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Name: Ted Roger's

Regiment: Merchant Navy

Date of Transcript:

Transcribed By:

Time Code	What is Said
01:00:00	Start of Film 1
01:00:01	Hello, my name is Edward Rogers, but I'm normally called 'Ted' for short.
01:00:06	***Where are you from?***
01:00:10	I was born in Liverpool.1924 – a long time ago now.
01:00:16	***So in 1939 you were 15 years of age. Do you remember the Liverpool blitz?***
01:00:23	Yes, I was living in 28 Sturdy Road near Broad Green, it wasn't quite Broad Green but it wasn't far away.
01:00:37	***What do you remember of the Liverpool blitz? Were you evacuated?***
01:00:40	Oh, the blitz. I went to sea. The blitz was in 1940. We had an Anderson shelter in the garden and we all sort of scrambled into that. Because we were a big family we had a double one and my father arranged a big sort of wooden stage at one end of it and that was used as a bed, and so we had quite a bit of it. My uncle was bombed out. He lived about a mile away from where we were. That was in 1940 the next year I went to sea … well, in 1941 actually but …
01:01:17	***Why did you want to go to sea rather than any other service?***
01:01:21	Well, first of all I joined the Home Guard when I was 15. I have pictures of that in my uniform. My father joined the Home Guard and ... he'd been in the First World War and he was a corporal then before he was wounded and so he was a corporal in the Home Guard and I thought I'd join him you see to help defend the country and so that's what I did and then my father evacuated my mother and the younger children to Northern Ireland to get away from the bombing and so there was only my sister and my father left and I decided, well, I'm going to be called up in any case shortly and so I decided to become a merchant seaman because we had sort of a lot of relatives or former relatives at sea and my father worked for a shipping company so we had long sort of connections so I thought if I go to sea I'll also get a training for after the war, you see, I'd be a merchant navy officer which I was when I left.
01:02:29	***But why the merchant navy over the navy, then?***
01:02:33	Well I couldn't join the navy at 16 - you have to be 18 and joining the navy did not necessarily mean you'd have a professional job after the war, whereas the merchant navy, I went as a midshipman or cadet and so I served an apprenticeship for three years then I graduated as a third officer so I could have stayed on and got my masters eventually and stayed on as a master or captain of a merchant ship, you see.
01:03:04	***So you already had quite an ambition from a very young age?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:03:10	Well I decided to see what could be done and of course during the war is was very difficult to make any decisions because people were being were being called up, you didn't know what was going to happen you didn't know whether you were going to stay alive and what was going to go on you know and so …
01:03:24	***What was the process then for joining the merchant navy? What did you have to do before you were given your first ship?***
01:03:31	Well, you had to have your 'O' Levels first and fortunately I went to a secondary school because I got a scholarship and in those days there were very few secondary schools. People left after primary school at the age of 14. So I got my O Levels. I could have stayed on to do A Levels but then what would happen, and, anyway, I was glad to get out of the school because I didn't like it and … what to do during the war so my sister started working at a munitions place – she was older than me - Meccano, they used to make little trains and big toys. During the war they switched to munitions and things like that, you know … and my father was also in a shipping company and that's the one I joined. It was easier in that sense.
01:04:27	***What did you actually do? Would you literally join up and then you were on a ship or was there a process?***
01:04:33	No, you went straight on a ship and cleaned out the bilges on the first day … you see a great thing about in those days the merchant navy was an apprenticeship you did any job that a seaman would do even though you were being trained as an officer and so the first morning I was on a ship we were woken by the boatswain at 6 o'clock, no, half past 5 in the morning: 'come on lads, we have to go down to the bilges and clean the bilges out'. That was the training for an officer! Then you'd spend your time cleaning the decks; painting; watch-keeping and so on and lookouts and up the mast and all this kind of thing for three years. It was 4 years before the war but they cut a year off because of wanting to get more officers through, you see. And so, at the end of that, in other words, it was on the job training – it was an apprenticeship - it wasn't just an academic programme and so the seaman knew afterwards that if you told him to do something that you had done it yourself so there was no problem about: 'you don't know what's going on here'. That was the tradition. I think it was a very good tradition, actually, and then also I got my 2nd mate's certificate you needed that to be a 3rd mate you see, or 3rd officer and then you had to spend another 18 months watch-keeping actually in charge of a watch before you could take the next, the mate's certificate another 18 months before you could take the master's so it was all graded out and when I was in education in Zimbabwe I used this for training social workers – they have steps and do a lot of practical work as well so it was a useful experience for me.
	Start of Film 2
01:06:19	***What was your first ship, and what was it like setting sail from Liverpool? Was it from Liverpool?***
01:06:24	Yes. I sailed on the Alfred Jones. This was my first trip from Liverpool in May 1941 and we went out into the Irish Sea and then we went round the north part of Ireland to keep away from France and so on when the Germans occupied it and out into the Atlantic and then the convoy broke up mid-Atlantic and then we went individually then and we went to west Africa.
01:06:58	***What was it like setting sail for that first time, do you remember it?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:07:00	Well, you know, you get a bit sea-sick on your first voyage. Understandable. There were four cadets – there was always four cadets and some of them were second or third year, you see, so they helped you to realise what was going on and then you had a special cabin for the cadets or midshipman. The two different names – the same people and we eat with the officers – we were classified as officers – and the food was very good, actually – and we had passengers on the ship too, and so you would be with the passengers. There weren't many passengers, but there were passengers there, so it was much better than eating in England, war-time England. And it was quite hard work, though, you had to do sort of four hours on and four hours off and during the war in danger zones. You had what they called double watches and you had to spend hardly any time to sleep the most time you got was four hours and by the time you got into bed and had a sleep and woken up again you got about three hours sleep, you know. That was on what they called double watches. Normally it was four hours on and eight hours off but during the war, in these areas – which was difficult – then it was to get more people on deck for look-outs and manning the guns it was four off and four on, you see.
01:08:38	***Tell me about the outfit. What was it like as a ship: the size, your mess, et cetera?***
01:08:42	Well we had – on that ship - we had about seventy people, as we were commodore's ship as well and we had the commodore, a retired vice admiral, and his staff and then we had twelve passengers and then we had our own crew; and in those days the crews were much bigger than they are today and because the ship didn't have such a quick turnaround, you had to do a lot of work on the ship: painting and so on, you know and so … I quite enjoyed it – in a way – and once you got into the Tropics it was beautiful. You had a calm sea; beautiful nights, you know, the stars and so on and the dolphins jumping up and down ahead of the bows: that was very beautiful.
01:09:32	***Why did the outfit, the convoy, split then?***
01:09:37	Well, the ships went to different places, you see. The whole convoy couldn't go to one place because some ships were going to America; some were going to South America; some were going to the Mediterranean; some to South Africa; some to West Africa. The idea was to take the ships through the most difficult part of the voyage where there were German submarines and also German aircraft that could sort of reach them, you see. And that was why we went out straight out into the Atlantic to get out of the range of the German bombers before we split up. But then, later on, the submarines adapted a different tactic: instead of lone submarines and lone ships, you know, that looked for … they had convoys attacks … convoys with wolf packs. I remember one particular convoy we were in we got a message from – we were commodore's ship again – we got a message from the Atlanta: expect attack developing from ahead by twelve submarines. In fact there were more. We could see them during the day: they were cruising along at the stern of the convoy on the surface. And then at night they'd come – on the surface, again – and would have a better speed than most of the escorts that we had. Corvettes couldn't keep up with them. They'd come round ahead, go down, torpedo the leading ships go down through the lines and out the stern. Although we had an anti-submarine gun we couldn't really fire at them there because you might hit another ship on the other side, you see. So they were very clever in their tactics. So that was very difficult. Sometimes that would happen for days on end and it would only stop when you got air cover to spot them, you know. But when we were actually torpedoed, that was a lone submarine, by a submarine ace: Hessler, and he was lurking around West Africa to get the ships out of convoy, because Free Town was an assembly point for convoys going up to England but the ships came in on their own and so they were waiting outside a hundred miles, hundred and fifty miles outside for lone ships to blow up.

Time Code	What is Said
	Start of Film 3
01:12:11	***Let's talk about the day you were torpedoed. What do you remember of that?***
01:12:14	I'll just tell you about it in brief. I was on the bridge as one of the lookouts. The third mate was in charge the ship at that time because the captain wasn't always on the bridge. We had a lookout up the crow's nest, high up, and just about 11:20, 11:30 in the morning on a Sunday he shouted: "torpedoes on the starboard bow!" I looked there and saw four coming towards us and then the third officer gave a command to steer towards them, hard a'starboard because then you present a smaller target, but it was too late. By the time we were swinging around there – you can't do it like that you know (gestures sudden movement) it takes a bit of time to get round – two hit the ship. One went ahead, I could see it; I was still watch in the bridge. The other one came in I thought it was here, it was there: it had gone right through the ship, but actually it was set deep so it went underneath. One ahead; one underneath, and two hit us amidships and the ship went on fire and then the captain gave the order to abandon ship because it was quite hopeless and to go to the lifeboats. We had four lifeboats: two on each side. I went to my lifeboat and there was nothing there: it had been blown up in the explosion. The two lifeboats on the starboard side were in splinters: they had disappeared with the explosion and so I went to … the rule was to go to the one on the opposite side of your own. I went there and all these people were getting in it and it was being lowered down so I got in that boat and it got stuck on the way down because the ship was heeling over to starboard and it got stuck in between decks and by pushing it and pushing it they freed it, but it damaged the boat and when it got down to the water it sank.
01:14:29	Now, it was my first trip so I didn't know much about lifeboats so most of us then jumped over the side. The captain was going around. He let go a number of rafts from the ship and these rafts were the home-made type with oil drums and wooden slats on them. Anyway, I swam to one of those along with some other men from the sinking lifeboat. Anyway, they managed to salvage that boat because the air tanks lifted it up a bit and they patched it with canvas and baled it out, you see. So then we only had one other boat, you see. The other boat went round circling and picked us up from the life raft and then they managed to get more people in the damaged boat and then the submarine was on the surface, taking films and then the third mate remembered he hadn't ditched the secret code-books so he tried to get back on board the boat climbing up the ropes and then the submarine machine-gunned. They didn't try to hit him; it was a warning I think, so he came down again. And then, shortly after that, the ship wasn't sinking quickly enough for them so they put another torpedo in and then it went up like that (gestures vertically) and down. The shocking moment when you see the ship completely disappear and you're left in a little boat 120 miles from shore. And then we were over-crowded because was made for a capacity of 32 and, because of the damaged boats, we had more: we had over 48 and it was sitting like this (mimes hunched-up position), you know and we had also the second-engineer in the boat and he was badly burned: the engineer was on fire when he got out and he died the next day. We had to put the body over the side and see the sharks coming. And then we towed the raft for a couple of days because if you needed exercise you could go on the raft because the boat was so cramped. And then the sharks were coming up underneath. I remember the boatswain had an axe and he was hitting the sharks. Anyway, after that time we thought well, it was dragging us too much – too much of a drag on the boat. We're not sailing quickly enough – because we were sailing and rowing - so we let it go and that was another dramatic moment because that was the last line of safety that we had left, you know.

Time Code	What is Said
01:17:32	That was on the Sunday when we were torpedoed, and then on the Wednesday we saw Sunderland flying boats on some days but they didn't see us and it was very hot. The sun was belting down, you know. One of the crew had got delirium because he got sun-stroke I think and he was raving and shouting around, it was very difficult. And then we were running short of water: we only had water tanks; water barrels, you know. And then, on the Wednesday afternoon one of these old Walrus aircraft came, and he saw us and they were the old sea planes and the sea was quite calm so he landed near us and asked if anybody was injured and he could take them to hospital, but it would have meant putting his pilot, his co-pilot, in our boat as his plane was only a two-seater so nobody was badly injured so we said: 'OK'. So he gave us a course to steer – which we were on already – and then he took off. And then that evening we saw smoke coming out of … a ship coming to pick us up, we thought, but then there was a tremendous sort of hurricane, storm, and we had to fight for the boat. It was raining as well, which meant we had plenty to drink. By the time the storm had subsided there was no sign of the boat at all, but that night we saw land and we rowed all night, but in the morning we didn't see a thing. The visibility was very low from the boat and we had been swept around into the bay, you see, by the current. Anyway, we carried on on our compass – because we had a compass direction – and that afternoon, late afternoon, a trawler, a naval trawler, came out of Freetown and picked us up – not far outside the harbour – it didn't come a long distance actually, and then we were taken on shore and there were so many, what were called 'British distressed seamen' there because a lot of ships had been sunk just outside and then we were put on the Scythia troop ship – I've got a picture of it, actually, and sent back to England. So that was my introduction to the merchant navy and to the war.
	Start of Film 4
01:20:27	***How many … were people killed during the torpedo attack?***
01:20:29	No, we only lost two, fortunately. One was the deck boy and he just disappeared – we don't know what happened to him – he was probably blown away in the explosion. And the other was the second engineer who was burnt in our boat. We were very fortunate that we only lost two people. Now the commodore was in his uniform, but he borrowed a jacket to put over it because if the submarine had seen a rear admiral they would have taken him prisoner. So he was off and along with everybody. He was in our boat, actually.
01:21:11	***What was it like to see the u-boat that attacked you, just sat there watching?***
01:21:15	Well, it was just circling around with a camera going, you know. And then it must have been on German newsreel, I suppose. This Hessler guy did a report on it which I read. After, he was a u-boat ace and he married Doenitz's niece so he was quite in touch with the high command and after the war he was employed by the Royal Navy to write the history. And now he mentioned this sinking: he said this was a Q-ship – and it wasn't. We were not an armed naval ship. Now, those were in the First World War when the u-boats used to attack and the ships would drop their sides and there would be guns there and they would fight back, you know. We were an armed merchant ship: we had one anti-submarine gun, but we weren't one of these specialist ships. But he may have thought that we were carrying aircraft on deck - Beaufighters - for the Royal Air Force. We were taking those to West Africa and from there they were flown to the Middle East for the North African battle, you see. So these were in the sea. They were blown up; they were sinking around, so perhaps he thought that was the reason why, but we weren't that: we were a merchant ship.
01:22:53	***You mentioned there were two life-rafts. Were you able to keep with the other life-raft through the storm?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:22:57	Now, we got separated. The other boat was picked up before we were, actually. As you know it is very difficult when you get currents and waves and things. We had a bit of a sail we put up and you get separated, you see. We had a radio – a distress radio – in a big sort of portmanteau, a big thing, but that was in the boat that was in the water and was useless, so we weren't able to make any communication and we couldn't have communicated with that one in any case because they didn't have one and there was no cell phones in those days … and no satellites!
01:23:47	***Were there any women?***
01:23:48	We didn't have any women on the ship, no.
01:23:51	***And what was the rear admiral like? Was he calm?***
01:23:55	The sea was quite calm.
01:23:57	***No, the admiral that you had on board: the commodore. What was he like?***
01:24:03	He was quite OK, but, you see, he wasn't in command of the ship – he was in command of the convoy, you see, and when he was in the lifeboat the commander of our lifeboat was the second officer, who was a very good manager: a good navigator. He was the one who organised things on the boat: dishing out the food and things like that and allocating different jobs to different people, not the admiral.
01:24:33	***What did you do if you needed the loo and stuff?***
01:24:37	Well, you went over the side – you just sat on the … but, you know, you didn't really have much in the way of motion all the time because you weren't eating: you only got a little bit of stuff to eat and to drink and so you might want to have a pee, but number two wasn't very often – if at all – you see.
01:25:00	***What was it like when you saw this plane come in and land and then take off again? It must have been soul-destroying.***
01:25:06	It couldn't take any more people and it was … it could only land on quite calm water otherwise it would be in difficulty, you know. It wasn't a Sunderland – they could take a lot of people – but the Sunderland's didn't land on the open sea. When he took off, we knew he knew where we were and that's why I think they sent out this ship to try to pick up, but then with the storm we lost it … in the night.
01:25:43	***In the storm did you think that you might sink?***
01:25:47	Well, it looked a bit like it, yes. But it was good seamanship by the second officer and we had - what they called a sea anchor we put out as well - that steadied the boat and put the bow into the waves and things like that.
01:26:04	***Did you a chart to navigate or was it stars – astral?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:26:10	No, we had a compass, we didn't have any sextants – they all disappeared – so we didn't get … we could only rely on estimated positions, you see. But each lifeboat was fitted with a compass and we were going on that compass. I mean we knew where we were when we were sunk, so we knew where we had to go. We knew the approximate distance. Now, if we had been a bit further out in the Atlantic, maybe five hundred miles, we would have had to go to Brazil because we couldn't have gone against the currents and tides to West Africa – they were all sweeping across there (indicates west). And this happened to a number of lifeboats. People were 30, 40 days in the boat and very few of them survived. So we were fortunate being fairly close to the mainland of Africa.
	Start of Film 5
01:27:06	***OK, well let's move the story on.***
01:27:08	Well, I'll talk about the convoys now, because, you see, that was, in a sense, it wasn't as bad as being in a convoy under constant attack because we were torpedoed and then that was it, we were in the boats. We had problems in the boats and so on – we had all those difficulties but on a couple of occasions we were under attack for four days in almost a semi-storm by u-boats and ships were being blown up all round us. You didn't get any sleep hardly, because it was four on and four off and then you had to relieve people for their meals as well, so you hardly got any time to have a rest and people's nerves are on edge, you know, and if a door jams you thought you've been torpedoed with people jumping up. The most dramatic moment, I think, was when the last ship in the convoy line was usually designated 'rescue ship' to pick up survivors from those ahead that had been, you know, in the boats and one of the ships in our line was 'The Empire Shackleton' – it's in my book – it was torpedoed. So we stopped to help it …
01:28:30	***Were you the rescue ship?***
01:28:31	Yes, we were the last ship in line at that time and we stopped to rescue this ship and there were submarines all around and we thought any moment we were going to be hit, too because the engine was stopped – everything was stopped, you see. We were telling them to hurry up to come across. So one lifeboat got off the ship and came across and we picked up the people on it and then we saw people running around on the ship with torches looking over the bow, and – it had been hit in the bow – but, evidently, the bulkhead had held so they weren't sinking. So they sent us a message – signalled a message – that they were going to try to make it to the Azores. So then we got these people in and we went full steam to catch up with the convoy. Now that particular ship was torpedoed again that night; this time it sank. It was picked up by another ship – the name is in my book – was an armed ancient cruiser and that, in turn, was torpedoed and it had 300 people on board then and most of them were lost. All the people we could have saved went down on that ship the second time, and so we only had 12 from that.
01:29:58	***What was this: an Atlantic convoy?***
01:30:02	It was an Atlantic convoy. That was a very dangerous area off Spain, off Gibraltar coming up to the north here.
01:30:12	***When you had gone back to Liverpool after Sierra Leone, how is it determined what your next ship is?***
01:30:22	How is the?
01:30:24	***How is it determined what your next ship will be? Who makes that decision?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:30:28	We didn't decide what your next trip would be or your next ship would be – you were allocated this ship and the Ministry of Transport decided where it was going to go. And so we were going backward and forward to America picking up arms and tanks at one time, and then apples and things like that and fruits and all kinds of foodstuffs, you know, as well as arms and jeeps in boxes and things like that, you know. And then we went to Italy: to Naples, to supply the army there, and when we got into port there was absolute devastation, there were ships sunk all over the place. Anyway, we unloaded these 30-ton Sherman tanks and they brought down portable cranes to lift them. It was quite a hairy business, you know. And then, the harbour was in a bad state, because the mole was damaged and so on you couldn't … we had, more or less, a rough sea coming in there – it was a bit hairy. So those were some of the incidents, but the convoys were the worst things really, for tension, and so on. I mean, to see ships being blown up along side you and people going on fire and people struggling to get off the ship and into boats when it was a half gale running and the ship was going up and down like that, you know. One ship next to us, a passenger ship, was hit and you could see women and children on this ship as well. Nothing we could do – we were rescue ship in our line – we weren't to go over there, you know.
01:32:16	***Let's talk a bit about the configuration of the convoys. How it was determined where you were in a convoy.***
01:32:21	Well, this was all allocated before you left because there'd have a meeting between the commodore – who was the vice admiral (retired normally) – and the captains of all the merchant ships and also the escorts and they would decide then the convoy positions and places and also the escort duties. Now, a problem was – and I've mentioned it already – the corvettes, which were mass-produced, were very useful for depth-charging when a submarine was underneath, but when a submarine was on the surface – in the early days, certainly – a submarine could do 18 knots and the corvettes could do 16. They could outrun them, and so they could deal with them down below but not on the surface. Now destroyers were much better, but then the destroyers were in short supply. Also, the destroyers only had a limited range, so they couldn't go all that far without re-fuelling. Sometimes we re-fuelled them ourselves, from the ship – we took our own oil and they would come alongside and we'd put a pipe on. But the destroyers were much more useful, but, with the shortage, they had to rely on these corvettes. They weren't in the convoy : they were on the periphery and so often the u-boats would be inside the convoy and the escorts would be over there and we'd get frustrated: 'why can't they do something?' But, understandably, they were trying to track – with their ASDIC – any underneath and trying to stop them coming in ahead, but they weren't very effective. What happened really was, we needed air cover and to solve that problem we were fitted with a Hawker Hurricane on the ship, on the foredeck - blasted off by rockets - because the Focke Wulf Condors – Germans - used to fly round the convoy spotting for the submarines. You couldn't get at them – no use having a Walrus or something like that because that couldn't fight them, so they put Hurricanes on, but the poor pilot had nowhere to land. He had to ditch in the sea and hope he'd be picked up. But then, as the war moved on, they developed merchant ships into mini aircraft carriers and grain ships carried about 12 planes and then later on they had more escort carriers, and once we had air cover, to a large extent the submarine menace dropped. They were able to spot them coming in and then attack them, you know, but it wasn't there in the beginnings and there was a very dangerous sort of zone mid-Atlantic.
	Start of Film 6
01:35:28	***What was it like when you were out in an Atlantic convoy and you could see these u-boats prowling around you?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:35:32	You could see them astern during the day, on the surface, but there was nothing you could do about it. If the escort … say you have four corvettes and you've got thirty merchant ships and then you've got twelve submarines armed, following on behind you. What can you do?
01:35:59	***You just wait … for your death.***
01:36:04	That was the great difficulty. Then sometimes they'd give the order to scatter, you know; the convoy to split up and go each your own way. We did that on one convoy because we were the fastest ship – some of the ships were only going 8 knots – and the speed of the convoy was that of the slowest ship, you see, and you were sitting ducks in a way and so when it got very bad in some areas, sometimes the commodore would say the only thing is to split up. Each go your own way, we're going to lose some ships, but if we stay together we might lose more. It was a matter of balancing that out, you know. On one of the Arctic convoys, that was a disaster when they did that.
01:36:57	***Did they give you the… you mentioned about being told to scatter - was that an Atlantic convoy?***
01:37:03	Yes, an Atlantic convoy, yes. Then we went from there because – we weren't a very fast ship, but we were one of the fastest ships.
01:37:14	***What about camaraderie? Just talk a bit about … were you always with the same apprentices that you started with or was it always different on every ship?***
01:37:25	Sometimes you might be with the same people on the next ship. Not necessarily. I mean I was with one particular captain two or three trips, but normally it was changed. Because when you went home of leave they'd re-allocate people to different ships, you know. But there was a very good friendship amongst the crew – that was really good, you know, and the solidarity. People were willing to stick together and do what they could, you know. So that was very positive. Actually, there's a man in Birmingham who was on the same ship with me. He was the cook. Now I didn't know that he was on this until he saw me on the 'Songs of Praise' and he picked that up and got me, he rang me up. I didn't remember his name because we had only been on the ship a couple of weeks before we were sunk – I didn't know everybody. But now he's in fairly regular contact with me, and he's retired – he's a bit older than me.
01:38:39	***Where does he live?***
01:38:40	Birmingham.
01:38:41	***I wouldn't mind interviewing him.***
01:38:43	I'll give you his name and address when we finish up.
01:38:46	***Were you ever torpedoed again?***
01:38:50	No. Some people were torpedoed several times. I mean, some people we picked up had been in an oil tanker and … they saw the torpedo. They were on the gun platform, which was at the stern, because it was defensive. And they saw the torpedoes coming, and on a petrol tanker they knew what would happen, so they jumped in the water, straight away. And the ship went on; the torpedoes hit it; the boats were lowered; the sea was on fire; everybody in the boats was burned. Those were the only two that were saved. And then they had already been torpedoed on another ship: so some people had two or three sinkings.
01:39:40	***Were there any unusual cargoes that you carried?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:39:45	Well, we often carried mixed cargoes and even in going down to Italy, for instance, in addition to Sherman tanks we had food supplies; we had railway lines because the railways had been devastated in Italy and they had to lay new tracks, you see. I remember those vividly because one of them slipped out of the sling when we were unloading them and one of the cadets – I was third mate there – one of the cadets was down at the hull and it hit him on the foot and his foot was bleeding and we had to carry him off to shore. I remember that quite vividly. You carried a very general cargo transport and ammunition and war supplies – whatever was needed. And then this was allocated by the Ministry of Transport: some ships would have this, and some ships would have the other, you know. I was quite amazed in New York, when we loaded these Sherman tanks because they put general cargo down below, first, and then they came in and laid a sort of dance floor, beautiful wood: right throughout, over the other cargo. We wondered what was going on because this was done by the dockers there , and then they loaded these tanks and then they pulled them sideways on this floor, because they put grease down and then they pulled them sideways with the winch, you see, so you could pack more in. It was very, very clever.
01:41:26	***Who was in charge of the loading of the ships? Who has that job?***
01:41:30	Well, that was done in port normally by the stevedores, but in some foreign ports it was done under the supervision of the ship, itself. We had to use our own derricks and cranes especially in West Africa, where we used to go quite a lot because there weren't the facilities there. We were going up some of the creeks in West Africa 90 miles inland up to Sepali (?) and then you tie up to a big tree, incredible!
	Start of Film 7
01:42:09	***Just in terms of the rescue: how does a ship do this rescue? What are you using to help this rescue process?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:42:15	Well, you stop first of all, and, if necessary, you lower your own lifeboats and go and help people in the water. If, like we had, another lifeboat was lowered off that ship and was coming toward us, and then you put scramble nets over the side. These are big, huge nets that are normally used for lifting cargo but people can climb up them more easily than up a rope ladder, and more people can get on them, so you can get more people on board. And then you give them whatever you can: food, clothing, whatever the ship … We had no doctor on board, we just had to do what you could, you know. But we weren't officially rescue ships, we were just designated rescue ships, because we didn't have all the facilities of a hospital ship, for instance. When we were in the area of great intensity, the passengers all had to help as well. They were on lookout; all these twelve people were round the ship looking out for submarines, so they didn't get away with it! The crew: they had work to do – all hands on deck. One of the rather funny things on the convoys was, that normally when we left England in one particular part of the war, we were all given a barrage balloon. It was from the mast and then it went up. A trawler used to come round - like the balloon man - with all these balloons, you see, and give you one. They were small barrage balloons, you see, and the idea was to stop dive bombers who would come down – they were about 500 feet up, you know. But when you got into a strong wind they would blow away, or become deflated. They weren't a great success. Then we had all kinds, later on in the war, we had all kinds of weird and wonderful rocket things, which weren't very safe, but the ship was armed better against aircraft than against submarines. We had Oerlikon guns and on one ship had Bofors, but, fortunately, we didn't have an aircraft attack on our ship – it was always submarines. But one particular period when we were sailing on our own off West Africa we saw a cruiser coming up. So we put on our top speed, which was about 14 knots and manned the gun, you know. Our gun would have been hopeless anyway, And this huge ship came up and … of course we couldn't get away from it … but it was a Free French cruiser and it just circled around us, waved and went off, you know. But it could have been a German raider – that's what we were worried about – but if it had been a raider we couldn't have done anything. We had a 4.7 gun which is an anti-submarine gun. Quite a big shell but it wouldn't have been any good – it wouldn't fire very far – the cruiser and other naval ships …
01:45:40	***How come you didn't use these 4.7s when you had the subs following you?***
01:45:47	Well, they were mounted on the stern, you see, not on the bows. The Americans put some … of their merchant ships …on the prow as well. To be defensive, legally, it was supposed to be one on the stern so you could defend yourself, and not be used for attacking, you see, because we weren't a war ship. War ships had them forward – they could use them for attacking but we were not allowed to do that by international law.
01:46:22	***So you had all these subs following you and you weren't allowed to …***
01:46:26	They were out of range for us. We couldn't have shot that far. If they came up during the daytime astern of us we could have had a pot-shot at them, but they knew that they couldn't do that… and then, when they came at night, as I mentioned before, our gun was no use because we couldn't fire across the lines in case we hit the other ship next door to us. You see, what they were saying that the Royal Naval officers were gentlemen but not seamen, the merchant navy officers are seamen but not gentlemen.
01:47:02	***What about big seas and stuff? Big storms and what have you. Do you remember any horrific ones? Big swells?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:47:14	Ah yes, I remember one time we were on our own and for three days we couldn't go ahead. The waves were so big that we were up, down and over them like that and you could see them over the top of the mast as the ship went down this one, you looked up and the next wave was coming up that way. Now what you do in those situations is you go dead slow on your engines: you ride them. If you go full ahead you go right through them and they swamp you. Even so, you get quite a bit over. I mean, I know that we used to carry railway engines on deck sometimes for West Africa, and one of our ships - same line - was in a storm with one of these on the deck and it broke loose and was running up and down the deck. 80 tons: ended up in the dining room. Now it was very difficult sometimes, because, I remember on one occasion we had a storm – not as bad as that one – but we were in a storm and we had oil drums on deck and they broke loose. They were tied up with wire … and they were sliding around the deck and it was very dangerous. We had to try to go down and get them into position, and the deck was covered with oil as well. It was a bit difficult job to do that, but we finally secured it but it wasn't very easy.
01:48:59	***Did you see the Lady in White in Durban?***
01:49:01	Yes, she came out with her choir in Durban and sang for us as we entered. It was very, very nice. In those days Durban was very colonial, you know. That was when we were going to India.
01:49:21	***Tell me about that trip.***
01:49:23	That trip. Well, it was interesting because when we left South Africa to go across the Indian Ocean the Admiralty asked us to take two of their small mine sweepers. Now they were too big to put on the deck so we had to shepherd them. They didn't want to go on their own in case they couldn't make it. They were wooden mine sweepers. So we went like a shepherd with two sheep right across the Indian Ocean. And I remember in Calcutta I was in hospital for three days because I got, sort of, dengue fever there. So that was the highlight of that. On another occasion in Madras we took on coal, Indian coal, because we were coal burning on that particular ship and when we went out next day at sea it was on fire in the holds … combustion … so we had to go back to port to get it all taken out. One very interesting thing was the fire brigade came down and, of course, it was in colonial times then, and the chief fire officer was a white man and he had a beautiful white uniform and a gold-braided cap, you see, and he went down into the hold with all his firemen to try to sort this fire out, you see, into the bunkers and he fell down one of the chutes. There were coal chutes down to the stoke hold, you see. He came up, his beautiful white uniform was completely black and he had lost his cap. When we changed the coal and got new coal in, we went off again, and then, a few days later, one of the African – we had African stokers on that ship – he appeared on deck with this commodore's cap on. We had a lot of amusing incidents as well.
	Start of Film 8
01:51:48	***What did you do to keep yourself happy? How easy was it to be a happy sailor when you were in these situations? Do you get tough to it?***
01:51:58	Well, it depends on what you want to do, I mean, we were four – as cadets – we were four in together. When I was third officer I had my own cabin then I used to take a portable type-writer to learn how to type, you know, and write letters and things like that. And then we had a library on board, you'd read books and … you couldn't get the radio, you couldn't transmit, but in the radio cabin they had one radio that could listen into the news, and we got the news sometimes. We didn't always get it and you couldn't listen in. We had no tape recorders in those days; the gramophones were the old wind-up ones, you know. People used to play cards and things like that, you know, and sit on deck on a nice day and read a book – that was very, very wonderful, you know … when the weather was fine.

Time Code	What is Said
01:52:57	***Did I ask you about burial at sea? Did you ever have any …***
01:53:03	Yes, we did, yes. We were, actually … scared of yellow fever and so before we left port we were given injections against yellow fever, but one of the people got it – it was a cook, actually. He got yellow fever from the injection and we had no doctor on board, and there was nowhere else we could go and he died. So, we were on our own, we weren't in convoy then, so we had the burial. It was very impressive. The ship was stopped. Now traditionally, the corpse was put in canvas and you put weights at the bottom: old iron bars or coal or something like that, and you sewed the corpse up. This job was done by the boatswain and the carpenter, that was the tradition, and the last stitch was taken through the nose… to make sure he was really dead. Then there was a hatch board on the (?) of the ship with a flag over it. The body was underneath. It was called the 'snatching back of the ensign'. Then the captain would come down and the crew would assemble and we had prayers and committals, and there was a proper sort of form for this, and then at the appropriate moment the captain would give the signal and the seamen would hold onto the flag, lift up the hatch board and the body would slide out into the sea. It was very nice… and that was a burial at sea. It was the only one that we had … the other one – in the lifeboat - we didn't have any, we just said prayers and we put the body over we couldn't sew it up or anything.
01:55:00	***Are there any other stories that you would like to share about your naval time?***
01:55:08	Well, there's rather an amusing one. Now, when we were cadets, there were four cadets and the senior one … now the third officer got sick so we had to leave him ashore and the senior cadet was promoted to acting third officer – he was a good friend of mine so we were then three in our cabin and he had a special cabin on his own, but on one particular occasion I was painting outside – you had to paint the ship every three months and I was painting along there and he had his feet sticking out of the port-hole, you see. I couldn't resist the temptation, so I painted his feet grey. Of course, he was very senior to me, but he was a good friend of mine. So he rushed out with the paint pot and between us we both got covered in grey paint. Now his wife got in touch with me and she remembered that incident, because he told her. He died a few years ago, but she's been in touch with me through this broadcast, and she remembered that. That was a very amusing incident. She was actually in Detroit by then. She was a passenger we had from Malta to the United States and he was quite young. I used to chat with her and she was quite alone. I went to see her family in Detroit when we were in New York and we kept up a correspondence. We weren't very close, but it was a sort of, you know, that kind of relationship. I remember in New York another rather interesting observation: we were invited to the Stork Club, which was very famous in those days for actors and people like that, you know and several members of the crew went in and we were given a standing welcome by the people there; they were singing Rule Britannia and so on, you know it was very, very nice. And then one of the guys there said he would take us to meet Shirley Temple - but he never did. But we were given quite a lot of honours, if you like. One of the other rather sad ones was a young man, named Gilchrist, who was with me on one of my trips and the next trip he went on a different ship and nothing was heard of it. It was actually torpedoed and it was in a storm and eventually …I've got the details in my memoirs. I went to see his family in Ireland - they lived in Arden Glas actually – to make my commiserations, you know because it was very, very sad when you know someone and you know the people there. So that was another incident, actually, but that was completely different from the funny one.
01:58:31	***Do you remember the end of the war? Did you know the end of the war was coming? Did you sense it?***

Time Code	What is Said
01:58:37	Well, you see we had very little news and we were in the Indian Ocean when the final end of the war, against Japan. We heard about it on the radio then, but, you know, we didn't know much of what was going on in North Africa or in Germany or so on. We didn't get much news, and we were a long way away. Some trips were very long: nine and ten months sometimes. You'd be away all that time and letters would be censored. You couldn't say where you were, and you had to send them to the main post office, you see, and they would forward them. Then letters we had received had to be sent to the main GP office and they would put them to the Admiralty who knew where the ship was, and send them out, you know. So it was hit and miss to an extent – you didn't get much information.
01:59:50	***Was there a celebration on board?***
01:59:54	Yes, we had a celebration. There was some wine and things like that, you know. We usually had a bit of a Christmas party on ships as well, if we could, and we'd have Christmas pudding and things like that, you know. But there were limits on drink, I mean; they were very, very strict on drink. Fortunately, you didn't want people to be drunk half the time. So you had a bar but you couldn't have an unlimited supply, but cigarettes were dirt cheap, of course, so everybody was smoking … I had to give that up, later on.
	Start of Film 9
02:00:01	***How long were you in the merchant navy after that? After the war.***
02:00:35	I stayed on in the merchant navy until I left the merchant navy, I couldn't leave … I had to get demobilised. You couldn't leave immediately after the end of the war – we had to wait another year. Then you had to be demobilised by the government: Ministry of Transport. I've got my demobilisation certificate there. Then I had decided already that I must train for the priesthood, you see, so then I went into a seminary.
02:01:08	***When did you have a moment that you wanted to join the priesthood?***
02:01:12	Well, there were several moments, if you like. One was just after we'd been torpedoed and I was in the sea and I thought, you know, what can I do for my life and then others were in the Tropics. You see, especially when you are an officer of the watch four hours at night in the Tropics with the ship steaming along; beautiful stars and soon on and you're looking out but you can't see anything there apart from the wondrous stars, but it's conducive to praying, you know, the glory of the Lord and the stars and we had to do a bit of navigation so we knew a bit about stars and things like that, you know, and that was another area that had a big impact on me. I had a girlfriend in the interim and then when I was in my last year at sea I had to make up my mind whether I, sort of, told her on what happened and eventually I decided that I wanted to be a priest and so I wrote to her about my decision, you know. So that was another rather dramatic moment, if you like.
02:02:32	End of Films