned uncomfortable.</p>
02:01:05	<p><i>When did you leave Witherington. Do you remember what month, year.</i></p>

Time code	What is said
02:01:09	<p>Witherington went up, oh, yes, month, I don't. We then were sent in Witherington from Liverpool round the north, through the (inaudible) to Hull, to dock. And we docked Amos and Smith in Hull. We came down the east coast again, and back to Portsmouth.</p> <p>From there, we were to go on to Plymouth to do the next lot of gunnery practice. We got into Portsmouth and we secured alongside a south railway jetty in Portsmouth, astern of Major Mess Revenge, a battleship.</p> <p>That night there was the most stupendous air raid on Portsmouth. The biggest, I think, of any. When the air raid started, I was actually ashore with another officer, with the gunner. We came back, tried to get into the dockyard, trying to get back on the ship. But it was what was called a double red.</p> <p>If it was a double red, you weren't allowed, nobody was allowed in or out of the dockyard. The gates were closed. There we were, on the hard at Portsmouth with the bombs coming down and really dangerous they're coming down.</p>
02:02:34	<p>We went down in the air raid shelter on the hard. None of us could stand that. You could hear the bangs of the bombs going, and poor unfortunate citizens of Portsmouth down there with their children, scared stiff and the children crying and I, it's the only time I've been in a civilian air raid shelter during and air raid.</p> <p>I must say, I didn't like it, and I felt very sorry for any civilian who has to sit it out all the time. Somehow the fact of being down there with all the crashing going on around you and people crying and weeping and worrying, it was much better to be out and watching them come down.</p> <p>That's exactly what we did. The two of us got up, went up on the hard at which minute a salvo bomb landed on the brewery. Brickwood's brewery. And we rejoiced because I can remember, we danced, almost. Because we're very critical of Brickwood's brewery. They had the monopoly in Portsmouth, and the beer they brewed was disgusting. It really was foul. It got more and more disgusting, but they had the monopoly, and that's what they say.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:03:51	<p>I can remember, we used to get a taxi and drive out to get Strong's ales in a bar on the way to Southampton, rather than drink this horrible beer.</p> <p>Anyway, at that moment a fire engine came tearing along, along the heart of Portsmouth, going to the dockyard, and the gates opened, and we jumped on the back of the fire engine, and so we got into the dock yard, and back to our ship.</p> <p>I can remember, it was a very dramatic scene HMS Victory was entirely ringed with fire, and this low water sitting there illuminated by all these flames was pretty dramatic.</p> <p>When we got back on board H.M.S. Witherington, she was undamaged. But, the, I appreciated that the form of the air raid had changed. They were no longer, they'd already hit the power station and they were no longer going for the town, they were running along the jetty in order to, presumably, get H.M.S. Revenge, the battleship there.</p>
02:04:57	<p>The aircraft were all running along the line of the jetty. I reckoned we were going to get hit in due course. Why not get away from the jetty. So I got the engine up and full of steam, and told the captain we were ready to go, let's go out into the stream where it is safer.</p> <p>He rang up the duty officer, which I think was quite the right thing to do, who said no, I don't think you should do that because if a place, if they dropped mines out there, you'll only blow up on the mine and make it all worse.</p> <p>Which I suppose was a reasonable argument, so we stayed then. I went and sat in the ward room. There was nothing we could do, we couldn't fire. We had no guns that would be of any use.</p>
02:05:40	<i>Was the Revenge firing at them?</i>

Time code	What is said
02:05:44	<p>I presume so. I imagine she was using her four inch guns, yes, yes. I don't remember now. It was such a, it was very noisy at any rate and lots of bombs were dropped in the dockyard itself.</p> <p>Then we were hit. Three bombs, which must have been armor piercing bombs and they can't be very big ones. I think forty five hundred pounders. Three bombs when through the forward boiler room. They didn't go through the boiler, they didn't go through the bunkers behind it.</p> <p>They went straight down in the very small space that there is between boiler and bulkhead, where the stoker petty officer and the stoker stood as they work the valves and things for the oil flow and air supply for the boilers.</p> <p>Went straight thought he deck, thought he bottom of the ship, right through the bottom of the ship, and one of the three only because there was only one real big band, one of the three exploded underneath the ship, and lifted the ship up, right up in the air, and dropped her back in the water, and we broke her back.</p>
02:07:01	<p>It broke her back by the torpedo tubes. And the stoker petty officer, and the stoker in that were untouched. Totally, just scrambled up the ladder and came out. Very, very extraordinary. I was in an arm chair, rather like this, and I was thrown right across the ward room, arm chair and all. But I was quite undamaged.</p> <p>We then looked around our engineer officer, and our chief petty officer, our chief mechanic, we went around the ship closing all the doors. There weren't many sailors on board, actually, at the time. Closing all the water tight doors. And the captain was going around ship saying abandon ship, and we were running around the other side saying no, don't, come and close the doors.</p> <p>He made a bad decision, actually. There was no need to abandon ship, she didn't sink. We did then abandon ship and go aboard H.M.S. Revenge, and left her there, lying on the jetty with nobody on board.</p> <p>Actually, she then broke away from the jetty, drifted out into the harbour and had to be towed over and beached on the mud bank there as at the end of the harbour near Whale Island, and there she rested for several weeks afterwards.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:08:33	<p>Meanwhile, we were looked after on H.M.S. Revenge. That was my finish on Worthington. I did spend another fortnight in Portsmouth with a party looking after the ship. We used to go on board everyday and stay on board her, and then go ashore at night. She sat on the mud, leant over at low tide, and came up right at high tide and was eventually restored.</p> <p>So there, I had a bit of leave, and I was appointed as first lieutenant of H.M.S. Offa. H.M.S. Offa was then building in Fairfield's yard in Glasgow. I can't quite remember when, what stage I got up then.</p> <p>My first, I was about two to three months standing by her while she was building and then again, Diggs and in bears den then, with an extremely nice family, he was the manager of the Templeton Carpet Factory. I was unsuccessful in getting him to fit the ship with his carpets. He wouldn't do that. I don't think he was, in a position to put his firm in that position.</p> <p>But then we went, what at this time, this is at the time when I can remember we were at lunch in a pub, the officers who were standing by the ship when we got news of H.M.S. Repulse and H.M.S. Prince of Wales being sunk in the Far East.</p>
02:10:20	<p>So that will date you, whenever that was. The captain then arrived, and he was a chap called Alistair Ewing, a lieutenant commander, and quite the best captain I served under.</p> <p>He was an extremely good commanding officer. A nice little officer side building up. Eventually we commissioned and went out on sea trials and the captain asked me, when he got up, about the officers.</p> <p>The daily officers he asked, who is the engine officer, and I told him. What he like is, I said fine. He's excellent on deck, he's an ex mechanic. Very experienced, et cetera, very likable. And the doctor. He's from Glasgow. A gynecologist from the Gorbals.</p> <p>Young, very young lieutenant there. And he didn't ask about any more, and I said, don't you want to know about the other. No, he said. So long as the engineer and the doctor are pleasant personalities, then I'm all right in the ward room because they're the two that are always there.</p>
02:11:40	<p>Other officers are on watch or, but on all meals, the doctor and the engineer are the two that don't have a specific job, and they'll be there, and they're the important people in the ward room. You'll have a good ward room. And he's quite right, and they were the backbone, they were extraordinary good at mothering us, looking after us.</p> <p>Soon as commissioned, we went up to Scapa, worked up and almost as we finished the work up, we were off on our first operation. First operation we did was a Russian convoy.</p>

Time code	What is said
	Start of Film 7
02:12:14	<i>How was an Artic Convoy for you. You know, had you heard about difficult they were.</i>
02:12:20	<p>It had only just started. This was one of the very early ones. No. Now that I think of it, we don't meet at all. And we weren't very well equipped for it, either. We went on this convoy with H.M.S. Onslow, and H.M.S. Berwick, a cruiser. Certainly Berwick was around and it was one of the early ones, which, made everything go through. We were, we had no attacks, there were no air attacks in the winter.</p> <p>Quite uninterferred with. When we got to Murmansk, and what hardly made, and we never were, made to feel in the least degree welcome. We were, for example, I didn't have any callers. I did quite a few. I only want to shore once and that for an hour. We were never anywhere where, the shore was ghastly, it was a terrible place.</p> <p>We were pushed away into corners and anchored well out of the way in case there was any, infect the purity of the communist's virtue.</p> <p>Anyway, on this occasion we were anchored in Polyarny, it's called, I think. And most unsuitable place for a ship to anchor, because it was very, very deep water. I remember it well over fifty fathoms, and that's a lot of water.</p>
02:14:01	<p>Onslow and ourselves offer, went up. Onslow was our Captain D He was our senior officer, commanding the whole squadron and he found, what marked on the Russian, on the charts, as a Russian first class mooring.</p> <p>So naturally, senior officer, he took the mooring and hooked onto the buoy. We had to drop anchor. We dropped both anchors, was this enormous depth and every bit of cable we had.</p> <p>The gale then came, and gosh did it blow. It was a most stupendous gale and we sat there all night with steam up and steaming to our anchors, going slow ahead every now and then when the strain got too great, in order not to drag anchor.</p> <p>With an anchor watch, that's a chap standing on the fo'c'sle, looking at the cable and watching its movement. Onslow meantime, was happily at its moor. It didn't have to worry too much. At eight o'clock in the morning, still blowing this gale, pitch dark, of course, no, this was mid-winter.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:15:26	<p>I was in the bath, there was a bang on the door and somebody said get on the bridge quick sir, captain, Captain D made a signal saying that he needed assistance. What had happened was, H.M.S. Onslow was ashore by this time, or she wasn't quite ashore. She was so lucky. She had, was blown broadside on, onto a jetty. Not a proper jetty, one that was being build and was under construction by the Russians.</p> <p>This was just holding off, although her ASDIC dome was crunching away in the mud, the hull itself was okay.</p> <p>We raised steam, wasn't necessary, we had steam up anyway, we raised anchor and went to pick her up. Before the war, one didn't, every Monday, the fleet did general drill. When the admiral used to tell you to do this, do that, drop this anchor, take out this cage anchor in a boat and put it there. All sorts of different maneuvers you had to do in order to test your organization and your resilience.</p> <p>One of them was to tow forward. Towing forward is to lay out everything on the fo'c'sle necessary for when you are being taken in tow. That's the same as a grasp line to float over to the ship who was going to tow you to pick it up.</p>
02:17:01	<p>Along that was another line which he pulled the wire, which was a three and a half inch wire which then was hooked onto the cable and he took the cable over, or took a certain amount of cable out, and he then towed you on a three and a half inch wire and so many shackles of cable.</p> <p>This was quite an arrangement of knitting on the fo'c'sle which had to go out through the bow of the ship without everything getting caught up, flake by flake of wire, flake by flake. It never went right, never went right. Something always got in the way or somebody put their foot in the wrong place and there was always turmoil on the fo'c'sle.</p> <p>Here we were doing it for real in pitch darkness in a full gale. So we went bows on to Onslow, you got to visualize her broadside on ashore, we went, put our bow in close to her. She took the grasp line, and all the other lines and we backed slowly away while all these flake of a hundred and fifty fathoms, or whatever it was, of three and a half inch wire, went pfth, pfth, through the horse pipe.</p> <p>It all went absolutely beautifully. Nothing caught. It all went so smoothly, you wouldn't have believed it. And then we veered cable, and I suppose we get two or three shackles of cable and then backed off and towed her off broadside on, undamaged. The only way you could do that was going starboard. A stationary destroyer in a full gale can only hold itself if it's got its stern into the wind.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:19:07	<p>We had to do it with our stern into the wind and go off slowly backwards. It was beautiful Alistair handled the ship beautifully. I'd done the fo'c'sle beautifully. I was so pleased with myself, I went and got my camera.</p> <p>That was a very silly thing to do because there hardly wasn't any light at all and I thought I'd take this photograph of our senior officer being towed off from the beach by us, and it would be a triumphant photo to have. All I had was an absolute total black.</p> <p>Anyway, but we did the score because from there after, captain Onslow made sure he looked after us. He was very good to us. And he needed to be, because he never brought it this to the admiralty. He didn't want us to spill the beans either.</p>
02:20:00	<i>That was a great story.</i>
02:20:02	<p>He was a great chap. I'm very fond of that particular captain. I'm sure had he not been killed a couple of years later in [inaudible] in the Mediterranean, she was, he'd have been Percy Lord. I admired that man very much.</p>
02:20:17	<i>You said some Polyarny. What, access into Polyarny was very narrow, wasn't it. Did you go straight through to..?</i>
02:20:25	<p>I can't remember the landscape now, I'm afraid. Perhaps it wasn't Polyarny. It was a rotten place to anchor in all that depth of water. So we came back from Lemans with Berwick, not with Onslow. I don't now why. Obviously Onslow went somewhere else.</p> <p>On returning towards Scarper, off the Shetlands, we again struck a most colossal gale. The strongest gale and storm at sea that I was in my whole career. It lasted three days. We were literally heaved to off the scaries, off up, which is some rocks over there.</p> <p>In my recollection, for three days. I can't believe it could be as long as that, but it was a long time we were heaved to. We fortunately got all the officers forward. Officers lived aft. We got all the officers forward while we still could move between the front and back of the ship.</p> <p>It was so rough you, in due course, you couldn't. When the, to change the watches in the engine room, we had to do it one man at a time, every man being monitored by somebody watching him, hooked through, there was a lifeline, what were rigged all along the deck, hooked to a lifeline, rather like somebody abseiling.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:20:04	<p>He's literally ab sail without this line to get into the engine room. And then the next chap, and then the next chap. We had to watch them. But the officers, meanwhile, were all forward and two officers were to be on watch, of the seaman officers, and four off watch. The four off watch slept in the sick bay.</p> <p>There were only two bunks in the sick bay, so we had to sleep head to toe. One chap's horrible sea boot stockings in your face and you sea boot stockings in his face. We messed with the petty officers in their mess. This was a wonderful thing, actually.</p> <p>Wonderful thing, actually. Early on in the commission and it cemented that ship's company and its officers, because we mucked in with them. It was very interesting for us to live on the mess deck which is not something we've done since we were cadets in the training reserve.</p>
02:23:07	<i>Obviously, you experienced a lot of seas but how gargantuan of the seas? Did you fear for the ship?</i>
02:23:16	<p>The ship? Yes. The ship was rolling 45 degrees which is almost it's tipping point, so to speak.</p> <p>I was on watch one night on this gale, in the middle watch and I rung up the engine room to say, "Have you seen the motorboat?" "Why you asking?" I said, "Was a bit of the engine just arrived down here." I looked over the side and there was no motorboat. It had gone. The davits, it's hard to describe. The davits were very large, heavy things were absolutely flat on the deck. Completely flattened on the deck and the boats had gone. The whale on the other side didn't go but It was still in. if there's one, it wouldn't have floated. The upper deck was cleared of anything movable.</p> <p>I can remember, again, censoring a letter. We had to censor all the letters. A sailor wrote to his girlfriend, I'm breaking confidences now supposed to never say, but anyway, it was a long time. Sailor was saying to his girlfriend, "I was on the middle watch last night. I was starboard lookout. Have you ever faced your maker, because I did last night and was starboard lookout over middle watch."</p>
02:24:48	<p>That was a fair comment because that poor man, he was in the sponson on the side of the bridge, not in the middle of the ship as I was as off the watch. As the ship rolled those 45 degrees, he was almost in the water and then he's back again over the other way and wasn't much better when he went off watch, this poor chap because the weight of water on the fo'c'sle had stripped the deck. Water was seeping and more than seeping, pouring into the uppermost deck. That was awash with water. All the lockers in the mess decks then were a deck level so all of those, all the clothes wash about so all the sailor's belongings were going from one side to the other, with the mess deck, water sloshing about, no comfort, the only comforting is get in your hammock because at least that was above this sloshing water. Very, very unpleasant.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:25:59	<i>It's amazing when you think of all the great oceans of the Earth, the biggest storm that you experienced was off Scotland.</i>
02:26:07	Was off the Shetlands, yes. Off the northwest of the Shetlands. It really was rough.
	Start of Film 8
02:26:16	<i>Okay, so you survived the storm.</i>
02:26:19	<p>We gone back to Scapa pretty broken, the ship, it was swept clean almost and that immediately that we were to go off on an operation. We managed to get a whaler before we went but not a motorboat. I presume we got the deck patched up, the leaking foredeck but I don't remember how.</p> <p>We then had a very short time in Scapa doing this and went to the Shetland Islands on Boxing Day. No, must have been Christmas Eve and got ready to run an operation. I can't remember what it was called but anyway, it was a raid on the west coast of Norway in Nordfjord, an island. I've forgotten the island's now but Vaagso V-a-a-g-s-o-o with a couple of dots over one of the o's. I forget how you pronounce it, with HMS Onslow, Oribi and ourselves, three ships in the same flotilla and the Princess Beatrice and Prince something or other, two Belgian cross channel steamers that have been converted into commando assault ships and HMS Kenya, senior officer and another Hunt-class destroyer, a name I've forgotten.</p> <p>We didn't do it on ... We were supposed to sail and actually I think do the operation on Christmas day but we couldn't sail. It's fortunate because it was still pretty rough because the landing ships, the Princess Beatrice had gotten damaged in the gale and they needed a little time in harbour to sort themselves out.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:28:24	<p>Then, we went off and arrived off the Vaagso Island, off Nordfjord at crack of dawn, just as the sun was rising. Quite calm actually by then. There was Atlantic swell but otherwise quite calm but simply beautiful, the mountains and fiords of Norway being lit up as the sun rose. We were there just about at sunrise. To our surprise went in line ahead, Kenya leading, Onslow, Kenya, us and then the landing ships up the fiord and nothing happening. Nobody firing but us, nobody apparently having noticed us. Sunrise was very late at that time.</p> <p>We were still in darkness or virtual darkness going out at the fiord at 8:00 when a dreadful thing happened in my ship. Somebody had turned the ship's radio to the BBC Eight O'clock News but accidentally switched it through to the loudspeaker on deck and suddenly in this quiet, I say it was calm, in the quiet as we were gliding up this fiord, out bellowed "This is BBC Eight O'clock News and this is Alphonso Delringus," before somebody squashed it but that didn't appear to wake the German's either. A little bit further up the fiord, somebody woke up and we did get somebody fired a machine gun or something at us and actually hit the torpedo gunner, wounded him quite nastily. He's out of action, in our sickbay from then on but didn't do any other damage or anything to the ship.</p> <p>We went up and anchored off this island. Mulloy Island, it was. M-u-l-l-o-y, I think it's spelled. The commando's went ashore. We supported them with bombardment.</p>
02:32:02	<p>Interesting bombardment, the only one I've ever done with reduced charges. You reduced the charge and the shell going out of the gun is a whoosh. It went out with a sort of pop and you could see the shell in the air as it did itself a howitzer trajectory with a very low charge. This meant you could, as close as you were firing close range and you could do it very accurately in front of the soldiers going ashore. I don't think we engaged with them anyway. We did this creeping barrage with our guns in front of them and then took on our odd targets. That was one gun that started firing and actually did hit HMS Kenya. Didn't do him much damage and kept on popping up during the course of the morning.</p> <p>What did we have to do then? We were there to provide supporting fire for a while. We weren't caught on when Oribi and Onslow had gone right into the harbor. As they got in there, so a German convoy arrived from the north. They had a great time sinking all this convoy, unless it ran ashore actually but we weren't in that action at all. We were out in the fiord but one of the ships that we were escorting this little convoy came down the outside and this was an interest in the north of Mulloy island where as we come into the south of Mulloy Island. This ship went down the outside, was reported doing so and we HMS Offa were told to go out and sink it or capture it or do it something. It was a little sort of ex-Dutch coastline, converted to an anti-aircraft ship for escorting coastal convoys with a German naval crew.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:33:30	<p>As we came out of the fiord, it realized it was in trouble. I was steering west at its full speed which is about 12 knots. We chased it and fired at it and hit it in the engine room, actually but unfortunately didn't stop the engine. We killed the coxswain so there was nobody at the wheel but the engine was still running. The vessel was doing 12 knots and off it went. The crew had abandoned ship meanwhile.</p> <p>As we went by them, we threw them life rafts because they weren't going to last long in that water but then went on to catch that ship. We spent rather a long time lassoing this vessel which wasn't easy because there was this long swell from the Atlantic and she was going 12 knots. Every time we came up alongside her, she put the wheel and once she rammed us or it went the other way and she ran away from us. There was nobody at the wheel, remember, and it was just the movement of the ship that spun the wheel one way or spun it the other.</p> <p>We eventually got and tied her alongside and got her some sailors and officers on board but the trouble was there was a fire in the engine room and they couldn't get down there to stop the They first had to put the fire out. That took a little time. Still while the darn thing had its engines running. That was effective now the engines were stopped. We then could search her. We had a man on board, we didn't really know what he was there for but he was actually from naval intelligence. He was there to get the Enigma machines if we ever found any and we did find one in the ship and all the books giving the codes which was very valuable except that whoever tied the knot on the bag as we were hauling it up into HMS Offa, it went and the bag went. However, the machine was saved. We had no idea what was in the bag. We've no idea that we'd lost something so valuable. No idea at all. We didn't even know what this ... We didn't see the machine. That come up in a bag, too. We didn't know what we'd actually got.</p>
02:36:12	<i>Was that before they captured an Enigma machine...</i>

Time code	What is said
02:36:15	<p>No. It wasn't the first, no. Just another one. I think several were got on that raid. We then had to sink the ship and put some charges on board and then, it sank.</p> <p>Then, we went back for the wrenched survivors. Of course, the only ones that were still alive were four on their own raft. None of the people in the water had got to the raft we dropped. None of them. They'd expired very quickly. I don't know how many of the crew was but there were four left in this raft. We got along side and got them out except one man who was in the stern of this thing, absolutely mad, crazy and waving his arms and shouting. His mind hand gone completely, he broken down. He wouldn't come on his and I was about to put somebody in the raft to drag him out, when a bombing raid started and an aircraft started bombing us. The captain said to let it go and I had to cast the raft off and this poor chap. It's still a rather disagreeable memory.</p> <p>One of the German sailors collapsed on arrival on deck. We rushed the doctor to him, did his best with this poor chap but sadly, he didn't survive. That chap died. There must have been five of them because I think we had four prisoners we brought back home.</p>
02:38:11	<p>Later in the afternoon, I had to bury this chap. He was there on the quarterdeck. The sailmaker had sewed him up traditionally in a hammock, last stitch through the nose. He was a real old sailor, this one. It would have been done absolutely correctly, I'm sure. I said, "What's his name, somebody?" because I need to know his name before I say something over this poor boy. I looked at his name tag around the neck and it was Martin Luther. Of all the names! I'm a Roman Catholic. I buried Martin Luther.</p> <p>Remember, I was rather shocked it was Martin Luther. I hesitated. Obviously I hesitated long enough for the able seaman sailmaker alongside me to dig me in the ribs and say, "Come on, sir. Say a prayer over him. He's some mother's son." That's right, so I did. That was sad. It's a very good looking young officer, an extremely nice looking young boy.</p> <p>The other ones, we got back to England. There were no other, the other ships came out of [inaudible] Raid was over and we all went back to Scapa</p>
02:39:44	<i>Is that still one of the most troubling experiences of your maritime..</i>
02:39:47	Sorry.
02:39:48	<i>Would that still be one of the most troubling experiences of your naval history, do you think?</i>
02:39:53	It was a big, exciting day. I don't know how troubled I was. I was troubled by the deaths from this German ship, actually.

Time code	What is said
02:40:05	<i>That's what I meant.</i>
02:40:06	That was horrid to see those people in the water and realize they didn't even succeed in swimming one yard before they've died. There were quite a few in the water. I don't know how many of the crew but there were four or five in the water.
	Start of Film 9
02:40:26	<i>You got back to Scapa.</i>
02:40:32	<p>Then, the Offa was employed successively on Russian convoys, various ones. We must have done another winter convoy because I can remember being in Murmansk with HMS Kenya this time, the same ship as we'd had on the raid. With HMS Kenya when the whole of the bay at whatever it is we were in off Murmansk ice up. You could walk on it. It was thick enough for that.</p> <p>That's a good story because the Russians gave HMS Kenya a reindeer, of all the silly things. The story goes, this beast was on their quarterdeck. Some say they felt sorry for it. There it was, poor beast on its own on the quarterdeck and it thought it would get up a cold so he gave it a blanket which he get and properly expired. Whether it's apocryphal or not, I don't know but that's the story. The sailor who thought a reindeer in the arctic would get cold, gave it a blanket.</p>
02:41:46	<i>How cold did you find it?</i>
02:47:48	<p>Surprising thing is ... It was very cold. We iced up actually solid. We had chaps chipping, having to chip the ice. The ship was getting very top heavy with all the guns, solid lumps of ice, the gun, equipment and everything. Even had to have a chap at the gun all the time and it gets depressing and training it so that the mechanics didn't ice up.</p> <p>I wanted to shout at a chap at the fo'c'sle about something and I picked up a megaphone which of course is metal and put it up and touched my mouth with the metal, the megaphone and burnt myself beautifully, a great burst all around my lips. You couldn't touch any metal with your bare hands. You stuck to it if you did.</p> <p>We weren't very well equipped for the cold. Inside of the ship, only really got warm. Your cabin only got warm, when there was enough ice formed inside from your breath and the humidity to turned into an igloo. Up to an inch thick of ice inside, on the deck head, on the bulkheads, on the ship side. Actually not so much from the ship side because the sea kept it just, that much slightly warmer but deck head.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:43:27	<p>That, you can imagine was very unpleasant when it thawed. Your whole cabin was soaked. Your bunk was soaked. The place was dripping with water. At the same for the sailors on the mess deck only worse. The whole deck there frozen up. I was lucky. I had bought myself [inaudible] a sort of suit rather like the zip-up thing Churchill used to wear but this was lined with kapok which would have kept me afloat if we'd fallen in and padded me against the cold. It was very good against the cold. It was kept around your wrist and had a head thing, too. It was Mr. ??? survival suit, it was called. I was dressed and just a lot of other things underneath it and I was pretty warm and with leather sea boots with a sheepskin lining was fairly tolerable.</p> <p>Trouble was, though, sheepskin boots, your feet got warm in them inevitably and you therefore sweated. They then got damp and then they froze. You couldn't win. You have to dry one's sea boots out in the cabin as the cabin was pretty moist anyway, that wasn't very good.</p> <p>Your clothes were damp and it was pretty unpleasant for us. We used to have an arrangement whereby the messenger used to bring up baked potatoes onto the bridge. You put one baked potato in each hand and put your hand in your duffle coat pockets and warm yourself and your hands up and then, eventually eat the baked potato. They were very good hand warmers. It was quite a nice routine.</p>
02:45:30	<i>Obviously you knew of the PQ-17. Are there any convoys that really stand out to you?</i>
02:43:37	<p>PQ-17 and PQ-18 is the one that stands out. The other one stands out from being cold and being rough and for getting lost in it or ships getting lost in the Arctic.</p> <p>One poor thing we had, we saw very little of the Russian Navy. I can remember one convey, they did join the escort on leaving Kola Inlet in that. We had two Russian destroyers with us. Then darkness fell and daylight came. Never saw them again. They'd vanished. I don't think they're very good at station keeping in a convoy in pitch blackness.</p>
02:46:20	<i>When you were building up to PQ-17, was it very apparent that things were getting worse or was it the quiet before the storm?</i>
02:46:29	<p>You know it was pretty foolish to send a convoy through in broad daylight with no darkness to protect you at all. There had been one or two quite severe battles in convoys prior to this. Yes. I do think we weren't particularly worried. You managed these things. No, I don't think you looked ahead too much. It was a mistake to do so really.</p>
02:47:12	<i>Was Offa on PQ-17, then?</i>

Time code	What is said
02:47:16	<p>Yes. We must have Hvalfjorour which appeared on the south of Iceland before that. Quite a big escort, PQ-17 with HMS Keppel as the senior officer with Captain Jackie Broome as the escort commander.</p> <p>All the escorts were in Hvalfjorour including the Pozarica and ... I've forgotten. It's HMS Palomares I think it is. Anyway, two converted anti-aircraft ships. We sailed there and joined the convoy to the west of Bear Island. Bear island is fairly well known as a landmark in the Arctic all of its own.</p> <p>Good weather. We joined the convoy, just quite reasonable escort around it. We went past Bear Island. There was some controversy or some difference of opinion, I think about which course we should steer to try to get to Murmansk as quick as possible or go safe as possible, namely up by the ice shelf. It was just at the time when this decision had to be made. We had the first air raid. It was quite a considerable air raid, quite a lot of torpedo bombers. We did very well, we thought. They had, I think a couple of ships hit but again, we had enough confidence after that air raid to feel quite secure. "We'll get this convoy through." When we weren't unduly worried by it.</p>
	Start of Film 10
02:49:38	<i>Where was the Offa at this time? Was it south of the convoy or the north side?</i>
02:49:43	<p>We were for that particular we were on the south side. Or were we? I think we were on the south side. We're steaming towards these airplanes which popped up over the horizon like a lot of little mosquitoes coming, because visibility was tremendous at that time.</p> <p>One ship that was hit was called Macbeth I think and we went along side of her and took all her officers and crew off. They were our guests for the rest of the trip, very welcome guests because the captain ... She was a Panamanian ship actually. The captain had brought the ship's safe with all the cash in it with him. He insisted on paying all their ways and we at the same time claimed from the admiralty for all these survivors we had on board. Actually, the wardroom we lived for three months for free as a result of all that.</p> <p>That ship had every nationality in its crew, that Panamanian ship. We got on perfectly all right and understood every one of them, whether they were Filipino or Italian or Dutch or Wop, except for the French Canadian. We couldn't understand him at all. None of him had the French that understood French Canadian. He, poor chap, was somewhat isolated.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:51:24	<p>The others that was the air raid, we felt quite pleased with ourselves. If you remember, there was the USS Wainwright and this was July the fourth, American Independence Day. USS Wainwright came on and did a tremendous barrage at these airplanes. Quite effective actually, very good antiaircraft ships, those. She and Tuscaloosa. Was it Wainwright? Sorry. Wainwright was a destroyer but anyway, she put up a great display firing at these ... I can't remember how many were shot down but there were some shot down. Wainwright then fueled in the convoy and then went back to join the cruisers. The cruisers which were the Tuscaloosa, London and one other British Town-class cruiser.</p> <p>It was then these dreadful, dreadful signals around and three signals around in quick succession. The first one saying that the convoy was to disperse, I think. No, sorry. The first one said the cruisers were to retire at a high-speed to the west. Second said the convoy was to disperse. The third said the convoy was to scatter. All of them were with high priority, emergency, top secret, all the rest of it. They literally burnt in our hands. It's hard to describe our feeling. We were quite upish after this air raid. For no reason, suddenly these three signals came. There could only be one reason. The Tirpitz was coming over the horizon but she wasn't. There was nothing inside. Just this beautiful day and the Arctic summer.</p> <p>We naturally assumed Tirpitz was at sea or Scharnhorst, Hipper, whoever and in the way towards us. I expected it to come over the horizon at any minute and it never did. I can remember we sat on the bridge with these three singles, a captain, a navigator and I and no doubt others. "What do we do? We can't do this. What do we do?" We debated breaking down or pretending to break down and dropping back and going to rejoin the convoy but we didn't do that. We were absolutely baffled by this.</p>

Time code	What is said
02:54:44	<p>When we were told to join HMS Keppel which we were and we joined the cruisers and the convoy went off as individual ships, we still sat down bothering and worrying, "Why we were doing this?" and, "We shouldn't be doing this," and, "We should have stayed with the convoy." We'd have all got sunk and won VCs no doubt but I'm sure we should have stayed with the convoy. I'm sad we didn't. In that way I'm sad they didn't make up our minds to do so. I'm sure it's the right thing to do. I don't know.</p> <p>I can remember vividly the scene at that time and the picture of my captain on the bridge worrying and us all worrying with him. Anyway arctic mist. It's broad daylight, little flows of ice coming by us that were small spits of ice. Not icebergs but looking beautiful in this serene flat calm glassy sea. Then, we were quitting. It's the most horrible recollection.</p> <p>That's what we did. We came back to Scapa and we were mustered, all of us, from every ship on board, flag officer, destroyer's flag ship, whatever that was, can't remember and addressed by him, obviously the admirals were extremely worried about what's happened and trying to reassure us that we'd all done the right thing and this was great and whatnot. It was very unconvincing. I can remember going away feeling even worse after we've been buttered up, so to speak. "Don't worry, get on with the war," stuff. That's all we could do but that's such a disagreeable thing to be a part of, such a horrible thing to be part of but in we were.</p>
02:57:23	<i>When you remember that scene, being on the bridge, how far away was the convoy at that point?</i>
02:57:29	We were sailing 20 knots west. They were going their seven knots east so you were opening 30 miles an hour.
02:57:39	<i>Seen another load of Stukas coming at you?</i>
02:57:44	No.
02:57:45	<i>No? Fortunately, you didn't witness any such...</i>

Time code	What is said
02:57:47	<p>No, no. Didn't witness any of the horrible destruction. No. No, you have to decide pretty quickly. Doesn't take long to get over the horizon when you're going 20 or 25 knots. The convoy were probably 25 knots.</p> <p>Then after that, PQ-18. Here, we had the most enormous escort. We had this same admiral, Bob Burnett who tried to ... had a difficult job and tried to cheer us up after PQ-17. He was a senior officer of HMS Scylla, a cruiser. We pushed those convoys through with very little loss. From my very low level of a young lieutenant, I was very critical of that convoy. I thought we could have got it through with no losses had the admiral handled the escort and the positioning of it more intelligently.</p> <p>We used to have a convoy diagram. You were told to go to this position or that position or that one. You could switch people from different positions. Everyone would know exactly which place to go to around the convoy from these different standing positions. He had these positions. We were all in, I can't know how they were let up now but we were all in our particular stations round the convoy, each one being a lettered position and they didn't change.</p>
02:59:20	<p>Most of the losses came in from submarines coming in on the port quarter where there was quite a gap and firing into the convoy from that direction and catching a ship on the left wing of the convoy again and again. An submarine captain put his periscope up... knew where he was going to be because he was always in the same place. I thought this was very mistaken.</p> <p>We didn't lose very many ships. There was one enormous air raid which was the most spectacular air raid I think I've seen at sea. I think there was something like 40 bombers. In this, I happened to be looking at the horizon at the time and these bomber popped over it. Suddenly they were none there and suddenly, there were all these little dots in the air coming at us. They pushed their attack in very, very close. They were brave flyers. They flew their airplanes at zero height with their torpedoes under them right in over the escorts and into the convoy.</p> <p>They disengaged at this time. They were coming from the south. I was on the north side of the convoy. Near us at the moment, I'm think, was a tanker. I never remember to take photos during the war. I got my camera out actually and I had it actually up to my eye, useless old camera. An aircraft with a bomb dropped his torpedo in the middle of the convoy. At the same time, the aircraft was hit by somebody's anti-aircraft fire and his wing caught fire. The aircraft started to cartwheel, last all trim and it cartwheeled. It was over the top of the tanker at the moment of its torpedo struck the tanker. The tanker exploded in one huge bang, a colossal bang. The aircraft was lost in this crash and the sound. When everything fell to the sea, there was absolutely nothing. Nothing at all. Ten thousand ton ship one minute, nothing the next. An airplane on fire one minute over it and that gone the next. I haven't got my camera. I was so shocked by what I saw, I didn't click my camera.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:02:37	<i>I think you'd be excused for seeing that. It's quite a scene, isn't it?</i>
03:02:43	Yes. It was very ...
03:02:45	<i>Where was that?</i>
03:02:47	I suppose we were about half a mile, something like that.
03:02:53	<i>Did you feel any explosion like that?</i>
03:02:56	Yes. I felt that one. It was a big bang. They lost the odd ship there and done.
	Start of Film 11
03:03:05	Interesting that you were now seeing and observing and recognizing good and bad decisions. You obviously coming a confidence. Did you feel the need to be the captain at this point? Did you ... Was there ...
03:03:24	That was my aim.
03:03:25	<i>Yes, no but there's sometimes seminal moment, isn't there where you think, "I better step up now."</i>
03:03:29	I don't know whether I ever had that moment. I don't remember getting that moment. It's all very simple to me but a captain's job was to keep his ship afloat. That's his first job was keep afloat. No damn good if it was anything other than afloat so his first job was to keep it afloat but to keep it afloat you have to have some tactical ... Now, start and maneuver and place your ship and have some idea what the enemy might be doing. That's anti-submarine tactics. If you're doing an anti-submarine screen and your screening a convoy and you're senior officer of that screen, you maneuver that convoy the best anti-submarine tactics that you can think of. I don't think Admiral Burnett had any. I don't think he had enough. He's dead a long time now. Poor man.
03:04:37	<i>Tell me any more moments from Offa. I'm sure there's lots and lots. I also do want to hear about...</i>
03:04:45	No. Next thing Offa did was go down and cover the American landing in Casablanca in North Africa.
03:04:56	<i>Operation Torch?</i>

Time code	What is said
03:04:57	<p>Yes. We were a mini cog in that wheel. I don't think the Americans wanted us very close anyway. We were miles out in the Atlantic doing absolutely nothing while they landed in Casablanca. We went to the Azores and fueled and filled up with. I don't know. It's awfully lucky we didn't go into action, actually, because all our magazines and things were full of bananas and pineapples and all of the fruit that the sailors could buy in the Azores in our 24 hours fueling.</p> <p>I know I have a few medals as a result of this last war. That's my most bogus medal. I have the Africa medal because my ship took part in the Africa landing. It sat out in the Atlantic, hardly even seeing the shore. That was its contribution to the landing. The most bogus little color on my chest. Anyway, I've got other bogus ones, too.</p>
03:06:03	<p><i>When did you leave the Offa? When did you know that you were going to be made a captain? What are the circumstances around that?</i></p>
03:06:09	<p>After the North Africa landing, Offa went to the same places I'd been before in Witherington at Amos and Smith dock in Hull for a short refit. I was relieved as first lieutenant then. I went command court courses in the various schools in Portsmouth and the tactical school in Liverpool. There was a little tactical course there, very good one actually.</p> <p>Then, in February of 1943 I went down to Sheerness and took over HMS Cotswold. By the way, sorry on the way there. I already said I'm a Roman Catholic and I'm worried. Here I am is captain of a ship with no chaplain on board. What do I do on Sundays with my Protestant flock On the way south in London, I went to the Jesuit Church in Palm Street and consulted a Jesuit priest there who said, "What did the regulations say?" I said, "The regulations say the captain shall conduct the divine service in the absence of captain, captain shall provide service or on civil time Sundays or words to that effect." "It's quite clear then. You'll do it." That was fine and I'm very unusual, Roman Catholics in those days. Roman Catholics did not participate in Anglican service in any way. Many priests would be horrified. Well, we're horrified when they learned what I was doing it.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:08:05	<p>Anyway, that's byway of ... I took them onto the ship. Gale seemed to film my conversation. It was blowing very heavily that night and the old captain was still on board. I joined the ship. He spent the night on board turning over, talking to me and while he was talking to me, the ship was pecking away at this buoy. I can't remember there's a phrase for it. I've forgotten it now. It was a naval phrase for war, what was happening, but the ship has a buoy with a very short length of cable out. Was in the gail, pecking at it, so to speak. I said, "Surely shouldn't you lay out a bit more cable?" He said, "Oh, no. It should be all right," so I wasn't yet in command.</p> <p>Then later, suddenly there was a really big snatch and the cable broke. Fortunately he had two on so we held the other one but this one which was too ... I remember David Ingham, his name was, he said, "Bill, would you like to go up in the fo'c'sle?" I said, "No. I'm not in command yet. It's still your ship. Up you go." And in the gail, off he went and did it. And re-secured us to the buoy In the morning, he went and I took command.</p>
03:09:50	<p>It's interesting. I worried terribly, my mind, about the first time you do anything. The first time you take the ship to sea. I spent a quite a lot that night with that ship visualizing how it's going to be in the next morning when I did take her to sea. I did take her straight to sea the next day and all the maneuvers I'd have to do and the wonderful ship handling, I'd have to indulge him to get the ship to sea because when we were alongside another destroyer anyway, the tide would be against the wind. We'd be bound to each other. I'd have a jog. All the things go through your mind.</p> <p>The event, I went on the bridge and I said, "Ring our main engines." I said, "Let go your ... You're on a main wire to the buoy. Taking the cable in." I said, "Let go the buoy, let go the head boat," because we attached to the ship alongside by abreast like ... The tide took the ship out. They'd go off aft out of Sheerness harbour. The only order I had to give was half rev both. All the things I worked out beforehand and there we are. I had to use some of those things now with cases but then it was so easy. That was our start in Cotswold.</p>
03:11:27	<p><i>How did you feel as a man when you take over a ship like that? What's it feel like? You've been aiming for this moment. You've got ...</i></p>

Time code	What is said
03:11:35	I don't know. I don't remember. I really don't remember. I was probably too excited to think about it anyway. It was very exciting. Then, suddenly very calm because it was so easy. The Hunt-class destroyers, Cotswold was a Hunt, were beautiful little ships. They were twin screw and handled easily. They were excellent to make you learn. They were just the sort of ship that pity we haven't got now. For people to learn on because I do think you need to learn how to handle. That was the ideal. About 120 men, something like that, quite small ship's company, two twin forward anti-aircraft gun. One firing one aft. Nothing else. Depth charges and ASDIC but no torpedoes. I'm quite sure range and 25 knots were the maximum screen, ideal for coastal convoy which is what they were used for.
03:13:00	<i>Can I ask you, do you take a man of two men or do you take anyone with you when you take command of the ship or do you take the crew that's there?</i>
03:13:09	<p>No. One of that. No. I did once take a man with me but that's one of my steward for when I was commander in chief but not when I was captain of a ship. There were, now that I think, there were senior officers who took chaps with them from quite far back which something I always disapproved of. I thought you should take what you're given and always hark back to Lord Byron and Nelson. This really was my guide in this. Nelson fought Trafalgar when he was point, off you go to remain train your fleet again, went and saw the First Lord, Lord Byron. Byron asked him who he'd like to have. He said, "Send who you will, my lord. They are all made of the same stuff." I can't remember what the phrase is but my motto always was, "Send who you will."</p> <p>On the whole, this is not bad advice. I think that if you're an admiral anyway, we have a secretary who you like and take them on with you, take them on with you again. Take them on with you again. I lasted as long as I did with it and in many ways, I don't think it was a good idea myself. I think he should have other voice behind his ear advising him rather than the one he liked to know and got used to and who got used to him. I'm an exception in this and as an admiral, I've followed for the rule, I have different men every time.</p>
	Start of Film 12
03:15:03	<i>Where did you go with Cotswold all, then?</i>
03:15:06	Cotswold, up and down the east coast again. I was back on that same run, not much different than 1940, three years before when I was doing it in Wolsey. We either were on patrol off the east coast and they were patrol lines. The convoy route ran northwards from Sheerness up and near and off Harwich, they turned right and went out to the East back north, back west again and then up north. That was a dog eared one going off, the southern convoy came straight down. When convoy passed in the night, so to speak, they passed quite far apart. They weren't going to be barging into each other because the swept channel where they wide enough for two convoys to pass each other within the channel so all the crossovers took place by this device.

Time code	What is said
03:16:20	<i>Was it northerly convoys generally the empties?</i>
03:16:25	<p>Yes. They were empties. Some of them, they've been carrying things but the southern convoy were the loaded one as I was taking coal mostly down to London from Newcastle.</p> <p>You're either on patrol on those routes or you were escorting the convoy. The convoy came down from Rosyth with an escort from Rosyth and we then picked as the southern escort, we then picked them up. We take a convoy north overnight and pick up a south bound convoy as it came down its route and take that down to south end or to Sheerness but south end was the terminus of the convoys as far as we were concerned.</p> <p>You did this for four nights. That was four sleepless nights because you had to be on the bridge most of the time then you got a short time in harbor, either in Harwich or in Sheerness. Depended upon where you quit the last convoy. Sorry about one comment. My wife used to come down to Sheerness every now and then. I knew that we were going to have a few days in in Sheerness after I've done my stint of convoys and I knew that we were going to have to do some practice shoots, that's something but we would be around Sheerness so I rang down, she come down to the Fountain hotel of Sheerness.</p>
03:18:13	<p>I was escorting the convoy, came into Harwich and next evening, I was to go out and escort another convoy. The weather blew up. It was a rough and the convoys were cancelled. Then, I was stuck in Harwich and my wife was in Sheerness.</p> <p>Actually, at the moment that they canceled the convoy, I was on a slip rope ready to go to sea with steam up. I sipped the buoy and I went out of Harwich. I went thumping as far as I could toward Sheerness. I then got a signal of the commander in chief saying, "Return to Harwich." I held onto this signal until I got more than half way down. I said, "Since I'm down near the area of Sheerness than Harwich, I intend to go to Sheerness." I got away with it. I got into Sheerness and they gave me a birth. I went and joined my wife in the Fountain Hotel.</p> <p>We'd hardly got to sleep when the telephone rang. Next morning at 8:00, I was in the Captain D's office. Was given a proper ranting over, quite rightly actually, but I got away with it. He didn't know about my wife being in the hotel. Quick site over mind. I did this because I knew I was having to do some exercises. My excuse was, I knew I was going to be doing some shoots and exercises the next day off Sheerness so I needed to come south to do it. He happened to come in for a drink to the hotel in lunchtime and met my wife. He never said a word. He was a very good man. He never said a word. Anyway, I got away with it.</p>
03:20:17	<i>That is a lucky escape, isn't it? You've had a few! A few lucky ones.</i>

Time code	What is said
03:20:21	Yes, I was lucky there. That was a lovely ship. I was very happy in that ship but the real thing, big thing we did and the ship was to be there at D-Day.
03:20:34	<i>How much did you know about the build up to D-Day? What did you know as...</i>
03:20:38	I knew a conservative amount because as captain, I got the orders.
03:20:41	<i>When did you first know that It was first happening? Do you remember? How far in advance did a captain...</i>
03:20:49	<p>You knew it was not far off. For all the things, the preparations that were happening, it obviously wasn't far. We didn't know when it was going to happen. I don't know how far ahead of the actual day, I knew I was going to be on it. It did me a good service, actually, because I was gone married in June, '43, soon after I've taken over command of this ship. My daughter was born on the first of May, '44 and by great good chance, my ship was docked in preparation for D-Day, just the week after our birth. Did I knew by then, D-Day? I don't think I knew. I must have guessed because we were put into a dock and we were not due to be docked. We had our bottom scrubbed.</p> <p>Anyway, I had a few days leave and I got to Hatfield where my wife was in a nursing home and saw this baby at one week old or thereabouts and came back to the ship. The orders were enormous. You no idea the size of the operation orders. Every single adventure could possibly have, it was an amazing, amazing document. I had quite a lot of time to read them before I was allowed to ... In fact, I wasn't allowed to tell anybody else about them.</p> <p>We then went from Sheerness down to Portsmouth and it was perfectly obvious then that the invasion was on whether you had the orders or not because the whole place was stuffed with ships and from there, I used to anchor every day in the Solent, with stern to the wall at Fort Gilkicker, Fort Gilkicker is just outside the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. We sat there. I was Force G, that's Gold Beach. We go out with the other ships that were doing this job, [inaudible] and Cattistock, which were the other two, all from my flotilla and did the rehearsals took place Studland Bay and the landings were for that Studland Bay beach and we had rehearsed, pretending to bomb Normandy, actually aiming our guns into Studland Bay.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:23:47	<p>Those exercises gave me a nightmare, silly nightmare. Adjacent to my running to Studland Bay somewhere, there was shallow patch. Had a buoy on it and our way past it, for some reason I started to dream that I was going to go aground on that shallow patch. I never went anywhere near that shallow patch but I had sleepless nights for quite a while while this practice was going on, that I was going to go aground on that blasted piece of ground. I didn't.</p> <p>Next thing we did was go to Exbury, Rothschild's, magnificent place and garden. This is end of May, early June, to be briefed and all the azalea and rhododendrons were out. The place was absolutely glorious. I don't remember much about it. We were briefed then on what we had to do. The only thing I do remember is sitting in those glorious gardens and the scent of those azaleas.</p> <p>Back in the ship, we had a slight disaster then, just before D-Day when the ship was, as I said, strung to the wall and that meant that when the tide went out, it didn't go out up and down the ship, it went out a beam of a ship so the tide was pushing underneath the bottom of the ship and sailors were skylarking and the young Stoker fell overboard.</p>
03:25:46	<i>What was skylarking?</i>

Time code	What is said
03:25:45	<p> Fooling about. They were sparring, playing, whatever you like, on the iron deck by the torpedo tubes. I would say, it's about five foot of deck width, not very wide. He went over the guard rails and in, the side was slucing and he went into the water under the ship and he never came out the other side. Several sailors dived in to try to get him but couldn't find him and he was lost. That was very sad. He's terribly on my conscious, that boy. I have no idea who he was now. Just before D-Day, we sailed next day, I think and all the business of going to Normandy and the excitement and drama of that event, I totally forgot this boy. I never wrote to his parents which I should have done. I never got in touch with his family. It absolutely went out of my mind completely. I remain ashamed of this particular ... Somebody should have reminded me but they didn't. Yeah. </p> <p> Anyway, then eventually, we, as you know, everyone knows it was can- We nearly sailed and it was canceled. We hadn't yet sailed. Then, we sailed on the night of the 5th of June with the minesweepers. I think the other ship was with me was a, if I had a Pytchley and Cattistock. I suppose they were all with me, Pytchley being the senior one of the three. We escorted the minesweepers over to Normandy. They swept, this was the first sweeping of the swept channels as they were called. </p> <p> We got off the beachhead, about three miles off the beachhead, I suppose, at about 3:00 in the morning. Then, we stopped and went to one side and the minesweepers went on sweeping the channel into the beachhead and sweeping the assault areas where the ships would have to anchor. How far off shore were we? I suppose about three miles off shore. Absolutely nothing was happening. We anchored and we sat at anchor for two hours watching airplanes going over and watch bombs falling in France. Absolutely nothing happening around us. That wasn't all we expected. It was a sort of colossal anti-climax, very happy one but an anti-climax. </p>

Time code	What is said
03:28:56	<p>Then, at the crack of dawn, I don't know what time now. We weighed anchor and met the incoming landing ships and craft as they came down the swept channels and took up our positions in between the various columns of landing craft. Going in with them right up to the beachhead. Our job initially was to demolish the wall behind the beach so the vehicles can get breakthrough and also the obstacles on the beach but particularly the wall behind the beach. Whether we achieved that to the satisfaction of the army, I've no idea. When I went to shore later, I had to look and it was hard to tell how successful we'd been and what breeches we made and what breeches someone else had made by some other means.</p> <p>Then, this is very impressive actually. All these rows of craft in beside you with particular the landing craft rockets, they were the tank landing craft but instead they had batteries of rockets in them and they fired these off into salvos onto the beach. It looked from where I was as though nobody could possibly survive on the beach for that but of course people did survive and German's did survive in the area and a lot of the obstacles were not destroyed. It was very impressive indeed. We were banging in with our guns at our various targets but then of course, when the landing took place, we stopped our bombardment and were scheduled to take on any targets on call from shore. We were in touch with the forward observation officers. We got various calls. I don't remember what they were for. I do remember firing at a particular battery which I went to see the other day when I was in Normandy, went and had a look at it. It didn't look too battered but we fired at it.</p>
03:31:30	<i>Which battery?</i>
03:31:32	The one at longues sur mer
03:31:35	<i>longues sur mer</i>
03:31:37	<p>longues sur mer battery? I can't remember what the German's called it but it was behind the Gold beach. I was pretty sure it was one we were banging at while we're going in. We then sat for the rest of the day off the beach taking any targets we were given. There weren't many. We weren't called on very often but of course the big ships were and were getting in and Rodney and Sheffield and the other cruisers. I could see them. They were just behind us firing away when we didn't have very much. Thank god. It'd been a shame. I had much more ammunition left after that than I think I ought to have had. I ought to have more but the targets weren't offered us.</p>
	Start of Film 13
03:32:33	<i>How much could you see of the actual beaches? Could you see progress or could you see...</i>

Time code	What is said
03:32:38	<p>You could see quite a lot. In fact, at one time, there was an 88 millimeter mobile gun that was [inaudible] the breach. He was behind a sort of butt of land to the right of Arromanche and to see him, I had to get very close in shore to fire at him. Any orders for Operation Neptune, Hunt-class destroyers were described as dispensable so taking that as ... I went in until I was just aground. The tide was flooding. I was all right. I ducked out in order to be able to see around this bluff to get at this 88 millimeter gun which we then fired at and it stopped firing because we were firing or whether he moved somewhere else I don't know.</p> <p>Anyway, I didn't run my ship deliberately on the grounds, just touching. We sat in there firing, otherwise we were 1,500 yards off the beach. No distance. You could see to a certain amount what was going on.</p> <p>Then, in the afternoon, I was told to come back urgently to Portsmouth and wasn't urgent at all and I run back to Portsmouth. That was an interesting drive because we obviously are going back up the swept channel but everybody else is coming down it. All the follow up was pouring down it, going the opposite direction to us and this absolutely massive shipping.</p>
03:34:28	<p>I got back to Portsmouth late in the evening, went alongside the tanker and fueled and telephoned my wife actually because it's the nice thing to be able to do because she'd been completely out of touch for the fortnight. No mail was delivered. All our mail was stopped. We didn't know it but we wrote our letters dutifully but they never got through. She was getting a bit worried by then. It was lovely to talk to her.</p> <p>I was told to go to Sheerness and take a convoy from Sheerness or from south end I suppose down back to the beachhead. This I did. We went back there, collected this convoy and took it through, as we were going through the Straits of Dover, we were very heavily bombarded by the guns from Cap Gris Nez from Calais and quite accurate actually but I learned by then, you certainly weren't going to be attacked by anything other than those guns as you went through there. You certainly weren't going to be attacked by any surface ships so why the hell stay there? Why not leave the convoy to go through slowly and steam out the other side. I did but not quite soon enough because a shell fell quite close to us and there's obviously a lot of splinters on contact with ... We got a lot of splinters throughout the ship. The drill when you saw the guns firing at Cap Gris Nez was to start a stop watch and count out to, I think it was 10, whatever, 10 seconds and then over the loud speaker say, "Lie down!" and all the ship's company went flat on the deck, the bomb fell and you got up again. We did this with one unfortunate man the Chief Engine room artificer was on the loo at the time. He wasn't laying down and a splinter came through the ship and caught him in the kidney. He got a bit of shell in his kidney. My only casualty and he really ... How many ... Credit for him. He was sitting on the loo, poor man.</p>
03:36:55	<i>What is it, is a splinter actually coming through the hull of the ship?</i>

Time code	What is said
03:37:00	Yes, and quite a small splinter.
03:37:03	<i>What? A splint?</i>
03:37:05	<p>Obviously not an armor piercing shell. It was one that exploded on impact. A little bit of the shell came through the ship. Shrapnel. I'm sorry. Actually, I don't remember that was that time through or some other. I went through there very often. We took this convoy back and it was darkness by the time that I got to Piccadilly Circus was the area at the top of the from which all of the tram lines are down to the barest beachhead. Sword, Gold and all the other named beachheads. I got there at the dark and then took my convoy down the swept channel. There are so many other ships in it that I had no idea which my convoy was and which was somebody else's or what any ship was.</p> <p>There was this jumble of ships moving south in the darkness. The e-boats got in the middle of us. I ran around, dashed around, trying to find e-boats in all this. All I did when I fired a star shell to illuminate them was to illuminate more water for the e-boats to hit. That was pretty pointless. I didn't see any e-boats.</p> <p>When I got to the beachhead, I found I lost three ships. I've no idea how I could not have lost them because I lost the whole lot in around all the press of shipping that was moving. It's hard to believe and describe this mass in the darkness all trudging, trundling along to the beachhead.</p> <p>Anyway, from then on, I was part of the defense of the beachhead. You had to go out on a patrol lines at night or anchor on static patrol lines against midget submarines or e-boats or whatever's coming out.</p> <p>Again, when I was on that line, there was very little activity the nights I was there. Activity did happen and sometimes we were patrolling off Le Havre. I used to go at Le Havre, we had [inaudible] La Combattante, a Free French ship. I was very fond of the captain. We were quite good friends. I enjoyed being with him.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:40:05	<p>Then, this all went on for a long time. The next thing was to escort HMS Warspite and Erebus. Erebus was a monitor for the landings in Walcheren islands, the landings in Walcheren but we were in the swept channels to the north of lost end with not Warspite and Erebus bombarding and us doing nothing but escorting these ships and listening in and hearing the terrible, terrible hammer there was going on in Walcheren. It was a very bloody battle. The marines faced terrific opposition. I thought this was silly in a way because they had no close support, only the rocket landing ship guns. There were some landing ships with a gun in them which wasn't much fire support for the landing. The RAF never turned up because there was fog on their airfield so there was no preliminary air bombardment.</p> <p>In view of the fact that my orders said that I was expendable, HMS Cotswold was expendable, it said Hunt-class destroyers were, I asked permission from Warspite to go in because we weren't far off the shore and provide some close fire support for them. I was told, "No. Stay where you are." Entirely the right decision, I'm sure, because I'm sure there was a socking great minefield between us and Walcheren but I still think if you're expendable one day, you should be expendable the next and if you might be of use the next, you should be expended. Anyway, I wasn't ...</p> <p>That was the last operation of any sort that I took part in that ship. I went back to the east coast and back to the convoying until early November, 1944 when a relief was appointed. I took the ship out to Chatham. Actually, I took leave I got my wife on board and took her up into it, too. She was on board my lovely Cotswold on its last voyage for me and went up Chatham and left and turn over to my relief.</p>
03:42:55	<i>Was she a Chatham ship?</i>
03:42:56	Yes, she was. Yes.
03:42:57	<i>You were a Pompee Rating?</i>
03:43:00	<p>As an officer, you were nowhere. I've no base. Yes, she was a Chatham ship, actually. And went home and had some mead. I've been of war, I'd said, I'd been at sea since 1934 with odd breaks but not very long ones. I was one year married. I felt the navy owed me a little bit of home time. I thought that I was going to go to HMS Royal Alfred which was a shore establishment in Bexhill training establishment but as I walked into the office in London, the commander, then commander, his name was [inaudible] He ended up as an admiral. He said, "Just the chap." That was disaster but in a month, I was out in Delhi with an amphibious assault force on the coast. We went in and went to Burma. I was with an amphibious ... The plan off for an amphibious assault force in Burma.</p> <p>A very unhappy time.</p>

Time code	What is said
	Start of Film 14
03:44:19	<p>A most extraordinary rank. I was made acting lieutenant commander. But it's not really acting lieutenant. I was called quasi permanent acting lieutenant commander. Quasi because it didn't gain any seniority. Semi-permanent. Why was it semi-permanent? I don't know. Anyway, it was acting lieutenant commander. I got the pay, anyway, of a lieutenant commander but not any seniority for my service.</p> <p>I've joined this thing called Force W and we were based in Cox's Bazar which is in Assam, just outside Burma and very intense and we planned from this place the capture of Akyab Island which is half way between the top of the bottom as you're going to Rangoon, roughly from Kandy where Admiral Mountbatten had his headquarters, a brilliant staff officer called ????? and had a brilliant brain, actually, came out and to brief us. He sat down and dictated off his cuff no less than seven possible outline plans for taking Akyab. This is a brilliant bit of staff work. Absolutely useless because if you've got seven plans on the go, so to speak, you've never the slightest idea of which one is the one you're going to use and when you use it, it'll be too late and it was. Everything, good actually, nobody lost any lives, we've lost any lives.</p> <p>We did the assault on Akyab. The Japs had gone three days before. There wasn't a Jap there so that was a peaceful entry and the story of our lives actually. Everything we did. It was a rotten place. Wasn't a good organization. The naval secretary sat down to get the number of senior officers who were not going to get on together and then put them together when he achieved it with Force W.</p> <p>The admiral was a chap called B.C.S. Martin who was an ex lower deck very fine ex-warrant officer but I'm afraid absolutely out of his depth. He said, "Don't bother me with details." This is no good because it was combined operations. Details! You start with the detail. It's the essence of it.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:47:21	<p>I can give you one example. If you're landing Grenadier Guards as opposed to Gurkhas, you can do it on a shallower beach, because they're taller and they won't drown. It's these sort of ... "Don't bother me with the details. Just give me the big picture." He had a brilliant chief of staff, Captain Harry Bush, had won the D.S.C. at Gallipoli and another D.S.C.s and a couple of D.S.O.s in the Mediterranean. Very fine man. Very fine staff officer but he didn't get on with the admiral. All the captains didn't get on with Bush. It was an unhappy outfit.</p> <p>We did Akyab and then we went back to Delhi. Then we went back through Burma to Akyab itself. In Akyab, we planned the invasion of Ramree, Ramree Island being next island down, so to speak.</p> <p>This time, the Japs were there. It was quite a successful opposed landing. The Japanese were there in quite good strength, did oppose the landing. It was entirely successful. I was with the admiral in HMAS Napier, an Australian ship to use as the headquarter ship of that landing and then it were the admiral, the air commander commanded 224 group and General Sir Philip Christison who commanded XV Indian Corps which was the main backing corps of this landing which was done by 26 Indian Division.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:49:14	<p>As we were approaching the beach, all the landing craft were going in, the Royal Air Force was bombing inside Ramree. A flight of duck came up from the beach. Very big flight of duck. Now, the General was a well-known ornithologist. He wrote books about birds and had written a book about Indian birds. Air Commodore, the Earl of Bandon, Bandon was known as the Bandon Earl and was a great shot. He could shoot anything out of the sky so when these birds, don't know how many they are, Patty Bandon saw them, picked up an imaginary gun and said, "Duck." The general looked at them and said, "Pintail," because he recognized ... The admiral said, "Duck? I never duck," and he turned around and faced the enemy that's true. He went in and that was very successful.</p> <p>I, then, and the chief of staff, went ashore in Ramree, when we captured it and stayed with General Lomax who commanded 26th Regiment which was doing the invasion. The admiral and everybody else went back to Akyab The admiral and chief of staff were separated. They didn't agree on anything, it seemed to me and I was in a little communication aircraft, I think it was called the L5 or something, which the Americans flew. I was going to and fro with messages from chief of staff to admiral and admiral to chief of staff because they couldn't communicate any other way but we billeted and lived with General Lomax and his team.</p> <p>There's a silly story there. Lomax was on the phone at one time. The army had not moved south of Ramree, it's pretty horrible bit of war, this and they pushed all the Japs into the Chongs the little creeks with masses and masses of little mangrove swamps and creeks. No villages even. The Japs were forced into this place where they either died of mosquito bites or crocodiles or starvation but he was talking to his brigadier who was at the front on the phone and not hearing a thing. This is those field phones that you one handle. Within the bungalow where he was, was one of those lucky animals, one of those big geckos which are considered very lucky inside your house, I believe. Not one of those tiny geckos. This was a big chap. The big chap, his sound was dock-ey, dock-ey and they were known as dock-eyes. Dock-ey! Dock-ey! The general on the phone and this blooming thing over his head going dock-ey, dock-ey but he wasn't. He was saying, "Fuck you, fuck you." The general picked the telephone up and threw it across the room, I remember. Anyway. Another stupid story.</p> <p>We stayed there for a while. Then even, sorry, we stayed in Ramree Island. We proceeded to plan the capture of Rangoon in Ramree Island. Actually, we started that in Delhi and ... No. We started it in Ramree and then went to Delhi and did some planning there.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:53:04	<p>This was the great final invasion. I told you the admiral wouldn't listen to any detail and he wouldn't listen to my detail about the beaches in Malaysia. When they were all in Delhi, General, Admiral, Air Marshall, the rest of them, discussing which beach to land on, the alternatives in Malaysia there were the moray beaches by Port Swettenham which are very shallow and muddy and the nice shingley sand beaches at Port Dickson, down the coast which are very steep indeed, which any landing craft could land on and put their chap almost right on shore out of it. The Port Dixon beaches were very narrow and had difficult outlets. The Moray beaches were very wide and apparently had wonderful exits. Those wonderful exits actually were floating on marsh, they were roads floating on marsh. They weren't wonderful at all. One wheel off the main track and you were stuck but they wouldn't ...</p> <p>They came out and decided to land on the moray beaches because they had a chap in there who used to ride a motorcycle over them at low tide and they were hard as anything. Never believe the local chap. He's often wrong. Fortunately, the war ended. The Americans dropped the atom bomb but the only way to get into Malaysia, now all the ships were loaded. The only way to get in there was to do the operation, otherwise you'd have to take all the tanks out to get the butte of it with underneath, you see what I mean.</p> <p>We did the operation and landed on the Morey beaches and did they get stuck because the exits were totally inadequate for heavy vehicles but it didn't matter. What was nice for me as a planner was the whole approach and arrival at he beach went absolutely like clockwork. The convoy have started in Cochin, Bombay, Karachi, Chittagong, ????, ???? and Columbo and there were different sections with the army and the different places, all to be joined up, all to go through the very narrow Malacca straits and all to get the beaches and it all worked absolute beautifully, We was lucky it worked. It was nice to see our planning was reasonably accurate.</p>

Time code	What is said
03:56:05	<p>Right, then, we sat off the beaches and the unloading It, the army ashore for several days and then the surrender took place at Singapore. I was determined to be at that so he put all the necessary people in another ship, the ????, we were in a ship called ????? and another headquarter ship off the beach. The army and the air commander both had to get out of ???? but he went and we went with him to the surrender at Singapore. One of the wonderful things to witness I stood on the [inaudible] and saw this event taking place but we shouldn't have been there. We were so discourteous to our soldiers and sailors. We should have been where the job was.</p> <p>I don't know how long it was after that that I left this lot and went ashore at Singapore and was appointed to as a naval liaison officer with North Allied Forces Netherlands East Indies in Batavia in what is now Jakarta. From Singapore, I went down to Batavia and I became naval liaison officer. I also became the representative of the admiral who was in a cruiser in the Dutch East Indies at the time. I'm trying to remember what he ... Anyway, I could use his name. I was running the landing craft around Java that were engaged in all the operations going on at [inaudible] and Surabaya and places.</p>
03:58:16	<p>Because I could do that, I'd say that I was doing it in a CS5 commander cruiser squadron, that's cruiser squadron. CS5 was doing it. I was ordering the two captains, the officer in charge of Surabaya, naval officer in charge, tango creole which was the Batavia. I was an acting lieutenant commander actually telling them what to do because they had the ships. They didn't much like us.</p> <p>I had a nice time, actually, for a while in this position but then what happened? Once anything happened. Oh yes, the command changed. I was no longer under Admiral Patterson's fifth cruiser squadron and I was under flag officer Malaysia but so were the NLICs so I was certainly under them as opposed to being ordering them to do anything. They got their own back, all right.</p> <p>About this time an LST hit a mine, landing ship, tank and it knocked a hole in its side. Wasn't very badly damaged otherwise. I asked flag officer Malaysia what I should do it and flag officer Malaysia said, "Sell it." I said, "Sell it for what?" He said, "Sell it for what you can get."</p> <p>I think a lieutenant commander in just reoccupied Jakarta with a ship on his hands. Sell it? How the hell do you sell it? The solution was, I thought, was to find out what it's scrap value was and that was 7,000 Dutch guilders and to advertise it which I did. I got what, I don't know but presumably because along came Mr. ???? an Arab and he bought it for 7,000 Dutch guilders. We sealed the deal in a Chinese restaurant in the port in ???? where he made good meal.</p>

Time code	What is said
04:00:00	<p>On the way back, after this, we passed a shop which a Balinese carving in it. You only turn your camera in a minute because in the middle of it was that girl. I said, "Gosh. She's pretty." Then, I went to the office the next morning and she was on my desk. I sent for him and said, "take her away." He said, "Take what away. Oh, isn't she pretty. I've never seen her before," and went though this whole thing, this wasn't bribery or corruption, just my friend. I got her still.</p> <p>Anyway, he took that LST and then he did his next cleverness. He asked me if he could have a tug. I was also running the tugs the Japanese had had and still with Japanese crews in them so I gave him a Japanese tug to tow this thing to Singapore to get it repaired and turned into a nightclub. That was his idea. It wasn't his idea. He sank it on the way across and presumably got the insurance. That's the story of that LST.</p>
04:01:52	<i>What was it like coming back after the war, after all that excitement...</i>
04:01:56	<p>I came back to nice and slowly in HMS Loch Achray, who was a frigate that came into Java and I took a lift back in her. Very nice because the captain was a term mate of mine. We've been cadets at Dartmouth all of our time together. We came back to Portsmouth.</p> <p>What was it like? It was coming home. It was very nice. It was, far as I was concerned, coming back to proper married life for the first time because my married life so far which had started in June of '43 and we're now, July, '45 had been ...</p>
04:02:39	<i>July '46</i>
04:02:40	<p>July, '46, sorry, three years on, had been four day boiler cleans and breaks between appointments. I was quite lucky. I did have one or two three week breaks between appointments. I've got quite a bit between Offa and Cotswold for example but not a very settled married life.</p> <p>My wife is a naval widow. Her first husband was killed in HMS Glorious at the very beginning of the war. She was in ... You don't get used to it. She knew about it so to speak. We came back, still living on a houseboat, she was still living as a P.G. with a friend in somewhere in South London, I forget, near Orpington. I don't know exactly, but we did ...</p> <p>My proper married life then started when I was sent to petty officer school which was here in Wiltshire and Corsham where we went to the farmhouse and were as happy as we could possibly be. That's why I worked there now. I had no roots anywhere else and Wiltshire made us happy. We came back to Wiltshire when I retired.</p>
04:04:24	<i>How do you reflect on your naval service during the war now, all these years later?</i>

Time code	What is said
04:04:32	I was lucky to be at sea almost the whole time. All I wanted to be was at sea and not to be sunk. I think I'm very lucky. The one ship that did sink, so to speak was the Willington. She did it in harbor and did it in a rather gentle way. The bomb didn't go off until it gone out of the ship.
04:05:06	<i>That's it.</i>
04:05:08	End of Films