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Name: Dick West
Regiment: The Royal Navy

Date transcript: 27/07/2014
Transcribe by: David Davies

Time code	What is said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
	My name is Dick West my ratings are ERA2 that's commonly known as a Tiffy and was on HMS Sheffield, which was a cruiser of course.
01:00:22	<i>Dick why did you join the Navy what was the thinking behind that?</i>
	Well my father was in the navy he was a Stoke PO and I always wanted to be in the Navy so all my schooling was based on the fact I would go in the engineering department of the navy. So my school said you should go to Chatham Tech and I went to Chatham Tech and from there I joined as an engine room artificer apprentice at the age of fifteen and I did 4 years training before I ever went to sea. Started off at Chatham well we called it Fisguard I think it's called Collingwood sometimes and then when war broke out we split up I went to Portsmouth and I was in the place in the barracks and I used to do all my training in the dockyard there because I was a fitter and turner by trade so all my work was mechanical and then eventually after a couple of years we moved down to Torpoint in Cornwall and we were there when they started bombing as well. And when I was there that's when they wiped out Devonport and eventually I left the barracks and I went up to Scapa Flow, I picked up a destroyer called the Oribi and from there I joined the Sheffield at ?????? I've got the date on that sheet.
01:02:34	<i>Tell me a bit about Chatham in the early days... what was it like?</i>
	Well we used to go as I say, we used to sometimes go down to the main barracks and we do marching and so forth. We used to do drill with rifles and things like that so we did quite a lot of marching despite the fact we were in the engine room department and I used to go down to the barracks occasionally and they had a rifle range down there with 22 rifles. When I joined as an apprentice we weren't allowed to go ashore until we got our number one suits. So we were several weeks before we were allowed to go ashore even though I lived in Gillingham. It was 2 or 3 weeks before I could go out to see my mother but, no I was quite happy there because I was into all sorts of sports I mean while I was an apprentice I finished up captain of the hockey team, I used to box, I used to do cross country running and we had PT 2 or 3 times a week so we were very fit and did a lot of sport and that was the only fun we had really because we had to do school work in the evenings and we used to go down into the dock yard itself. The first year it was all hand tools but, we used to do jobs in the actual dockyard as well.

Time code	What is said
01:04:32	<i>Was it a busy environment?</i>
	Yes it was quite a few ships around in those days and you know there was always people coming and going and of course when war broke out we were helping to allocate men to various ships and so as I say I had quite an interesting life but, especially as an apprentice because as I say in those days sport was ok and I was also fortunately I was good at school work as well so it made life easy for me and it was about seventy people in my class and when we eventually went to sea we had various trades there was ordinance, electrical and mechanical ones... there was we had to use all machines lathes and all sorts of stuff in the workshop so we were taught everything before we ever went to sea.
01:06:02	<i>You just touched on it there what do you remember of the outbreak of war?</i>
	Well actually it was only two days after my birthday... well-being young you have a different idea of life you don't feel fear at that age and you just thought it was something exciting.
	Start of Film 2
01:06:30	<i>What was it like to see the Sheffield?</i>
	I was excited I was looking forward to it especially being a cruiser and as I say I had a mess of I think twenty eight ERAs in the mess of all various ages I was one of the youngest ones because I just passed out as a fifth class ERA and ell of course when you're in the mess especially war time you get on with each other you know you can't afford to have rows with each other so it was a happy crowd especially when we were at sea you know you came off watch and you went to your mess and slept when you can. My hammock because there wasn't room in the mess I slept in the workshop and my hammock was slung over a grinding machine and then of course in the morning you had to lash up your hammock and there was places all around the ship to stow your hammocks because hammocks if for instance you had a hole in the side of the ship you had to use a hammock to stuff in the hole... fortunately it didn't happen to me but, as I say hammocks have a lot of uses really.
01:08:25	<i>Was she the 'Shiny Chef' when you joined her or was she looking tired?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Yes if you.... Actually it's in my book there. Somebody paid I think it was Sheffield paid to have all the steel fittings made of stainless steel now it's like in the engine room you've got like for instance you had three throttles as we called them they were big wheels about that diameter and that's how you controlled the steam to your turbines and the 'Shiny Chef' my throttles were all made of stainless steel because on a normal ship if you was on watch most of the time was spent getting some emery cloth or something and getting rid of any rust in there but, also a lot of upper deck fittings were also made of stainless steel but, I'm surprised they didn't keep the Sheffield rather than the Belfast.
01:09:41	<i>Well you've not long been on the Sheffield when you then go of to the H??? Fjord?</i>
	Well I was split up really as I said I joined the ship at ????? there was 24 ratings that joined the Sheffield they'd over stayed leave well when I joined the Sheffield and I went on this when I went to join it.... although I'd only just passed out I was a senior hand, I was a leading hand and the master gave me all their identity discs or cards and he said keep these and don't let anyone until you've seen the master at arms on the Sheffield now they haven't mentioned me by name in that book on the Sheffield but, they've got the fact that this has happened because there was an old saying when I first joined the Sheffield they sometimes called the 'inaudible' because they hadn't had much leave at all but, we did a short relatively so up around Iceland way and that doing this and that a bit of convoy work and then as in the book there was a terrific storm and it smashed in the top of one of A turret. I think they said it was an inch and three quarter steel mentioned in the book and because of various things we had to go into the dockyard and do some repairs.
01:11:36	<i>What were you're sea legs like in big seas did you suffer sea sickness?</i>
	Well when I went to sea on the ???? when I joined the mess I hadn't had any food at all and the mess men said 'have you had anything to eat' I said 'no' he said and my friend with me another apprentice and he said 'how about a corn beef sandwich' I said 'that will be lovely' so they gave both of us this corn beef sandwich and we thoroughly enjoyed them and I suppose about three or four hours later we were in the north sea and it was very rough and we were both as sick as dogs and the only place we felt that there was less upheaval was down in the engine room. So we went down in the engine room and that night I slept between two turbines and my chum he also slept there and yet next day when we woke up no problem at all and so certainly by the time I reached the Sheffield I certainly got my sea legs.
01:12:57	<i>What about that big storm then what was it like to be in a cruiser on such a big sea?</i>

Time code	What is said
	It didn't worry me at all because I didn't feel sea sick you had to hang on to things of course when you was walking around going down the passage way and suddenly finding you're thrown against the side and that but, as I say it didn't worry us at all and I had every confidence in the ship but, as I say it's like years later once again on the Sheffield I joined it in peace time I was out in the West Indies we inadvertently went through the centre of a cyclone that was worse really we was tossed about like a rowing boat but, it didn't worry me I always felt the ship was safe you know.
	Start of Film 3
01:14:02	<i>So she comes back shore then?</i>
	Yeah and we all got leave actually because they said we hadn't had any leave for ages so I'd only been on the ship for a short while before I went on leave it was up in Govan Dock and Dalmuir Dock and another thing I found in our mess there was a big cube of concrete which was about nearly a yard square I suppose which was on the ships side apparently before I joined the ship when they was in landings of North Africa they were hit by an American ship a small ship and it put a kink in the side of our mess and it used to leak slightly so we had to have that done as well...
01:15:10	<i>Where does that link to this concrete block?</i>
	It was inside the mess and it was actually just against the ship where this leak was on the ships side it was right against it you know...
01:15:23	<i>Holding the water out?</i>
	It was stopping the water which it did successfully but it was just part of our mess when we first joined it.
01:15:32	<i>You had experienced by this point a real action stations on the ship?</i>
	Well yes at times.
01:15:38	<i>And what were your action stations points then?</i>
	Well usually in a place where by you could repair the ship I mean in some cases you was down the engine room but, what they call damage control was the expression they used. For instance one of the places where I was was down in the mess decks but, also if you wanted to flood magazines you had a series of extended valves coming up from where the magazine was and it comes right up through the mess decks and you had the hand wheels there so you could be three or four decks above where the magazine was but, you could let water in if you wanted to as I say you was there if you got a hole in the side of the ship you could get your hammocks and boards and we never had to do that thankfully but, it was there and we had to know how to do it.

Time code	What is said
01:16:51	<i>Do you know where you are going at this point?</i>
	Well they often didn't tell you until you got there anyway but, when we were on the Biscay run on convoys taking them... we picked them up on the Bay of Biscay and took them down to the Med...
01:17:15	<i>Who was this?</i>
	Well there was usually a couple of ships around but, I forget now usually a couple of destroyers, minesweepers and that with you and we always when we were on convoy we always zig zagged you never kept a straight course and of course some of the convoys are not very fat ships they only do about 10 knots so obviously you had to reduce speed somewhat to follow them and eventually of course we went into the Med and this is before we went up back to Russian convoys we were in the Med we went to Malta, we went to Salerno and Sicily and at the time we were taking more control of the Mediterranean although we had to watch out for aircraft and submarines and that we on this particular time it was almost like a cruise it was.
	We went up the west coast of Italy and the army was having some trouble with German tanks and they said could you do something about it so we actually had a six inch broadside it's the first time it ever happened to me and of course the whole ship shook there was bits coming down from the steam pipes and everything and we gave a few salvos. The first one was a bit short the next one was too far the third one was spot on. We managed to hit these tanks for the army but, at the time shall we say things were a bit more lax onboard you know at the time when we was doing this bombarding we were at action stations and of course being the Med the blokes were on the upper decks with our shirts off.
01:19:35	<i>And you just touched on it but can you describe that noise and sensation of being in a broadside?</i>
	Well I won't say we were frightened at all but, it went right through the whole ship and if you got a complete salvo of six inch guns the ship actually shakes.
01:19:59	<i>Were you actually on the deck when the salvo went off or were you down below?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Well actually I was off watch and I did go on the upper deck but, as I say at the time we was more in control of the Mediterranean and we weren't worried so much about planes and submarines you know it... in the early part of the war you had planes and submarines coming at you all the time but, towards the end of the war it did ease of a bit and I mean we're talking about 43 so as you know the war had been on then for 4 years so when we went to Augusta we allowed ashore same as when we went to Salerno we was there in fact we did a bit of shopping there I think it was Salerno at the time they had these umbrellas which you know short not fold up ones like we had and they were selling these in the shop you know and of course a lot of nuts to eat we bought a lot of almond nuts when we were over there but, you could do shopping and I think I've got in my diary i bought some scarfs or something like that you know so once you got ashore the Italians they greeted us as friends you know I think they was glad to get rid of the Germans...
	Start of Film 4
01:21:43	<i>And what was the attitude of the British towards the Italians at the time?</i>
	We was all friendly we never felt... we always felt Italy didn't really want to be in the war they was dragged in by Mussolini and there was no ill feeling between us and the Italians or with them to us but, as I say it's a... in Iceland they reckon they were more pro German there but, of course it wasn't ideal for us to go ashore we was only there for a short while.
01:22:32	<i>What about Malta?</i>
	Well we went ashore on Malta and of course at the time they had been bombed and that sort of thing but, we could go around and do a bit of shopping and that and of course the Maltese liked us anyway so we were well received in Malta
01:22:56	<i>And all this time you're out in the Med you never had any aerial attacks or anything like that?</i>
	Well the planes came around but, they were frightened off I can't recall we was ever actually attacked by planes we had plane warnings and we closed up for action stations but, while we was in the Med it was relatively peaceful.
01:23:27	<i>And was the Sheffield operating on its own in the Med or was it part of a convoy doing things?</i>
	I'm not sure if the... because up in the Russian convoys we had the Belfast and the Norfolk and of course with the battle with Scharnhorst there was the Duke of York and there was three destroyers I think there was but, we had the Belfast with us quite often.
01:24:00	<i>Ok tell me about these Canadians that arrived and what were they like, what did you do and how did you mix with them?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>Well... being Canadians they had different ways towards authority put it that way but, we got on very well they were nice chaps although one day one of my mess mates he was always a bit of a problem, he was always having a dig at someone and very irritating he was and he was on one day and everyone was trying to sleep at the time so one of these Canadians Tiffys he raised his head up and he picked up a plate from across the mess table and he threw it straight across the mess and it crashed against the bulk head and I won't use the expression he used but, he more or less said why don't you shut up but, all round we got on very well I mean although they come to us for training they knew all about ships and that sort of thing and that's it.</p>
01:25:30	<i>What do you remember of ????</i>
	<p>Well not very much loads of ships around of course for a while I was on the Iron Duke which is a real ancient old battleship while I was waiting to go to Oribi for instance and we used to get leave to Kirkwall that's a small little village sort of thing but, there wasn't really much ashore of course they used to have like an Iceland one place they had a place where men could have a drink of beer and the same with Kirkwall there was one place there... oh we went to a pub and there was four or five of us from the mess went to the pub it was closed and knocked on the door open up we're thirsty but, as I say there was a cinema ashore as well you used to see films but, it wasn't a place to really go out and enjoy yourself you know but, as I say there is pubs there when you could go ashore.</p>
	<p>Being engine room department I stayed down below most of the time so I didn't have to put up with the snow and the ice up top but, they had to use steam hoses to make sure the winches on the upper deck could be used again. We supplied the steam but, we never handled the hoses... in the boiler rooms you control... the boiler room controls the smoke that's coming out of the funnels ideally a ship doesn't show any smoke at all if it's black smoke they have to speed up the fans and if it's white they're going to fast but, you used to sometimes get a little bit of snow come down through the fans of the boiler room particularly.</p>
	Start of Film 5
01:27:54	<i>Just explain what your job is?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>My job was to... well to put you in the picture you had two outer shafts and two inner shafts the outer shafts were controlled by the forehead engine room and the inner shaft controlled by the aft engine room in the aft room you've got two sets of turbines a set of turbines you've got an HP turbine you've got an ???? turbine and you've got a cruiser turbine and because obviously you don't go full speed all the time because obviously you'd run out of fuel and it was when we were chasing the Scharnhorst that... all you do is control the steam you have a telegraph as you call it come down from the bridge and they say so many revs that's all so many revs two hundred something like that and you was on the throttle but, as it was then normally we're on action stations you was on HP steam anyway and you alter the throttle to give you the revs which...</p>
	<p>But, the boiler room has to alter the number of burners they've got going and you have to follow the steam if the order came through for instance when we went up to maximum speed which is about thirty two knots as I say if you opened the throttle too quickly you lose your steam so when you got an order for full speed ahead which, you did once in a while the boiler room they smacked on all the burners that's all they did and you used to see stokers not only controlling things with their hands but, using their feet because they used to have like it controlled the air to each injector and there was two handles there like that and the stokers have to push them in and out and also you had a little lever for altering the fuel going into your burner and when you're in a hurry you see a stoker going like this with his hands... and using his feet and kick the lever to put the oil into the burner. Anyway as I say that's the boiler rooms job. In the engine room all you do is watch the steam gauge that's all you do watch that gauge and your revs that's all you do and you try not to let it go below a certain pressure of steam and when you went on full speed you always gradually came up. You didn't suddenly go from nothing to full speed it always took time but, mind you fairly quickly but, that was it a Tiffys job was to control the speed.</p>
01:31:49	<i>It sounds like a really quite an exhilarating job?</i>
	<p>It is your excited I mean at any time whether it's peace time or war time when they said full speed ahead you were 'oh that's lovely' here we go and it was exciting as I say I was then being young no fear what so ever.</p>
01:32:17	<i>And was it difficult to get the steam released?</i>
	<p>No no it came out they put on their burners and you just gradually opened up your throttle because your throttle was horizontal you know.</p>
01:32:36	<i>Before you get to the Scharnhorst have you not gone to Murmansk?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Oh yes we went up there and well the called it Kola Inlet its actually where it is it's a few miles from Murmansk apparently and we were allowed assure but, it was like big sheds and that where we went and you could go for a drink and the rations. One of the things they used to make up these knives more like scout knives sort of things they used to make these and they were trying to swap them for watches they were. I don't think they got many peoples to do that but, as I say that's all I can tell you the Russians we did see. I don't think I actually saw any Russians at all and it was quite thick snow and we only had our burburees to keep warm a raincoat but, I seemed to be alright it didn't seem to worry me too much and that was it we were ashore for a while we had a drink and a few beers and that sort of thing but, otherwise likes of me anyway wasn't personally in contact with any Russians at all.
01:34:20	<i>And on the way into Kola had you had any encounters with aerial attack or anything?</i>
	No there was... I think they had some aircraft come over and we frightened them off as well and it's like one of the occasions after they wanted to bomb the Tirpitz using aircraft carriers more or less the tail end of the year and always remember we had a big fleet there was a couple of carriers and all sorts of big ships and the sun was out it was really pleasant going there and they sent these planes off the aircraft carriers to try and bomb the Tirpitz, but they didn't have a lot of joy because they were by a cliff or something and eventually of course they had to bring in massive bombers to do it but, they did try but, it was actually like a pleasure cruise because at the time we had more or less better control of the sea by then by the time that happened that was at the tail end of my period there.
	Start of Film 6
01:36:00	<i>So basically after you've come out of Kola you have that little foray ashore this is when you saw the Scharnhorst?</i>
	Yeah I think it was on the way back you know
01:36:12	<i>What do you remember of how it all... when did you first know it was going on?</i>
	Well of course the fleet they got a message from somewhere saying they thought the Scharnhorst was out you know and they were trying to find it you know but, as I say but all the fleet and eventually we did find it.
01:36:41	<i>Had you been told you were looking for it?</i>
	Yes yes they said the Scharnhorst is around and we're going looking for it and as I say the Belfast and Norfolk cruiser was with us as well actually the Norfolk took quite a bit of damage during the encounter we had.
01:37:04	<i>And what happens to you and the rest of the crew when your captain tells you that?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Well we're looking forward saying lets go and get it as I say you don't think you're going to get sunk you think it's always someone else that's going to get sunk.
01:37:24	<i>So basically just talk through the day and what you did and what happened, where you were and what you were doing?</i>
	Well of course we was closed up at action stations all during this period of time and as I say when they finally got it... found out where it was in the end we all started chasing after it and that was when we were doing I was told full speed thirty two knots and suddenly as I say I was on my throttle I heard this terrific bang, it was really a loud bang and of course being in a close space particularly. I thought oh Christ we've been hit and then after that all I could hear was this rumble rumble rumble where these gears were as I tooth broke off in these pinions as they call it and of course the whole thing was rumbling... so immediately I thought something has happened to the engines so I immediately started gently closing the throttle to shut the steam off and the chief come along and said 'you're doing alright Dick' he says 'carry on shut it down' and then once we because the captain told the ship to slow up.
	So we slowed right down and once we'd slowed down and we'd stopped this shaft from turning then we was able to lock the shaft so it couldn't turn and then we carried on the chase but, obviously because that shaft was stopped it slowed the ship down completely and we couldn't keep up but, one of the seaman's reckon if we hadn't slowed down so suddenly when we did there were three eleven inch shells landed where we would have been. As far as I recall all we suffered damage was a bit of shrapnel around the breach area. See in that big storm that we mentioned before not only did it smash in the turret but, we lost are ASDIC gear apparently it was all flooded where the ASDIC was so we couldn't use are ASDICs so as I say we had to come back to have all these urgent repairs done.
01:40:34	<i>After something as significant as that losing a whole engine what goes on next I mean obviously you've had to retreat from the battle?</i>

Time code	What is said
	We still carried on eventually what they did we disconnected the shaft eventually first of all we locked it and then because that slowed us down but, once we released the shaft so it could turn because the bearings were all still lubricated and everything we could increase our speed and we was over twenty knots I think we could manage so we were still going around but, we were practically almost so after we came back to Scapa Flow and you'll see on there. Incidentally on Christmas day because the action took place on Boxing Day and I think it got it down there that it was sunk at 21:45 that was when we was told it was actually sunk, it actually blew up eventually but, as I say on Christmas Day which was the day before this action my dinner that day was corn beef sandwiches but, when we got back to Scapa they gave us a lovely roast dinner with all the trimmings I thought it was turkey but, in that book on the Sheffield they said it was pork but, anyway it was a lovely roast dinner we had.
01:42:41	<i>With the screws when they go around is one not slightly quicker than the other is there a story?</i>
	All your screws normally go at the same speed and you have to log that in the book every engine rooms got a book and you had to log all temperatures and all speeds and what time you changed your revs and that sort of thing it all had to be logged.
01:43:14	<i>When the engines gone is there a sort of like assessment of what went wrong of what have you or is that just left?</i>
	Oh yes everyone came down the engineers and senior Tiffys and that and that was it but, it went smoothly everyone seemed to know what they were doing you know I mean you must accept the fact I was a very junior Tiffy at the time and so I didn't have great responsibilities like other people had I mean the chief of my mess he got a mentioned in dispatches medal something like that you know but, there was no panic at all.
	Start of Film 7
01:43:55	<i>You went to Liverpool then after that didn't you?</i>
	Yeah before we went to America
01:44:02	<i>What was it like knowing you were going to America?</i>

Time code	What is said
	<p>We were highly delighted well I mean let's face it... it was still war time and they said you're going to Boston while we went there basically apart from anything else to do with the ship we had all new sets of gears made by General Electric for the engines so of course to do that they had to cut all the big holes in the upper deck and the next deck down above the engine room to lift all that out but, also they took some aft turrets away and they put more anti-aircraft stuff onboard because eventually after I left the Sheffield it went out East as well but, I wasn't on it then I more or less left the Sheffield after we got back from America</p>
01:46:06	<i>And what did you do in America for ten months then?</i>
	<p>I still had my job actually they put me in charge of overhauling the motorboats we had four motorboats one with twin engines and there was two small single engine ones and I had to overhaul all the engines as well and of course we all still had work to do in the engine rooms that has to be done machines needed to be overhauled so we were working all the time but, for a while when we was without power on the ship we was staying in the barracks which was Boston south navy yard we were and we was staying in the barracks it was called hotel Fargo they called it and that's where the American sailors were and we was in there as well for a while because there was no electricity on the ship while they was doing it but, we had they did some marvelous things in the dockyard, the things they did for you you know.</p>
01:46:38	<i>Basically you were in America the war really sort of wound down really how wary of it were you?</i>
	<p>Not at all only by the news you know and of course we only heard bits and pieces of what was going on at home course I used to write letters loads of letters. That was one thing about it we had no trouble getting mail back and forth but, and of course in those days we didn't have telephones or anything.</p>
01:47:08	<i>And what was it like being demobbed or being kicked off the ship did you want to leave?</i>

Time code	What is said
	Well not particularly obviously there was going to be dockyard for a while actually shortly after I left that I went back to Canada I went in barracks for a short while and I went to Canada on the New Amsterdam took me with a load of other serviceman and I went to Quebec and Montreal and I picked up a landing ship for tanks and we brought it back home on the way home we called into Norfolk Virginia and eventually then we come back home again. While I was in Canada they said it will be awhile until the ship is ready for you if you know anybody and you wanted leave you can have it so I phoned up my uncle and he sent me a telegram to day welcome back and come and see us when you can and on the strength of that they gave me leave and I was in New York again for over a week it was before they called me back to Canada. So really I had a great life during the war I'll be honest really I was very fortunate.
01:48:54	<i>Did you love the Sheffield?</i>
	I did it was a very good atmosphere on there and I had one particular chum who we passed out as apprentices together and there was a few others that came afterwards who I knew also so there was a good crowd as I say specially in war time you tend to you always looked after your mate so you know if anybody was in trouble ashore you always looked after them it was a golden rule really. I liked my life in the navy I enjoyed it and I particularly liked my work I could of... I passed all the exams for warrant officer but, I said after twelve years I'm coming out because by then I was married I had my daughter she was a little kiddy and I said no it's not fair to my wife if I'm going to be away all the time because actually my wife came out in peacetime and she got a passage out to Bermuda and spent six months in Bermuda you could say I had a fortunate life really.
01:50:32	<i>Well thank you for your interview...</i>
01:50:37	End of Films